

DEMOCRACY AT RISK

The Need for a New Federal Policy in Education



About the Forum

The Forum for Education and Democracy is an education think tank dedicated to **renewing America's commitment to strong public schools** at the national, state, and local levels. We work for school revitalization efforts and policies that prepare young people for lifelong learning and engaged, thoughtful democratic participation. We believe that educating future members of our communities to the fullest extent is vital to the health of our democracy, and that a public education system worthy of a democracy is characterized by strong public schools, equity of educational resources and the support of an involved citizenry. The Forum's vision for American education is grounded in support for our schools and policies that build their capacity to provide a world-class education for every child.

The Forum is composed of nationally recognized educators who have founded schools and networks of schools, as well as reform organizations, that have pioneered new approaches that have improved teaching and learning. The Forum's Conveners have also been influential voices in education research and worked tirelessly to make schools more equitable. A selection of the experiences and accomplishments that inform their perspectives is included at the end of this report.

About This Report

This report was prepared by conveners Linda Darling-Hammond and George Wood with contributions from Policy and Outreach Director Beth Glenn and from conveners Carl Glickman, Wendy D. Puriefoy, Sharon Robinson, Judith Browne-Dianis, John Goodlad, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Deborah Meier,

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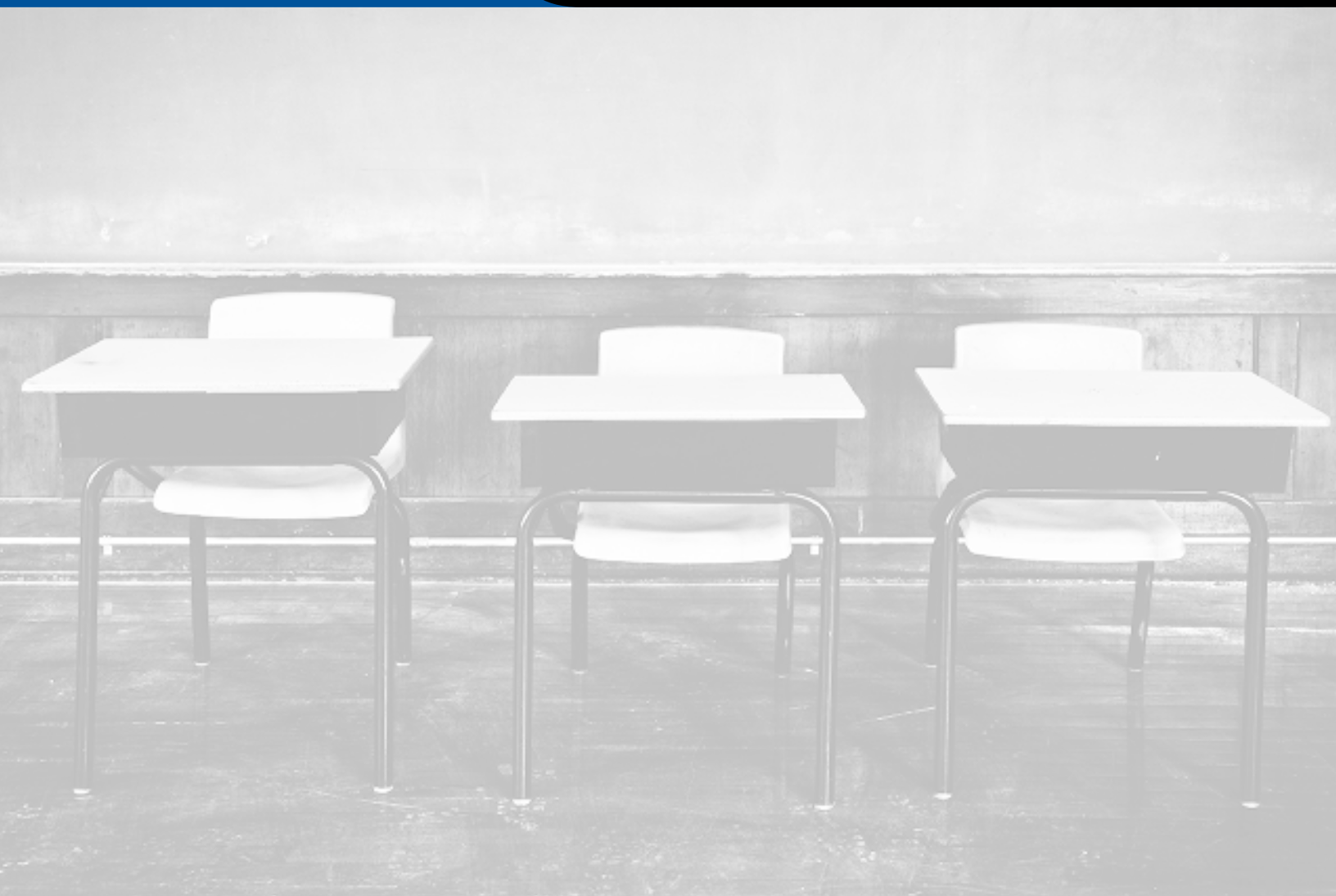


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FOREWORD

The welfare of our nation rests heavily upon our system of public education. We strive to provide all of our children with equal access to a high-quality, free education because we know that without it, our democratic way of life will be at peril. As Thomas Jefferson once said, “If Americans desire to be both ignorant and free, they want what never has been and what will never be.” Indeed, it is our democratic system of governing, based upon the twin pillars of equal rights and responsibilities, which requires we have a system of public education.

We continue to fall short of this most basic democratic commitment. We do not provide equal access to a high-quality education to every child in this nation. And even though we

have made strides in this direction, we have miles to go before this task is complete. There is a pressing need to redesign our schools to meet the demands of a global 21st century society in which knowledge and technology are changing at a breath-taking pace, and new forms of education are essential for individual and societal survival. Yet, our current policy strategies are constraining rather than enabling the educational innovation our school system needs. Indeed, the path we are pursuing promises to leave our schools, as well as our children, behind.

For this reason, The Forum for Education and Democracy has chosen the 25th anniversary of the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the last clarion call for federal attention to educational policy, to call for a new federal role in supporting our schools.

As practitioners, researchers, and policy analysts who have long been involved in developing successful schools, we are gravely concerned about the inability of the current federal role to support the breadth, depth, and quality of education our children need for a 21st century life — one in which they will need to solve problems we cannot yet fully envision, using knowledge and technologies that have not yet been invented. Signs abound that the path we have taken in educational reform has led us astray. Inequities in educational opportunity have increased, public commitment to democracy has waned, the scope of education has narrowed, and our rankings internationally in



educational achievement and attainment have fallen. These indicators suggest that we are not making the strategic investments in our schools that both democratic life and the new learning economy require.

We have failed to meet the goals our leaders set for education two decades ago. Now, we must move forcefully as a nation in a more purposeful and powerful direction. Based on our combined experience, we present the following analysis

and recommendations that call for new leadership that will take on the fundamental issues of equity and investment in innovation that only our federal government can tackle. In so doing, we believe federal policy can enable local educators and communities to create the educational opportunities that will provide every child with the skills needed for a life of citizenship, intellectual growth, and economic productivity — the skills they must have if our democracy is to survive.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Twenty-five years after the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the U.S. education system and our democracy are even more at risk. Although the nation set goals to be “first in the world” in math and science by 2000, with all students coming to school ready to learn and graduating with high levels of proficiency, we are further from these goals today than we were in 1983:

- ▶ More students live in poverty and lack health care than was true 35 years ago. Nearly one-fourth of U.S. children live in families below the poverty line, more than in any other industrialized nation.
- ▶ On the most recent international assessments, the U.S. ranked 21st of 30 OECD countries in science and 25th of 30 in mathematics — a drop from a few years earlier. U.S. outcomes are also among the most unequal in the world and the most reliant on socioeconomic status.
- ▶ U.S. high school graduation rates have been stagnant for a quarter century and have recently begun to decline, even though the economy increasingly requires higher levels of education. While many high-achieving nations now graduate virtually all of their students, we currently graduate only about 70 percent.
- ▶ The U.S. has dropped from first in the world to 13th in higher education participation. Only half of those who make it to college are well-enough prepared and supported to graduate with a degree.

In the end, about 30 percent of an age cohort in the U.S. gains a college degree, as compared to nearly 50 percent in OECD countries.

- ▶ Not coincidentally, our incarceration rates are higher than they have ever been, with one in 100 Americans currently behind bars. Most inmates are high school dropouts who are functionally illiterate. Growth in state spending on prisons far outstrips growth in education spending. Several states now spend more on corrections than they do on higher education.
- ▶ Meanwhile, indicators of democratic engagement are declining. Studies reveal declines in voter knowledge and participation, trust in one another, the strength of community life and institutions, and connectedness to family and friends — trends that go hand-in-hand with the nation’s educational decline. Those least involved in community and civic life are the least educated Americans.

Although many reforms have come and gone since 1983, we have lacked a purposeful, strategic approach for developing and investing in the kind of education that addresses the needs of a democratic society. In contrast to countries that have spent the last 20 years building forward-looking educational systems that fund schools centrally and equally, build a top-flight teaching force, focus on 21st century

While other countries are making strategic investments that have transformed schooling and produced results, we have demanded results without transforming schooling.



learning needs, and develop the capacity for school improvement, the U.S. has focused on none of these critical elements of success for an extended period of time.

Inconsistent and Shortsighted Policy

Furthermore, the need for major transformation to create a 21st century learning system has been undermined by a inconsistent approach — one that has stimulated innovations on the margins, while maintaining a compliance-and-control regulatory approach that holds the bulk of the system in place, trapping most schools within the constraints of a factory model designed a century ago for another purpose. This top-down approach has been intensified under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which has dictated school practices to an unprecedented degree.

The promise of NCLB has been its focus on achievement for all students and its insistence that all students have a right to highly qualified teachers. However, the law has not provided the resources to achieve these goals, and it has not focused on the kind of higher-order thinking and performance skills needed in the 21st century. These include the abilities required by social and democratic life to apply knowledge to complex, novel problems, communicate and collaborate effectively, and find, manage, and analyze information.

Instead, federal policy under NCLB has encouraged schools to focus on a narrow band of knowledge, exhibited in ways that are not applied to important tasks in the real world. This policy has slowed gains in achievement in math and largely stopped progress in reading, while failing to reduce the large gaps in school resources and student performance that are the major reason for America's low rankings internationally.

Our current stalemate emerges from flagging federal investments in children and schools in low-income communities, the development of teaching and school leadership, productive school innovation, and community engagement and support. In addition, since the 1970s, the federal government has paid too little attention to evening out gaping spending disparities among states and districts. While other countries are making strategic investments that have transformed schooling and produced results, we have demanded results without transforming schooling.

The federal strategy of attempting to improve schools through mandates and sanctions cannot get us where we need to go. The successful new schools that have been created by many local reformers have been launched by educators and community members who together confronted old constraints; developed new curriculum, teaching, and assessment strategies; redesigned school organizations; and created learning communities that could drive ongoing improvement. These kinds of schools are constrained rather than enabled by top-down edicts and regulations. A new direction — grounded in what we know as a nation about innovation, learning, and powerful change — is needed to reclaim our leadership as a democracy and our children's future in a land of opportunity.

A Federal Role to Improve and Transform Schooling

Federal initiative has made a major difference in both school quality and access in the past. Education legislation in the 1950s and '60s led to an era of substantial improvement in schools and gains in equity. By the mid-1970s, achievement had improved, college-going rates for African American and Hispanic students were equivalent to those for white students, and teacher shortages had

been nearly eliminated. The United States led the world in education.

However, many of these initiatives were ended in the 1980s and the gains lost when the federal share of education spending was sharply cut in half. Although modest progress was made in the 1990s, other countries have surged ahead with strategic investments in systems that promote top-flight teaching for higher-order skills in every school.

While many exciting initiatives have been developed, a strategic long-term policy that would take them to scale has been missing. Such a strategy would require intensive and highly focused research, development, and dissemination to document achievements and create tools and professional learning opportunities to help them spread. It would also require systematic capacity building at the school, district, and state levels, through the development of know-how at each level of the system, a skilled teaching and leadership force, support for new organizational designs, and investments in low-wealth schools that ensure they have the human and physical capital they need to adopt and maintain

productive strategies. Good ideas cannot be replicated when the schools that need them do not have the resources to make them work. Growing inequalities among schools make it less and less likely that the neediest schools will be able to adopt productive strategies that could make them more effective.

The Congressional reauthorization of NCLB and the inauguration of a new president next year make this an ideal time to rethink the federal government's role in education. Congress and the new Administration will have an opportunity to work together to strengthen our public schools and take up the challenge of preparing all children, regardless of circumstance, for productive citizenship in the 21st century.

Leadership in this area should restore an appropriate balance of authority, with the federal government focusing on ensuring equal educational opportunity and building knowledge for good practice. This federal support should occur through:

- 1 Investments and incentives for more equitable access to high-quality schools,
- 2 A set of intensive initiatives to develop a world-class education workforce,
- 3 A forward-looking agenda for educational research, innovation, and dissemination, and
- 4 New strategies that enable communities to engage with and be accountable for their local schools.

This approach will reclaim and extend the historic federal role in public education — first, by acknowledging education as a civil right that should be made available to all on equal terms, and, second, by taking on critical tasks that demand a strong central role in building the capacity of schools to offer opportunities responsive to our fast-changing world. These include:

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1. PAYING OFF THE EDUCATION DEBT: Just as questionable fiscal policies have saddled our young people with an enormous monetary debt, our nation faces a huge educational debt resulting from hundreds of years of unequal educational and economic opportunity. This report calls on the United States to:

- ▶ **Meet the federal obligation to fund programs for high-need students:** Although the federal government pledged to fund 40 percent of the extra costs of educating students with additional learning needs, the federal share has dropped to only 17 percent, while regulatory burdens have increased. The federal government should meet its commitment, allocate its funds more equitably, and streamline programs so that more funds can be spent on the most productive purposes — recruiting and preparing skillful teachers for these students, supporting appropriate curriculum and assessment strategies, and providing additional time for students after school and during the summer.
- ▶ **Link funding to state progress toward equitable opportunities to learn:** With a three to one spending disparity between high- and low-wealth schools in most states, the United States is one of the most inequitable nations. Current federal

funding — less than 10 percent of most schools' budgets — does not meet the needs of under-resourced schools where many students struggle to learn. Along with a continuous progress index tracking school progress on multiple measures of student achievement, states should develop an “opportunity index” reflecting the availability of well-qualified teachers; strong curriculum; and books, computers, and other learning resources. Then state plans should focus on improving these opportunities to learn.

▶ **Invest in out-of-school learning supports:**

The learning effects of providing safe housing, non-toxic environments, basic health care, and early learning opportunities are substantial — by some estimates as great as improving school instruction. One key to the success of other high-performing nations has been the provision of these out-of-school learning supports. We must tackle our obligation to provide high-quality preschool, health care, and nutrition, which will ensure that students come to school ready to learn.

2. INVESTING IN A NEW “MARSHALL PLAN” FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS:

If we are to achieve much higher standards of learning for all students, a purposeful agenda must be launched to ensure well-prepared teachers and leaders for every classroom and school, as all other high-achieving nations do. For an annual investment of \$4 billion, or less than what we are currently spending per week in Iraq, the nation could underwrite the high-quality preparation of 40,000 teachers annually (enough to fill all the vacancies that are filled by unprepared teachers each year), seed 100 top-quality urban teacher education programs, ensure mentors for every new teacher hired each year, provide incentives to bring expert teachers into high-need schools, and dramatically improve professional learning

opportunities for teachers and principals. This report urges the federal government to:

- ▶ **Create incentives for recruiting teachers to high-need fields and locations:** Rather than bringing in teachers with the least training to flounder as they struggle to teach the students with the greatest needs, the federal government should underwrite the preparation of teachers who will teach in high-need fields and locations, and recruit expert veteran teachers to the neediest schools through financial incentives and investments in working conditions.
- ▶ **Strengthen teacher preparation:** Improve the capacity of programs to prepare teachers to teach diverse learners — including exceptional needs students and the growing population of English language learners — and invest in high-quality teaching residency programs in the nation's largest cities. In these programs, which retain teachers at rates of more than 90 percent, salaried candidates apprentice in the classrooms of expert urban teachers while they complete their credentialing. In return for high-quality preparation, they pledge four years of service, becoming expert teachers and leaders themselves.



- ▶ **Create sustained, practice-based collegial learning opportunities for teachers:** In contrast to traditional “drive-by” workshops, large gains in achievement have been found when teachers experience sustained professional development focused on learning to teach specific subject matter in the context of practice. This kind of improvement can occur through guided learning at the school site, through content-based institutes and coaching, and through vehicles like National Board Certification that focus on close analysis of practice. Federal investments should encourage this kind of professional learning and include incentives to redesign schools so that they provide time for teacher collaboration.
- ▶ **Develop teaching careers that reward, develop, and share expertise:** The current structure of the teaching career places teachers in egg-crate classrooms, doing the same thing on their first day as they do 30 years later, with little opportunity to share what they know with others. Federal incentives could support innovative districts in designing new career pathways that recognize and reward teacher expertise and willingness to take on roles as mentors, coaches, and curriculum leaders, especially in high-need schools.
- ▶ **Mount a major initiative to prepare and support expert school leaders:** Given the critical importance of the school principal to every area of school success, it is shocking that we lack a national strategy for recruiting and preparing talented individuals for these challenging jobs, resulting in growing shortages and limits on reform. A major federal initiative would underwrite talented candidates to attend high-quality programs that provide a full-time internship under the wing

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of expert principals, help districts mount intensive professional development supports, and create a national School Leadership Academy — a “West Point” for developing sophisticated expertise among the most able school leaders — so that they can take on the challenge of turning around failing schools in high-need communities with all the knowledge and tools available to the profession.

3. SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

AND INNOVATION: Educational research and development comprises only 0.2 percent of the federal research budget, and its priorities have lost focus on the needs of practitioners and what needs to be known to build educator and school capacity to improve student learning. Studies of successful schools and teacher development programs are rarely funded, and large-scale tests of promising ideas are not affordable. As a result, the productive efforts of those in the field are not well understood or disseminated. The federal role should be to support research, development, and innovation needed to support and inform local educational renewal. The report urges the federal government to:

- ▶ **Document and Disseminate Promising Practices,** including teaching strategies, curriculum programs, technology uses, and new school designs, and provide rich documentation of “turn-around” strategies that have been attempted and proven effective. The government should invest in state and local efforts that develop and disseminate knowledge that addresses practitioners’ needs and unleashes the intellectual and creative powers of communities and schools.

▶ **Invest in the Development of Higher-Quality Standards and Assessments for Genuine Accountability:**

The report urges revising the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to more closely resemble the original NAEP, which was designed as a set of open-ended performance assessments. The federal government should also support the development of performance-based assessments of student progress, which emphasize intellectually ambitious learning, at the state and local levels. A revamped data system would disseminate descriptions of student achievement based on these performance-based assessments to inspire communities to press for world-class standards for learning.

▶ **Develop Data Systems, Tools, and Measures:**

The federal government should invest in the capacity of states and districts to develop data systems and instructional supports that can help inform and guide educational renewal. Given the enormous expectations of states to manage school improvement and system redesign, it is imperative that their ability to do so be a target of federal investment, as was the case in the 1960s and ’70s. The federal government should also invest in the development of sharable tools for such important imperatives as appropriately evaluating English language learners and special education students, assessing students in productive ways to inform teaching across content areas, and uses of new technologies.

4. ENGAGING AND EDUCATING LOCAL

COMMUNITIES: As part of its agenda for equity and innovation, the federal government should ensure that every community can provide all of its children with adequate learning supports in the form of preschool, health care, libraries, and parents who are literate and supportive “first teachers.”

Schools should become the centers of their communities, enhancing the learning of community members of all ages, and providing parents and community members with the resources to be engaged in decision-making about their children's education. As opposed to merely mandating parent or public "input," the goal should be to provide tools and supports for the public to make informed educational decisions and to be engaged in the work of education. Specifically, the report calls on the federal government to:

- ▶ **Foster family engagement in school life and school improvement:** The federal government should help provide teachers and advisors more time to meet with parents during and after school hours, to share information about the child's progress and to plan and solve problems together. It can urge employers to give parents a day of leave each year to meet with teachers and participate in school life. The government also can provide much-needed resources, such as school translators, to help families whose first language is not English better communicate with teachers and schools.
- ▶ **Provide for genuine community involvement in school improvement processes:** Families and community members should be invited into the process of learning about what is happening in schools, participating in discussions about school change and improvement, and sharing their visions and resources for what schools can become. Research investments can include support for community initiatives in conceiving, directing, and reporting inquiries on what schools are doing and how they are meeting the needs of the community's children, as the basis for discussions of school direction.
- ▶ **Place schools at the center of community education:** The federal government can

create a "community schools" model of funding and service provision that enables local schools to become hubs of educational services for children and families. It also can support the use of school facilities for after-school and summer programs, and initiate collaborative programs that locate community resources such as libraries and wellness centers in schools.

A Net Savings for the Nation

These proposals would cost a total of \$29 billion annually, beyond current commitments, about the same as one month of our involvement in Iraq, or less than 10 percent of the cost overruns identified in federal weapons programs this month.

While it has become customary for us to believe that there is no room for additional funding for education, we are spending far more than these proposals would cost on the wasteful — and often tragic — outcomes of thoughtless policies that put our society at ever greater risk. Lost wages and taxes for dropouts cost the nation in excess of \$200 billion annually in each case, while deficits in basic skills for high school graduates are estimated to cost students, businesses, and colleges up to \$16 billion annually for remediation and loss of productivity. In fact, for each student who graduates from high school, the economy gains 1.3 dollars for each dollar invested in preschool education, more qualified teachers, and more personalized school environments.

We are also spending more than \$50 billion a year for an exploding prison population that is largely the result of inadequate educational investments, as most inmates are dropouts who are functionally illiterate and cannot engage the labor market. An increase in corrections costs of over 900 percent in the two decades between 1980 and 2000 has eaten away the resources that should be going to prevent the illiteracy that

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creates much of this problem. And preserving the nation's commitment to Social Security in the years to come becomes possible only if every eligible worker is gainfully employed, rather than drawing on tax dollars from prison or on welfare.

In the long run, these proposals would save far more than they would cost. In addition to the savings associated with fewer dropouts, we would save the tens of billions currently spent on grade retention, summer school, remedial programs, and special education for students who were not adequately supported in their early learning. We would also save several billion dollars now wasted each year because of high teacher turnover — and gain greater productivity and achievement from stemming the rapid turnover of beginning teachers, who become significantly more effective when they reach their third year of teaching. And for each student who is educated in intellectually engaging ways, we gain the greatest strength that a democratic society must have: a wise and free community member able to think for him- or herself and able to contribute to society as a whole.

The challenge is clear: Improving education and improving democracy go hand in hand. We must ensure that our students learn the content knowledge, employment and health skills, aesthetic appreciations, and understanding of the rights and responsibilities of a free citizen. Indeed, if we can think of education in these ways, we will create a stronger fabric of “We, the people” by the next, and much better, generation.

The Forum for Education and Democracy urges Congress and the next Administration to act on these recommendations, which are feasible, possible, and based on experience, sound research, and strategies our competitors are investing in and implementing successfully. It's time to take the next step for school reform that we have been unwilling to take — addressing long-standing inequities in funding, supporting educators to transform their schools and raise achievement, harnessing research to tell us what works best and spread innovation, and connecting communities to schools to better serve young people. These are strategies that will ensure all our citizens have the skills needed to work and compete in a global economy and to strengthen the fabric of our democracy.

I. THE STATE OF THE NATION

Twenty-five years ago, in April of 1983, Americans were told that we were a “nation at risk.” Pointing to warning signs across our society, the National Commission on Excellence in Education suggested that our education systems were drowning in a “rising tide of mediocrity” that would threaten our very way of life. The report sounded a dramatic alarm, stating:

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world.... What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur — others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.

As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.¹

As a follow up to the report, in 1989, the National Governors Association and the White House proposed six goals for the year 2000, including intentions that all American

students would start school ready to learn, would become literate and graduate with high levels of knowledge and skill, and would rank first in the world in mathematics and science. Notably, a major omission in both reports was the civic mission of public schooling: preparing an educated public that can think critically, become active citizens, and take responsibility for one another. This omission began to narrow the way in which we thought about public education and to change how we saw government’s interest in supporting our schools. We began to retreat from the federal commitment to equal educational opportunity asserted during the 1960s and early ’70s — a commitment that undergirds our democracy — and from the robust federal commitment to research, development, and innovation that characterized the post-Sputnik years. The federal government increasingly left the tough issues of unequal resources to local districts, where they cannot be resolved, and took on the attempt to improve productivity by mandating from far away how children should be taught and learning should be measured — a strategy that flies in the face of what we know about successful school change.

Two decades later, we are further away from the goals that emerged from *A Nation at Risk*, than we were when they were announced. Instead of all children coming to school ready to learn, more are living in poverty and without housing or health care, and the gap between the “haves” and “have-nots” is growing.² Graduation rates have been stagnant and are now declining, hovering at only 70 percent,³

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TABLE 1: Program in International Student Assessment (PISA) Scores, 2006

Country	Mean Score Science	Country Rank in Science	Mean Score Math	Country Rank in Math
Finland	563	1	548	1
Canada	534	2	527	5
Japan	531	3	523	6
New Zealand	530	4	522	7
Australia	527	5	520	9
Netherlands	525	6	531	3
Korea	522	7	547	2
Germany	516	8	504	14
United Kingdom	515	9	495	18
Czech Republic	513	10	510	11
Switzerland	512	11	530	4
Austria	511	12	505	13
Belgium	510	13	520	8
Ireland	508	14	501	16
Hungary	504	15	491	21
Sweden	503	16	502	15
OECD average	500	—	498	—
Poland	498	17	495	19
Denmark	496	18	513	10
France	495	19	496	17
Iceland	491	20	506	12
United States	489	21	474	25
Slovak Republic	488	22	492	20
Spain	488	23	480	24
Norway	487	24	490	22
Luxembourg	486	25	490	23
Italy	475	26	462	27
Portugal	474	27	466	26
Greece	473	28	459	28
Turkey	424	29	424	29
Mexico	410	30	406	30

and student achievement relative to other countries has fallen rapidly toward the bottom of cross-national rankings in mathematics and science.⁴ On the most recent PISA assessments, the United States ranked 21st of 30 OECD countries in science and 25th of 30 in mathematics — a drop from three years earlier.⁵ (See Table 1 and Figure 1.) It is worth noting that the PISA assessments evaluate the ability to apply knowledge to new problems, not merely to recognize discrete facts. On tasks that require complex problem-solving, U.S. students fall furthest behind.

While the effort to create new standards in the 1990s produced many useful statements of important learning goals, we have since narrowed the *de facto* curriculum by emphasizing standardized basic skills tests. These tests ignore the pressing need to develop students' capacities for rigorous scientific inquiry, technology innovation, competent and compelling written and oral communication, information management skills, and cooperative problem-solving. And, perhaps most importantly, our civic commitments are withering, as fewer citizens vote, neighbors are more distrustful of one another, and community participation declines. Schools' efforts to encourage students' engagements in their communities and to help them develop personal and social responsibility are ignored by the accountability metrics that dominate our current reforms.

The federal strategy of attempting to improve schools through mandates and sanctions cannot get us where we need to go. The successful new schools that have been created by many local reformers have been launched by educators and community members who together confronted old constraints; developed new curriculum, teaching, and assessment strategies; redesigned school organizations; and created learning communities that could drive ongoing improvement. These kinds of

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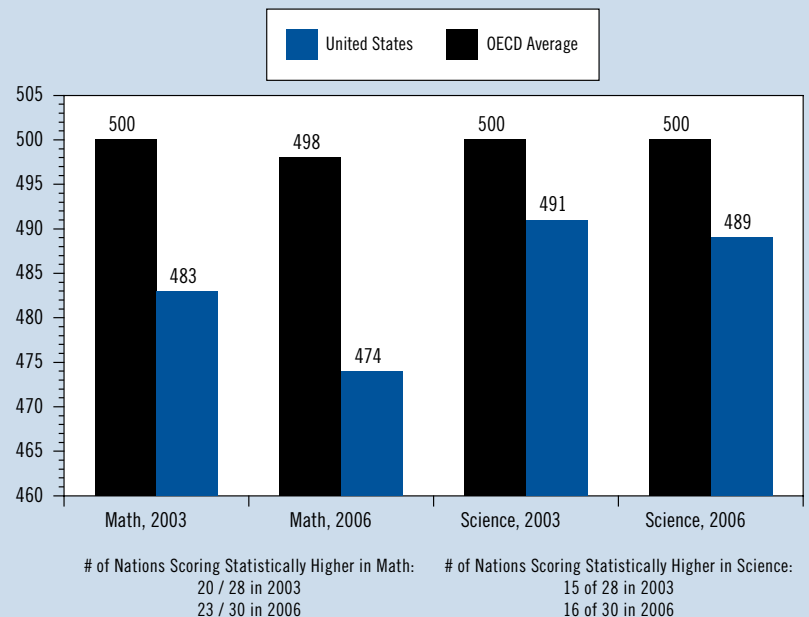
How We Got Here

Understanding what changes are needed in federal educational policy requires an understanding of how we have come to be where we are. It is important to note that in the quarter-century since *A Nation at Risk* was issued, many policies have been initiated and innovations launched. Some have been successful: Some schools have been redesigned and new ones created that have produced large achievement gains for students.⁶ Some teacher education institutions have undertaken major reforms and have begun to produce much more effective teachers.⁷ Some states have made substantial headway for periods of time in improving teaching resources and the quality of instruction.⁸

The problem is not that America’s schools are doing worse than they were in the “good old days.” In fact, they are — on most counts — doing as well as they ever did for a greater number of students: Basic literacy rates have risen over the last half-century and more students are participating in a greater range of educational opportunities at the secondary and postsecondary levels than they were decades ago.⁹ Schools are more diverse and inclusive places than they were 50 years ago, when nearly half of all high school students dropped out, handicapped students were largely excluded, and students who did not speak English coped on their own or left.

Instead, the problem is that these achievements have not been systemically embraced and are unevenly spread through the system. While

FIGURE 1: PISA Scores, 2003 and 2006



many exciting initiatives have been developed, a strategic long-term policy that would take them to scale has been missing. Such a strategy would require intensive and highly focused research, development, and dissemination to document such achievements and create tools and professional learning opportunities to help them spread. It would also require systematic capacity-building at the school, district, and state levels, through the development of know-how at each level of the system, a skilled teaching and leadership force, regulatory changes that support new organizational designs, and investments in low-wealth schools that ensure they have the human and physical capital they need to adopt and maintain productive strategies, rather than trying things that crash and burn without supports. Good ideas cannot be replicated when the schools that need them do not have the resources to make them work. Growing inequalities among schools make it less and less likely that the neediest schools will be able to adopt productive strategies that could make them more effective.

While many exciting initiatives have been developed, a strategic long-term policy that would take them to scale has been missing.

Most targeted federal programs supporting investments in college access and K-12 schools in urban and poor rural areas were reduced or eliminated in the 1980s. Meanwhile, childhood poverty rates, homelessness, and lack of access to health care grew.

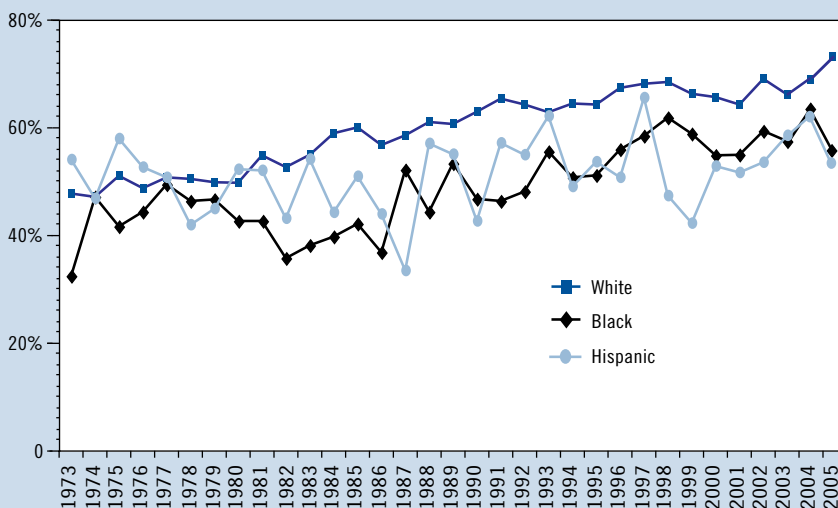
It is useful to remind ourselves that our initial large-scale federal engagement in educational policy was premised on the democratic agenda that our public schools were to fulfill — that every child would be given the tools necessary to make equal participation in our society more than just a promise. Driven by the belief that equal educational opportunity was a national priority, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 targeted resources to communities with the most need, recognizing that where children grow up should not determine where they end up. As part of Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, this major legislation was followed by the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which opened educational doors to children with exceptional needs, and the Elementary and Secondary Assistance Act, which supported desegregation, the development of magnet schools, and other strategies to improve urban and poor rural schools. These

efforts to level the playing field for children were supported by intensive investments in bringing (and keeping) talented individuals to teaching, improving teacher education, and investing in research and development.

This investment in our schools paid off. By the mid-1970s, urban schools spent as much as suburban schools, and paid their teachers as well; perennial teacher shortages had nearly ended; and gaps in educational attainment had closed substantially. Federally funded curriculum investments transformed teaching in many schools. Innovative schools flourished, especially in the cities, and, for a brief period, black and Hispanic students were attending college at rates comparable to whites. (See Figure 2.)

We have drifted mightily from this optimistic vision of equal and expanding educational opportunity as the gains from the “Great Society” programs were later pushed back. Most targeted federal programs supporting investments in college access and K-12 schools in urban and poor rural areas were reduced or eliminated in the 1980s. Meanwhile, childhood poverty rates, homelessness, and lack of access to health care also grew. Urban and poor rural schools fell behind their counterparts in resources and began to experience teacher shortages and poor teaching and learning conditions. Thus, it is no surprise that gaps in achievement began to widen again after the mid-1980s and have, in many areas, continued to grow in the decades since. After 1981, most of the programs supporting research and development and educational innovation in high-need communities were cut when the federal share of funding suddenly shrank from 12 to 6 percent. Although some of this support was restored during the 1990s, in recent years inequality has grown once again, as federal policy has focused on holding schools accountable for producing specific test

FIGURE 2: College Enrollment Rates by Race/Ethnicity, 1973-2005



score outcomes without holding governments accountable for providing equitable and adequate inputs.

The current incarnation of ESEA, the No Child Left Behind Act, articulates noble goals for improving achievement and closing the gap — goals that can move the nation forward. It introduces the concept of school accountability for learning across all groups of students — a concept that we applaud and have embraced in our own work for more than two decades. By flagging differences in student performance by race and class, it seeks to train a spotlight on long-standing inequalities and trigger attention to the needs of students neglected in many schools. And by insisting that low-income and “minority” students — who have so often been taught by under-prepared teachers — actually have a right to qualified teachers, the law has brought to the fore the maldistribution of teachers, which is so tightly tied to disparities in student achievement. Many educators, civil rights advocates, and parents have viewed these changes in the law as creating the possibility that federal educational policy would take seriously the challenge of providing equal access for all children — regardless of race, income, language background, or geography — to a high-quality public education.

While these aspects of the law have generated much-needed attention to inequalities, advocates’ hopes for major change in opportunity have not been realized. The law’s strategies have not addressed the primary mechanisms for achieving these objectives. Inequality in state and local funding has not been reduced, and the kinds of strategic investments in high-need schools that characterized reforms of the ’60s and ’70s have not been made. Rather than developing schools’ capacity to improve their practice, NCLB has substituted test-based sanctions as remote controls for micro-managing schools. Critics claim that the law’s focus on

FIGURE 3: Annual Rate of Gain in Reading Achievement Pre- and Post-NCLB

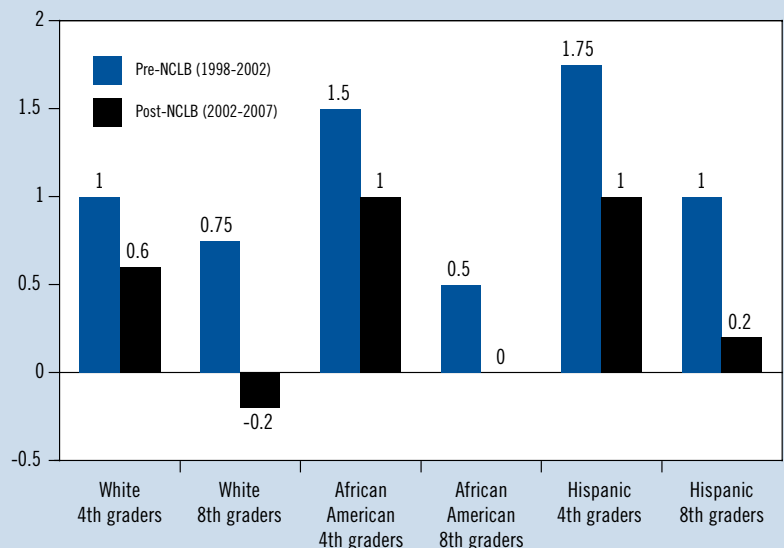
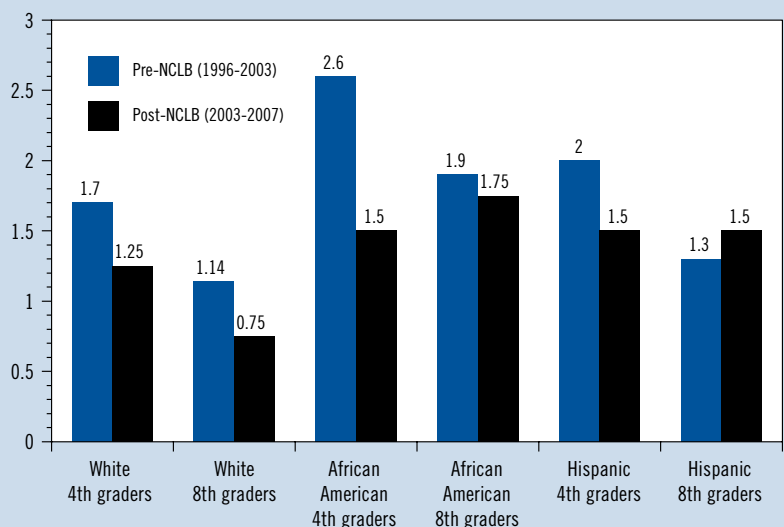


FIGURE 4: Annual Rate of Gain in Mathematics Achievement Pre- and Post-NCLB



NCLB has been managed in ways that push schools back to out-of-date notions of learning and stifle the use of new technologies. In the process, the law's complex regulations inadvertently reinforce the industrial model of schooling that is part of the problem, making it harder for educators to develop and use innovative approaches.



test score tallies has “dumbed down” the curriculum; fostered a “drill and kill” approach to teaching; reduced attention to untested subjects like science, technology, history, and the arts; undermined many successful school innovations; inappropriately labeled successful and improving schools as failing; and harmed special education students and English language learners through inappropriate assessments and incentives to push out low-scoring students in order to boost scores.¹⁰

Indeed, recent analyses have found that rapid gains in education outcomes stimulated by reforms in the 1990s have stalled under NCLB, with math increases slowing considerably and reading actually on the decline at the 8th grade level.¹¹ (See Figures 3 and 4.) The earlier standards-based reform initiatives stimulated efforts by states to develop standards and linked assessments focused on the higher order thinking and performance skills so needed in today's society. Some included hands-on performance assessments evaluating applied skills; diagnostic and formative assessments that can inform instruction; and computer-based adaptive testing that can evaluate a range of student performance more effectively. Unfortunately, NCLB imposed unnecessary straitjackets on the nature of tests that caused many states to abandon these more forward-looking assessments and adopt traditional off-the-shelf tests that poorly measure the standards that could pull them into the 21st century.

We believe the failure of the current federal effort in public education is a function of the misplaced federal role in our schools. Rather than invest in equalizing opportunity and improving the capacity of schools, NCLB focuses instead on mandating tests, allocating sanctions, and micro-managing school decisions about everything from testing requirements to tutoring strategies to reading programs. As the law has been administered,

schools have even been required to abandon successful programs to adopt unproven approaches that have proven unproductive. The complex requirements increase fragmentation of school services, making it harder to develop a coherent learning experience for the child.¹² While the goal is to prod schools into greater achievement, the regulatory strategy is poorly matched to the task.

With as many as one-third of public schools already declared failing because they have missed any one of more than 30 annual targets (including some that are structured to be impossible to meet for schools that serve large numbers of English language learners, for example), there is no federal strategy for genuine reform and improvement. Where innovation is needed, compliance checklists are substituted. Schools that have been taken over or disbanded because they failed to meet one or more of the specified annual targets have frequently been replaced by schools that are now doing even more poorly for the high-need students they serve. Rather than providing access to new programs, technologies, and supports that could dramatically change schools and communities, the law has been managed in ways that push schools back to out-of-date notions of learning and stifle the use of new technologies. In the process, the law's complex regulations inadvertently reinforce the industrial model of schooling that is part of the problem, making it harder for educators to develop and use innovative approaches.

Where We Are Today

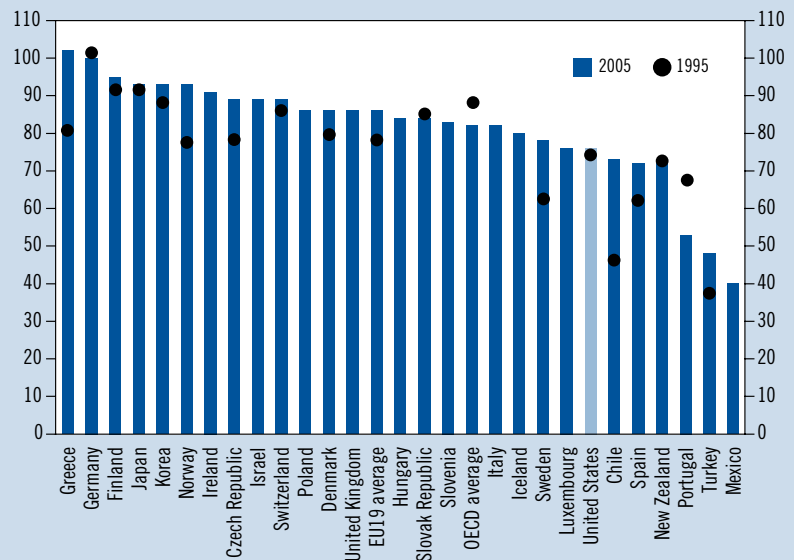
In the years since 1983, the country has embarked on several waves of reform which have spawned thousands of pieces of legislation to try to raise standards for education. Like the school reforms that have been underway in most other nations, these efforts are based in part on the realization that the knowledge

and skills needed by competent members of a democratic society, as well as workers in all sectors of the economy, are increasing rapidly to require more capacity for complex problem-solving, invention, and cooperation.

Yet the U.S. approach to educational reform has not been nearly as productive as that pursued by other nations which are making much more sustained and strategic investments in education and child welfare. These countries — including other federalist systems like Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, as well as a number of European and Asian nations — are leaving the United States further and further behind educationally. The growing gap is evident not only in achievement, but also in attainment. Many of the top-scoring nations — including nations that were previously low-achievers like South Korea — now graduate more than 90 percent of their students from high school, showing tremendous increases from 20 years ago. Meanwhile, U.S. graduation rates have been stagnant for a quarter-century, and now fall significantly below those of many other countries.¹³ (See Figure 5.)

At the same time, the U.S. has dropped from first in the world in higher education participation to 14th,¹⁴ as other countries make massive investments in their futures, subsidizing more and more young people to go to college. Although about 60 percent of our high school graduates go off to college, only about half of these are well-enough prepared and supported to graduate with a degree — far too few for the knowledge economy we now operate. In the end, about 30 percent of an age cohort in the U.S. gains a college degree, as compared to nearly 50 percent in OECD countries currently.¹⁵ And countries in Southeast Asia are rapidly increasing the proportion of their citizens attending college by expanding higher education institutions at home and subsidizing their studies abroad.

FIGURE 5: Percentage of Graduates to the Population at the Typical Age of Graduation



For students of color, the pipeline leaks more profusely at every juncture. Only about 17 percent of African American young people between the ages of 25 and 29 — and only 11 percent of Hispanic youth — had earned a college degree in 2005, as compared to 34 percent of white youth in the same age bracket.¹⁶ Although these young people of color will be a majority of public school students by 2025, investments in their education remain inadequate to meet today's demands for the kinds of learning needed in the labor market. The schools they attend are both more segregated than they were 25 years ago¹⁷ and more unequally resourced.¹⁸ International studies confirm that the U.S. educational system not only lags behind most other industrialized countries in academic achievement by high school, it is also allocates more unequal inputs and produces more unequal outcomes than its peer nations.¹⁹

Of nations participating in PISA, the US is among those where two students of different

FIGURE 6: U.S. PISA Results by Subgroup, Compared to OECD Average

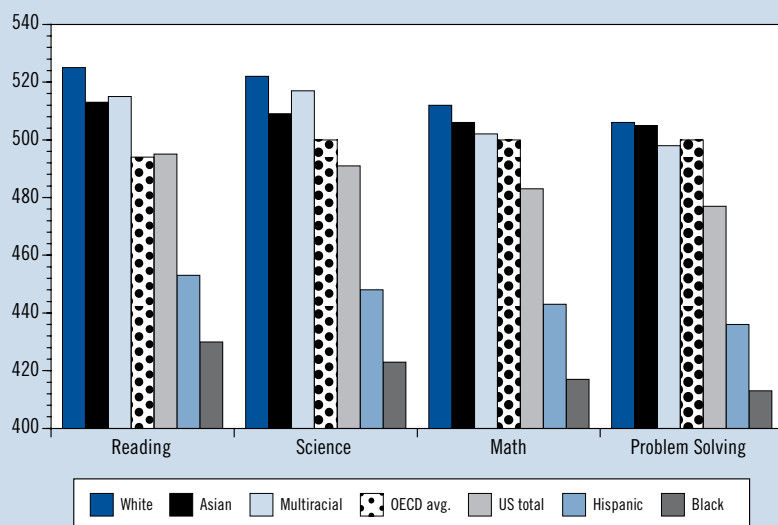
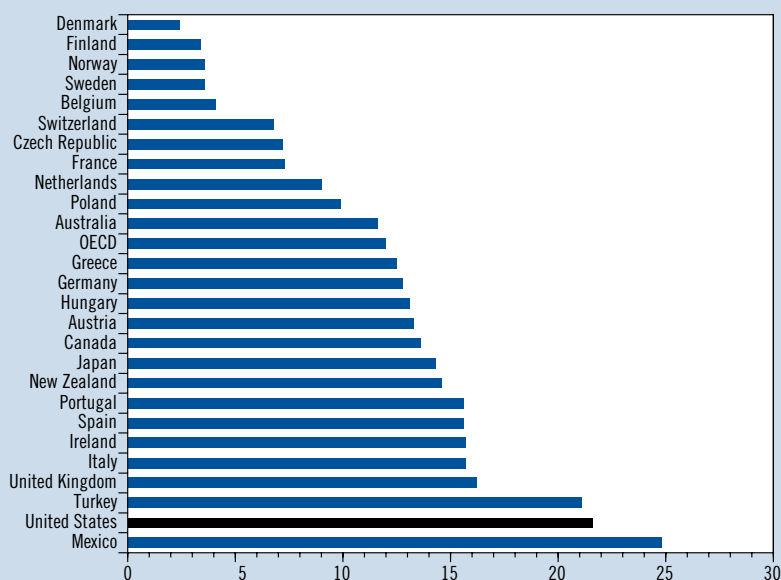


FIGURE 7: Percentage of Children in Poverty, 2007 (OECD Nations)



socio-economic backgrounds have the largest difference in expected scores. On this measure of equity, the U.S. ranked 45th out of 55 total countries, right above Brazil and Mexico.²⁰ On the PISA assessments in reading, math, and science, for example, the distance between the average score for Asian and white students, on the one hand, and Hispanic and Latino students, on the other, is equal to the distance between the United States average and that of the highest scoring countries.²¹ (See Figure 6.)

In all these content areas, U.S. students from all groups do least well on the measures of problem-solving. These data suggest, first, that the United States' poor standing is substantially a product of unequal access to the kind of intellectually challenging learning measured on these international assessments. In addition, U.S. students in general, and historically underserved groups in particular, are not getting sufficient access to the problem-solving and critical thinking skills needed to apply this knowledge in a meaningful way.²²

The reason for these disparities is not a mystery. The United States not only has the highest poverty rates for children among advanced nations (see Figure 7) with the fewest social supports, it also provides fewer resources for them at school. America is still at risk in large measure because we have failed to ensure access to education and basic family supports for all of our children.

Finally, as we under-invest in children, an increasing share of our government funds is spent on incarceration rather than education — a fact highly correlated with education, as most inmates are high school dropouts, and more than half the adult prison population has literacy skills below those required by the labor market.²³ Some states are said to predict the number of prison beds they will need in a decade based on 3rd grade reading scores.²⁴ This relationship between under-education

and incarceration creates a vicious cycle, as lack of adequate investment in early education increasingly reduces the funding available for educating subsequent generations.

For example, as prison enrollments have quadrupled since 1980, state budgets for corrections have increased nearly three times as fast as budgets for education.²⁵ (See Figure 8.) With 1 of every 100 Americans now behind bars, several states are now spending as much on corrections as they spend on higher education, and the nation is spending about \$44 billion annually on corrections.²⁶

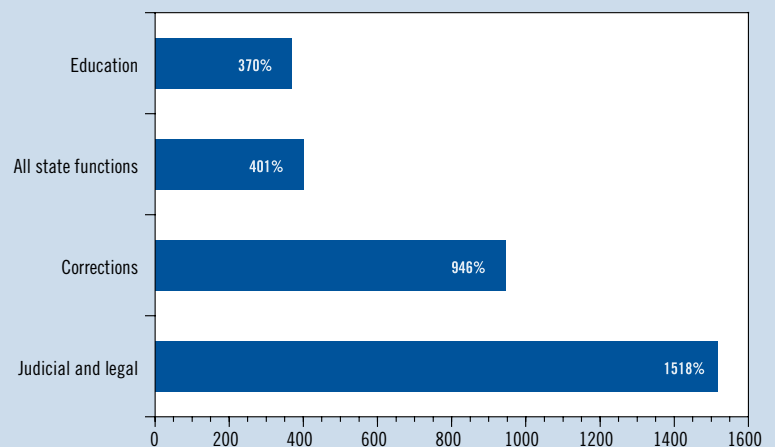
The implications of these trends are enormous for our well-being as a nation. Dropouts cost the country at least \$400 billion a year in lost wages and costs for social services and incarceration.²⁷ With only 3 potential workers for every 1 person on Social Security in 2020 (as compared to 20 workers for every retiree in 1950), having one-third on the non-productive side of the equation will undermine the social compact on which the nation depends.

A recent OECD report found that for every year that the average schooling level of the population is raised, there is a corresponding increase of 3.7 percent in long-term economic growth,²⁸ a statistic worth particular note while the U.S. is moving backward in educating its citizens, and most of the rest of the world is moving forward. The long-term survival and success of individuals and societies increasingly depend on a world-class education system. The United States must shift course if it is to survive and prosper as a first-world nation in the 21st century.

Democracy at Risk

We would argue that even if there were no international comparisons, if the United States of America were the only nation on the face of the earth, it would still be necessary to take steps to rethink the way we support our schools.

FIGURE 8: Increase in State and Local Expenditures, 1977-1999



That is because our future as a democracy rests upon our public schools. As former U.S. Senator John Glenn has observed, our public education system is “the personnel office for democracy.” And when our schools are unsupported, that democratic future is at risk.

An important mission for our schools and our communities is to incorporate the waves of immigrants who arrive from nations around the globe — a mission that has been intensifying with the large numbers of new arrivals in the last decade. About one million new immigrants arrive in the country annually. Today, new immigrant students are concentrated in port and border cities, but their families have migrated to cities, towns, and rural areas across the nation. While many new immigrant families are welcomed into their communities and are gaining a toehold on the American dream, others are struggling to learn the new way of life they are encountering, as they live in increasingly segregated communities, and their children attend schools that are overwhelmed by the demands placed upon them for new

Public education is the one institution that engages 90 percent of the next generation of adults, is governed by public authority, and has the explicit mission to educate for democratic citizenship.

forms of education and social services. Indeed, in many states, most of these first generation students drop out before they graduate from high school.

These new immigrants arrive at a time when common bonds are fraying among citizens of varying ethnicities, religious and spiritual ideologies, genders, economic backgrounds, and lifestyles. For example, Robert Putnam's recent study²⁹ shows that in comparison to homogeneous communities, people in diverse communities in the United States withdraw more from collective life, distrust their neighbors, expect the worst from their community and its leaders, volunteer less, vote less, and have less faith that they can actually make a difference. Citizens in diverse communities, rather than welcoming each other, are more likely to build barriers to isolate and stay away from one another.

Such realities suggest a marked failure — within government, politics, families, community institutions, and our education system — in bringing people together to learn from each other. And the responsibility to reverse this withdrawal from public life lies more and more heavily on schools. After all, public education is the one institution that engages 90 percent of the next generation of adults, is governed by public authority, and has the explicit mission to educate for democratic citizenship. As a recent report by Common Core noted, "The first mission of public schooling in a democratic nation is to equip every young person for the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship."³⁰

The loss to society from under-education has been well-documented in terms of income and productivity,³¹ but we also need to consider the grave loss to democracy. So much of our identity as Americans depends upon our participation in a government of, for, and

by the people, yet democracy in the United States is ailing. Even with the recent increase in voting in the current primary elections, only one in four young adults with any college education has voted and, among those without post-secondary education, only one in 14 has voted.³² Participation in community affairs is also decreasing among all groups. According to the 2006 report by the National Conference on Citizenship:

Trust in one another has steadily declined over the last 30 years: connections to civic and religious groups are constantly down; people are less connected to family and friends and more Americans are living alone; people are less well informed about public affairs; and our trust of and connection to key institutions have been largely on the decline.... Americans have withdrawn from regular "public" engagement in their communities — tackling issues of common concern — but the decline has been most pronounced among people with the least education.³³

The civic participation gap mirrors the education gap. While civic engagement has declined over time across the entire population, those with the least education are least likely to be engaged, whether the measure is voting, trust in institutions, or community involvement. (See Table 2.) As the Civic Health Index notes:

Education correlates especially strongly with deliberation and engagement in citizen-centered activities.... The least educated are the least politically efficacious. They are more likely than their more educated counterparts to say government is "complicated and hard to understand," and they are more likely to say people like them do not have a say in what the government does. This lack of efficacy is reflected in lower levels

of political involvement. Compared to those who have more education, the least educated are the least likely to be registered to vote, vote regularly, be mobilized in an election.... This lack of efficacy is also reflected in expression of voice. The least educated are the least likely to say they have expressed their opinion, either through contacting a newspaper or consumer activism.³⁴

The enduring gap in participation between the groups with the least and most education suggests that the education debt that begins in school continues to accrue throughout the individual's life and eats into our nation's civic life as well. The students most poorly served by the educational system go on to be adults with the least voice, involvement, and influence in their communities. With unequal education, we set up a cycle where today's young people — ill served by public schooling — become tomorrow's adults who are ill equipped to make other public institutions work for them. Unless we make progress toward education for democratic participation, today's underserved students will be tomorrow's disenfranchised citizens — and quite possibly the parents of the next generation of underserved students as well.

Educators need to help students go beyond their current identity group to become fully engaged community members, and a new engagement needs a different type of education — one in which students are asked to participate in shaping their education, engage in community building and community service both within and beyond their schools, and learn to collaborate with others to solve problems. Redesigned schools that have accomplished this — for new immigrant students and others — encourage debate and discussion about important historical and current events, build strong relationships among students, families, and teachers,

TABLE 2: Community Participation by Level of Education

	1975	2005	Percentage Change
Participated in a community project within the past 12 months	43%	27%	37% drop
College educated respondents	58%	35%	40% drop
Those without high school degrees	32%	15%	53% drop

A pedagogy of democracy is not the responsibility of only civic, history, or social studies teachers, but is the responsibility of all classroom teachers. For example, in Federal Hocking High School, in Stewart, Ohio, faculty members, parents, and students developed graduation performance projects that have been in use for 20 years. The school requires a three-part Portfolio for graduation. Three different faculty members assist the student; one as advisor, another as presentation coach, and the third as Portfolio presentation chairperson. One part of the Portfolio is readiness to be an active citizen. The directions to students are as follows...

... include explanations of two ways in which you have been involved in the political processes of the school or greater community. There are a variety of ways to demonstrate this including, but not limited to, playing a role in some part of school governance, assisting with some effort in the community such as registering people to vote or working at the polls, being involved in a campaign, registering to vote and voting, being involved in the school's site-based committee, serving on the School Improvement Committee, being an officer in a club, working on the First Amendment Committee, and so on.

Preparing students to pass such an examination of an educated citizen demands that:

- ▶ Students and teachers work together to make students' learning a contribution to their larger communities,
- ▶ Students demonstrate their learning in public settings and receive public feedback,
- ▶ Students have escalating degrees of choice, both as individuals and as groups, within the parameters provided by the teacher and school,
- ▶ Students actively work with problems, ideas, materials, and people as they learn skills and content, and
- ▶ Students are held to high degrees of excellence in both their academic learning and their contributions to a larger community.³⁵



We must think of education as more than a collection of standardized tests if we are to reverse the decline of democracy and create a stronger fabric for “We, the people” among the next generation of citizens.

and organize students into teams that tackle important and authentic projects that serve the community. Meanwhile, these strategies motivate students to come to school, learn rigorous material, and develop proficient English. These schools have moved beyond Carnegie units to learning that is not measured by seat time or limited by textbooks but is acquired through engagement with people, problems, community resources, technology, and research materials. They develop strong achievement by creating communities of learners within and beyond the school.

Existing policies and laws that construct education largely as a set of external standards, tests, and requirements tend to neglect this civic mission of schools. Our top-down system of increasingly onerous regulations also locks in an antiquated system of schooling that was born in the assembly-line era of the early 20th century and is unable to meet the demands for innovation of the 21st. As the Commission on the Whole Child noted:

Participatory democracy hinges on a social compact between adults and children that we shall together prepare them for a brighter future. For too long we have maintained a status quo in

education that has at best prepared children for our past and at worst marginalized those families least able to access a better life for their children through means other than education. We have been committed to time structures, coursework, instructional methods, and assessments that do not reveal to our children the marvel that they are and, instead, often leave them questioning their worth and the purpose of education designed more than a century ago.³⁶

The challenge is clear: Improving education and improving democracy go hand in hand. We need to build upon the natural curiosity of children to help them make sense of the world. We need to arm them with the knowledge and skills, as well as the resourcefulness and inventiveness, that will be required to invent solutions to tomorrow’s problems. We need to give them the tools to live their lives respectfully and collaboratively with others, building communities that can tackle the challenges that lie ahead. We must think of education as more than a collection of standardized tests if we are to reverse the decline of democracy and create a stronger fabric for “We, the people” among the next generation of citizens.

II: AN EDUCATION SYSTEM FOR 21ST CENTURY CITIZENSHIP

In contrast to countries that have spent the last 20 years building forward-looking educational systems, the U.S. has pursued a schizophrenic strategy of stimulating innovations on the margins while maintaining a compliance-and-control regulatory approach that holds the bulk of the system in place — expecting most schools to crank away within the constraints of a factory model designed a century ago for another purpose in another time. This top-down approach has been intensified under No Child Left Behind, which has dictated school practices to an unprecedented degree.

We have failed to make the investments that could make exceptional successes the norm, and we have failed to reduce the huge inequalities that make opportunities so haphazardly available to our young people. Especially in the last seven years, we have neglected the building blocks of strong systems:

- ▶ A clear vision of the kind of learning needed in the 21st century,
- ▶ Investments in educators' knowledge and skills to support this kind of learning and to transform schools, and
- ▶ Adequate and equitable resources to achieve this vision.

As we have already learned from the innovation sparked by new high-tech start-ups and the broader retooling of business and industry, the challenges we face cannot

be surmounted using school reform models that are rooted in industrial era practices emphasizing regulatory, command-and-control solutions. We need to learn from successful change strategies in other sectors and other nations if we are to create more successful schools and education systems:

With the advent of the 21st century, new drivers of change have emerged that empower the core members of the enterprise to lead and shape the reinvention of their own learning organizations. These drivers include: grassroots economics; smart networking; and the principles of teamwork that pervade our global knowledge-work economy. If we enable teachers, principals, students and parents to use these drivers effectively, they will transform their schools into genuine learning organizations. Our policies must be directed at moving from managed change to empowered change.³⁷

We need to realize that coherence does not come from the accumulation of hundreds of top-down mandates — which ultimately create fragmentation and straitjackets at the ground level — but from investments in shared expertise and collective action among those doing the work. The coherence that matters for learning is what the student herself experiences — and this must be constructed by educators and parents who are closest to the child. We need supports and processes at the local level that help teachers, school leaders,

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and families work together to create a seamless and successful educational foundation for every child. And this requires a dramatically different approach to educational policy.

A New Vision for Our Schools

Whereas the mission for schools when our current system was designed was to process large numbers of people for the basic skills needed in low- and unskilled jobs, the mission of schools today is to enable flexible learning at high levels for virtually all young people. In addition to the demand for higher levels of education, the *kind* of thinking and performance skills people need has changed radically. As all other high-achieving nations have recognized, schools must focus much more on the ability to find, analyze, and use information in new ways than to remember large numbers of discrete facts. Indeed, in the four years from 1999 to 2003, the amount of new information produced approximately equaled the amount produced in the entire history of the world previously.³⁸ The transmission curriculum that dominated schools for the last 100 years — which assumed a stable body of knowledge that could be codified in textbooks and passed onto students who would “learn” it by remembering bits of information — is counterproductive today, as are tests that focus largely on recall and recognition, rather than on production and application of what students have learned.

The U.S. education system began to adjust to these new demands in the early 1990s, with the development of new standards for learning stimulated by the Goals 2000 Act. However, with political pressures, many of these standards documents have evolved to suggest a curriculum that is a mile wide and an inch deep — one that requires teachers to rush through too many topics superficially, rather than to teach core ideas

deeply. Most high-achieving countries teach (and test) fewer topics each year and teach them more thoroughly so students build a stronger foundation in their learning.³⁹ Their assessments require students to conduct research and scientific investigations, solve complex real-world problems in mathematics, and defend their ideas orally and in writing. This focuses students’ and teachers’ attention on the skills that democracy, higher education, and 21st century jobs will require. Teachers’ involvement in scoring these assessments also helps them understand the standards deeply and develop curricula, with their colleagues, to support stronger learning — making the assessments more valuable for the school improvement process.

Unfortunately, many U.S. states that began to develop performance assessments like these in the 1990s have had to abandon them for traditional multiple-choice tests that more easily satisfy the requirements of No Child Left Behind. These tests often reinforce a curriculum that promotes rote learning rather than one that nurtures deep understanding. As tests have been used for accountability purposes, they have increasingly shaped teaching, reducing the amount of time students spend reading real books, writing essays, and conducting research. Teachers worry that preparing for this kind of test does not prepare children for real-world applications of knowledge. As one Texas teacher noted in a survey, echoing the views of a large majority:

I have seen more students who can pass the [state test] but cannot apply those skills to anything if it’s not in the test format. I have students who can do the test but can’t look up words in a dictionary and understand the different meanings.... As for higher quality teaching, I’m not sure I would call it that. Because of the pressure for passing scores, more and more time is spent practicing the test and putting everything in the test format.⁴⁰

Research on high-stakes accountability systems shows that, “what is tested is what is taught,” and those standards that are not represented on high stakes tests tend to be given short shrift in the curriculum.⁴¹ A recent national survey of teachers found that teachers in high-stakes testing states were more likely than those in other states to report that they feel pressured to teach in ways that contradict their ideas of sound instructional practice. Teachers in these states reported not only that they assign less research and writing work, but that they cannot use computers to teach writing because the state test is handwritten.⁴²

It is the height of folly to require schools to teach in ways that are more responsive to the 19th century than the 21st in order to meet the demands of antiquated testing technologies. Studies have demonstrated that students are less likely to engage in extended research, writing, complex problem-solving, and experimentation when the accountability system emphasizes short-answer responses to formulaic problems. These higher order thinking skills are those very skills that often are cited as essential to maintaining America’s competitive edge and necessary for succeeding on the job, in college, and in life. As described by Achieve, a national organization of governors, business leaders, and education leaders, the problem with measures of traditional on-demand tests is that they cannot measure many of the skills that matter most for success in the worlds of work and higher education:

States ... will need to move beyond large-scale assessments because, as critical as they are, they cannot measure everything that matters in a young person’s education. The ability to make effective oral arguments and conduct significant research projects are considered essential skills by both employers and



postsecondary educators, but these skills are very difficult to assess on a paper-and pencil test.⁴³

Recent federal policy has reinforced these problems, because it has not been organized around a clear vision of the kind of learning that is essential for the 21st century. We will need to foster major changes in curriculum and assessment to support the critical thinking and problem-solving required for success in the complex society we live in today. And federal policy will need to support rather than impede these changes, as it has in recent years.

Investing in Teaching

An appropriate vision for learning must be accompanied by serious investments in teaching. Researchers have discovered that the single most important school influence on student learning is the quality of the teacher.⁴⁴ Students lucky enough to have teachers who know their content and how to teach it well achieve substantially more. And the effects of a very good (or very poor) teacher last long beyond a single year, influencing their students’ learning for years to come.⁴⁵ Indeed, expert teachers are the most fundamental resource for improving education. Without them, no other reforms can ultimately succeed.

Unlike high-achieving nations, however, the U.S. leaves the supply of good teachers

We will need to foster major changes in curriculum and assessment to support the critical thinking and problem-solving required for success in the complex society we live in today.

In many states, schools serving the highest-need students experience a revolving door of inexperienced and untrained teachers who undermine both student learning and school progress, contributing to the long-term failure of both.

to chance, with no systematic approach to recruitment, preparation, or retention. With few governmental supports for preparation or mentoring, teachers in the U.S. enter:

- ▶ With dramatically different levels of training — with those least prepared teaching the most educationally vulnerable children;
- ▶ At sharply disparate salaries — with those teaching the neediest students earning the least;
- ▶ Working under radically different teaching conditions — with those in the most affluent communities benefiting from small classes and supportive working conditions, while those in the poorest communities often teach large classes without the necessary books, materials, supplies, and supports;
- ▶ With little mentoring or on-the-job coaching to help teachers improve their skills.

In many states, schools serving the highest-need students experience a revolving door of inexperienced and untrained teachers who undermine both student learning and school progress, contributing to the long-term failure of both.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, higher-achieving countries that rarely experience teacher shortages have made substantial investments in teacher training and equitable teacher distribution in the last two decades. These countries routinely prepare their teachers more extensively, pay them well in relation to competing occupations, and provide them with time for professional learning. They also distribute well-trained teachers to all students — rather than allowing some to be taught by untrained novices — by offering equitable salaries, sometimes offering incentives for harder-to-staff locations. They provide:

- ▶ High-quality teacher education to all candidates, completely at government

expense, including at least a year of practice teaching in a clinical school connected to the university;

- ▶ Mentoring from expert teachers for all beginners in their first years of teaching, coupled with other supports like a reduced teaching load and shared planning;
- ▶ Equitable salaries (often with additional stipends for hard-to-staff locations) which are competitive with other professions, such as engineering;
- ▶ Ongoing professional learning embedded in 10 to 20 hours a week of planning and professional development time.

While we worry about the supply of doctors, engineers, and technicians, we seem to ignore the supply of teachers who will educate the highly skilled workers and thoughtful citizens of the future. We lack a national policy to increase the supply of good teachers, to support teachers while on the job, or to distribute good teachers to all our children. When we do not tend to those who will nurture



our young in the skills and abilities that make engaged citizenship possible, we put our future as a democracy at risk.

Equalizing Resources

Tremendous unevenness and inequality characterize education in America. With a 3 to 1 ratio between high- and low-spending schools in most states, multiplied further by large inequalities across states, international studies repeatedly find that the U.S. has one of the most inequitable education systems in the industrialized world.⁴⁷ Moreover, the gaps along racial and class lines have been growing rather than shrinking, as inequality in funding has also grown since the 1980s. Gloria Ladson-Billings has noted that what we have is not an *achievement gap* but an *educational debt* that has accumulated over centuries of denied access to education and employment, reinforced by deepening poverty and resource inequalities in schools which continue to leave children of color and the poor behind.⁴⁸

Current federal policy tackles the equity issue by demanding equal outcomes from schools without equalizing the resources they provide. School funding lawsuits brought in more than 25 states have described highly segregated, apartheid schools serving low-income students of color with crumbling facilities, overcrowded classrooms, out-of-date textbooks, no science labs, art, or music courses, and a revolving door of untrained, inexperienced teachers. Meanwhile, their suburban counterparts go to schools where twice the money is spent on students with fewer needs in settings that offer expansive libraries, up-to-date labs and technology, small class sizes, well-qualified teachers, expert specialists, and luxurious facilities. Researchers have shown that schools serving large concentrations of “minority” students struggle with lower budgets, larger class sizes, lower-quality curriculum and less-qualified teachers across the country.⁴⁹ It is the shame of this nation that it continues to


take individual state-by-state lawsuits to try and force us into recognizing our obligation to provide for educational equity.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Other nations, especially those that lead in international rankings, have developed more productive government roles at the federal, state, and local levels. Studies of these nations reveal that they:

- ▶ Fund their schools centrally and equally, with additional supports to the neediest schools;
- ▶ Provide high-quality preschool and health care for children;
- ▶ Invest in a universally well-prepared teaching force, funding competitive and equitable salaries and high-quality teacher education with mentoring and on-going professional development for all teachers at state expense;
- ▶ Focus their curriculum on critical thinking and problem-solving, using assessments that require students to conduct research and scientific investigations, solve complex real-world problems in mathematics, use new technologies, and defend their ideas orally and in writing;
- ▶ Support local engagement in curriculum and assessment development, lesson study, professional learning, and collaborative planning among teachers as a means to improve practice and transform schools.

These conditions allow those closest to the child — parents and their teachers — to make crucial decisions about teaching and learning, knowing that their efforts are supported by the national government’s commitment to public schools. If America is serious about calls for improving the ranking of our students in international comparisons, we should take to



International studies repeatedly find that the United States has one of the most inequitable education systems in the industrialized world.

**The risk we face
is a lack of
commitment to
public education
and public
engagement,
both of which
can be addressed
through a federal
role that supports
educational equity,
develops and
supports a strong
national teaching
corps, promotes
educational
research and
development, and
supports community
involvement.**



heart these lessons and rethink the approach our federal government takes in supporting public schools.

That approach should commit the federal government *both* to leveling the playing field *and* to promoting and inspiring excellence — not by seeking to micro-manage schools into excellence, a strategy that cannot work, but by investing in the development and spread of knowledge and new technologies for learning and teaching. As Ted Sizer has noted, “bureaucracies lumber,” and top-down approaches stand in the way of new, more effective designs for schools. They

... force us, in large measure, to overlook special local conditions, particularly school-by-school differences.... While central authorities almost always try to provide local options and “consultation,” the framework of school remains permanently fixed. This framework includes the organization of schools by students’ ages, by similar subject departments, by time blocks, by specialized job descriptions, by calendar, and in many states, by precise forms of staff contracts and licenses.⁵⁰

Within this framework, much that fundamentally defines the process of education is predetermined. Changes within the framework can only be marginal, not transformative. Education needs the knowledge and information, supports, and incentives to transform schools into learning communities that can meet the pressing needs of the global society and local community members. Schools need top down support for bottom up reform.

We believe that now, on the 25th anniversary of the last national educational call to arms, coinciding with the national debate on the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind, it is time to restate the appropriate federal role in our schools. Our nation is still at risk. The risk we face is a lack of commitment to public education and public engagement, both of which can be addressed through reclaiming a federal role in educational policy that supports educational equity, develops and supports a strong national teaching corps, promotes educational research and development, and supports community involvement. We now turn to each of these important tasks.

III: REDEFINING THE FEDERAL ROLE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Support for Equity, Teaching, Research, and Community Engagement

The current federal educational policy framework has not fostered the important structural changes our public education system needs and our situation demands. We need a system wherein all our students emerge with higher-order thinking skills, such as the ability to apply knowledge to complex problems, communicate and collaborate effectively, and find and manage information. These are the abilities and dispositions that both democratic life and success in the new learning economy demand. Educational policy at the national level should be guided by a commitment to such outcomes for all of our children. The policy framework needs to put children and their learning at the center and then map backward to build a system that supports our goals for learning, rather than constructing a set of regulatory constraints and gauntlets and daring children and their teachers to see if they can get through them. As the Commission on the Whole Child put it:

If decisions about education policy and practice started by asking what works for the child, how would resources — time, space, and human — be arrayed to ensure each child's success? If the student were truly at the center of the system, what could we achieve?⁵¹

Congress and a new Administration can usher in a new era of support and advancement for

our public schools that takes seriously the challenge of preparing all children, regardless of circumstance, for productive citizenship in the 21st century by rethinking the federal role in education. Federal leadership should restore an appropriate balance of authority — with the federal government taking a more pro-active role in ensuring equal educational opportunity and a less heavy-handed but more productive role in supporting states and localities to focus on transforming teaching and learning. This agenda would reclaim and extend the historic federal role in public education first, by acknowledging education as a civil right that should be made available to all on equal terms, and, second, by taking on the critical tasks that demand a strong central role in building the capacity of schools to offer high-quality opportunities responsive to our fast-changing world. These tasks include:

- ▶ **Investing in Equal Educational Opportunity:** The most fundamental of all roles that our federal government plays is to use national resources to enforce civil rights and ensure equity in educational opportunity. First and foremost among those rights is the right to a high-quality education for each and every child. Underlying all federal efforts should be a commitment to paying off the long-standing educational debt our nation has accrued by allowing an unequal system to self-perpetuate for hundreds of years. America has not witnessed a major new vision for investment in public

Federal leadership should restore an appropriate balance of authority by acknowledging education as a civil right that should be made available to all on equal terms.



America has not witnessed a major new vision for investment in public education since the 1950s and '60s, an investment which, not coincidentally, led to our being an international leader in education for a quarter of a century.

education since the 1950s and '60s, an investment which, not coincidentally, led to our being an international leader in education for a quarter of a century. Fifty years later, we need another major re-commitment to move intently towards equity and excellence.

- ▶ **Developing a World-Class Cadre of Skilled Educators:** If our nation is at risk, it is teachers and school leaders who are on the front lines of turning the tide. For too long we have tolerated the low status of and inadequate support for our teachers, the single most important element in the educational system. Like other leading nations, we must invest systematically in the capacity of educators to carry out their proper roles as educational leaders so they can make wise decisions about how to improve schools. A strong federal role in ensuring that all students have well-prepared and supported teachers and principals is also a central element of the equity agenda.
- ▶ **Supporting Educational Research and Innovation:** Transforming public schools will require ambitious educational goals; substantial knowledge about the kinds of curriculum, teaching strategies, and technologies that can help students reach these goals; the development and widespread use of productive assessments for both developing and assessing higher-order thinking and performance skills; and ongoing support for innovation in classroom practices, school designs, and district strategies for change. Currently, the federal government is doing little on any of these scores; furthermore, its modest efforts are hampered by a narrow vision of educational achievement and a heavy-handed approach to school change that is not based on what we know about successful school innovation. Federal

support for research and innovation should be guided by the kind of learning we know is needed and by what we know about how to leverage change in schools.

- ▶ **Engaging and Educating Local Communities:** As part of its agenda for equity and innovation, the federal government should ensure that every community can provide all of its children with adequate learning supports in the form of pre-school, health care, libraries, and parents who are helped to become literate and supportive “first teachers.” Schools should become the centers of their communities, enhancing the learning of community members of all ages, and providing parents and community members with the resources to be engaged in decision-making about their children’s education. As opposed to merely mandating parent or public “input,” the goal should be to provide the tools and supports for the public to make informed educational decisions and to be engaged in the work of education, influencing how and what they and their children have the opportunity to learn.

A new federal focus on educational equity, teaching quality, research and innovation, and community involvement can support a public school system that provides all children with the skills and abilities necessary to take on the most important of all adult roles — that of a citizen of the republic. In what follows we turn to each of these in more detail.

Federal Priority #1: Pay Off the Educational Debt

The federal government plays a unique role in ensuring the civil rights of all our people, and that role has rightfully been extended to the area of education through both legislation and jurisprudence. The last decade has seen some

As W.E.B. DuBois noted, the “right to learn” must include skills for independent thinking and judgment:

Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental.... The freedom to learn ... has been bought by bitter sacrifice. And whatever we may think of the curtailment of other civil rights, we should fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn, the right to have examined in our schools not only what we believe, but what we do not believe; not only what our leaders say, but what the leaders of other groups and nations, and the leaders of other centuries have said. We must insist upon this to give our children the fairness of a start which will equip them with such an array of facts and such an attitude toward truth that they can have a real chance to judge what the world is and what its greater minds have thought it might be.

erosion of this role, through both legislative indifference and judicial action, to the detriment of educational equity. Our schools are more segregated today than they were three decades ago, and the tools to pursue integration within schools and universities have been weakened. Furthermore, one of the major roles of public education in our democracy, that of incorporating new immigrants, is weakened as the schools that serve these children are too often vastly under-resourced as well as segregated.

It is time for our government to be as concerned with the civil rights of its own people as it is with those of other nations. Securing the right to an equitable education is as fundamental as securing the right to the vote. To secure this right, we need to prioritize paying off the “educational debt” we owe our most underserved children and preventing such disparities from affecting the education of any child. Ensuring that every child has access to adequate school resources and the supports that make learning possible will require the following steps:

1. LINK FEDERAL SUPPORT TO PROGRESS IN OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN. Currently, the allocation of education spending does not reflect the urgency of repaying the educational

debt. With a three-to-one spending disparity between high- and low-spending schools in most states, multiplied further by large inequalities across states, the United States has one of the most inequitably funded education systems amongst the industrialized nations. The funding allocated in current federal policy — less than 10 percent of most schools’ budgets — does not meet the needs of the under-resourced schools where many students currently struggle to learn. It is also allocated in ways that reinforce rather than compensate for unequal funding across states.⁵² Nor does current federal policy require that states demonstrate progress toward equitable and adequate funding or greater opportunities to learn. Federal mandates that simply require equity in such things as “highly qualified teachers,” without a national agenda to provide such resources, offer a hollow promise.

Such inequality is fundamentally incompatible with the democratic mission of our schools to create an engaged and capable citizenry. This new direction must not only offer access to basic education, but also equip all citizens with the higher order thinking skills made necessary by new economic and social realities.

Investment in a “thinking curriculum” for all students is needed to reverse the destructive

Currently, the allocation of education spending does not reflect the urgency of repaying the educational debt. Also the allocation reinforces rather than compensates for unequal funding across states.

trend toward a society deeply divided between the “haves” whose education prepares them to participate in the new society and the “have nots” who can’t participate — and who are increasingly part of growing school-to-prison pipeline. The federal role must ensure that every child has equal opportunity to learn, which research has demonstrated includes access to high-quality teachers and school leaders, challenging curricula, and schools and classes organized so that all students are well-known and well-supported.

One central tool for this task is linking state eligibility for federal funds to state progress toward equitable school funding. The goal is to establish reciprocal or two-way accountability where it does not currently exist. While recent approaches to accountability have emphasized holding the child and the school accountable to the state or federal government for test performance, government has not been held accountable to the child or his school for providing adequate educational resources.

A new ESEA should start by asking (and helping) states to develop systems of accountability that use multiple measures of student learning which are performance-based and pegged to world-class standards of learning, and that assess gains based on how students improve over time. The current confusing statistical gauntlet of dozens of annual targets for making “adequate yearly progress,” some of which place NCLB at odds with other federal laws and parent and student rights, should be replaced by state plans that propose **a continuous progress index of performance** which evaluates how schools and individual groups of students are advancing. Such an index should include a range of important measures, including continuation and progress toward graduation, as well as measures of school learning that assess higher-order thinking and understanding, provide useful diagnostic

information, and ensure appropriate assessment for special education students and English language learners, guided by professional testing standards.

In addition, as a condition of receiving federal funds, states should create an accompanying **opportunity index** that reflects the availability of well-qualified teachers; strong curriculum opportunities; books, materials, and equipment (including science labs and computers); and adequate facilities. A report describing the state’s demonstrated movement toward adequacy and equitable access to education resources — and a plan for further progress — should be part of each state’s application for federal funds.

This notion was proposed at the start of the standards movement, when the National Council on Education Standards and Testing’s Assessment Task Force proposed that states collect evidence on the extent to which schools and districts provide “opportunity to learn” the curricula implied by standards as a prerequisite to using tests for school graduation or other decisions. The report argued that student performance standards would actually result in greater inequalities if they were not accompanied by policies ensuring access to resources, including appropriate instructional materials and well-prepared teachers, for all children.

Finally, as we describe further below, the federal government should help to distribute well-trained teachers to all students through incentives that attract and keep educators in harder-to-staff locations, just as it currently does in medicine. In these ways, our national resources would be used strategically to ensure an adequate opportunity to learn for every child.

The federal government can help ensure equity by:

- 1 Better equalizing its own allocation of funds to states, accounting for concentrations of need and differences in costs of living,
- 2 Creating benchmarks for the pursuit of equity in the form of opportunity-to-learn standards,
- 3 Insisting on greater comparability in total spending across schools and districts within participating states, and
- 4 Supporting studies on new funding models within states.

2. MEET THE FEDERAL OBLIGATION FOR FUNDING PROGRAMS FOR HIGH-NEED STUDENTS.

A complement to requiring that states move toward more equitable spending formulas is ensuring the federal funds designated for the education of high-need children are both adequate and spent strategically. When ESEA and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (originally PL 42-142) were first enacted, the federal government committed to funding 40 percent of the extra costs of educating students with disabilities and those who are “educationally disadvantaged” by reason of poverty. This commitment has not been maintained, and by 2007, the federal share had dropped to only 17 percent of the total bill for educating these students. The cumulative shortfall in Title I resources appropriated since 2002 (in comparison to authorizations) is now estimated to be \$65.4 billion, which translates into nearly 9 million students un-served or under-served due to funding shortages.⁵⁴

If we are legitimately to expect all students to reach much higher standards, the federal government must meet its promises to support the investments needed to provide students the kind of intensive, high-quality teaching and support services they need. An estimated \$10 billion in additional funds would move us



about half the distance toward meeting this obligation. More of these funds should also be spent to improve the actual quality of services, rather than merely to meet complex regulatory requirements and manage paperwork that takes up staff time and school resources without improving the quality of education. Rather than adding ever more procedural regulations, these programs should be streamlined to focus on the quality of teaching provided students by expert teachers, and to invest in growing that expertise by investing in top-flight professional education.

Federal funds should be targeted for purposes that can make a real difference in educational opportunity — recruiting, preparing, and retaining high-quality teachers with the skills needed to help students who experience challenges in learning; improving professional learning opportunities; supporting the development of strong curriculum and assessment strategies; and providing additional learning time for low-income students through enrichment opportunities after school and during the summer.

3. INVEST IN LEARNING SUPPORTS. The federal government also has a role to play in offering auxiliary supports that prepare students to learn, keep them engaged in school, and make their environment beyond school conducive

A complement to requiring that states move toward more equitable spending formulas is ensuring the federal funds designated for the education of high-need children are both adequate and spent strategically.

The federal government also has a role to play in offering auxiliary supports that prepare students to learn, keep them engaged in school, and make their environment beyond school conducive to high levels of skill development.

to high levels of skill development. The obvious truth — that schools alone are not responsible for student achievement — should propel attention to programs that will provide adequate health care and nutrition, safe and secure housing, and healthy communities for children. As Pedro Noguera notes:

If we want to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn, we must ensure that their basic needs are met. This means that students who are hungry should be fed, that children who need coats in the winter should receive them, and that those who have been abused or neglected receive the counseling and care they deserve. If the commitment to raise achievement is genuine, there are a variety of measures that can be taken outside of school that will produce this result. For example, removing lead paint from old apartments and homes and providing students in need with eye exams and dental care are just some of the steps that could be taken. This may seem obvious, but although the new law is called No Child Left Behind, many of these needs have been ignored, and consequently many children are being left behind.⁵⁵

The learning effects of providing safe housing, non-toxic environments, and necessary health care are substantial — by some estimates as great as improving instruction.⁵⁶ One key to the success of other high-performing nations has been the provision of these out-of-school learning supports. Nations that provide all children with health care, ensure that when students come to school they are not distracted by toothaches, vision problems, untreated asthma, and a range of illnesses.

The availability of high-quality pre-school is also a national priority in these nations. When nations view learning as a priority for all children, they ensure that students can

come to school ready to learn. For every dollar invested in high-quality family support and early learning programs for young children, there is a \$7 to \$10 return to society in higher graduation rates and employment leading to higher wages and greater tax payments, decreased need for costly special education services, lower rates of crime and incarceration, and better health. An additional \$10 billion investment annually would enable all low-income children to experience high-quality pre-schools and affordable day care, with additional supports to enable their parents to meet their children's educational and health needs as well.

FEDERAL PRIORITY #1: Pay Off the Educational Debt

- ▶ Link federal education support to state progress toward opportunity to learn,
- ▶ Meet the federal obligation for funding programs for students with special needs,
- ▶ Invest in high-quality pre-school and health care that enable students to come to school ready to learn.

Federal Priority #2: Develop a World-Class Cadre of Skilled Educators

Each year at back to school time, the single most important question in the minds of most parents and children is, "Who will my teacher be?" Their concerns are well-founded as research has consistently demonstrated that the single most important school influence on student learning is the quality of the teacher.⁵⁷ Currently, too many teachers, especially in low-wealth schools, enter without the knowledge

and skills they need to be successful, and do not receive the supports they need to stay and succeed. Indeed, a recent study found that the differences in achievement gains for students who have inexperienced, untrained teachers — as compared to similar students with well-qualified teachers (teachers with strong college preparation who are fully prepared and certified in the field they teach, with at least three years of experience and National Board Certification) — is greater than the influence of race and parent education combined.⁵⁸ In other words, having highly skilled teachers can help overcome the societal inequalities that are generally reinforced by schools.

Furthermore, the knowledge teachers need to reach all students in today's schools has increased considerably. Teachers not only need deep and flexible knowledge of the content areas they teach; they also need to know: how children learn at different stages so they can create a productive curriculum that will build on students' prior knowledge and experiences; how to adapt instruction for the needs of new English language learners and students with special needs; how to assess learning continuously so they can diagnose students' needs and respond with effective teaching strategies; and how to work collectively with parents and colleagues to build strong school

programs.⁵⁹ Federal leadership in developing an adequate supply of well-qualified teachers is as essential as it has been in providing an adequate supply of physicians, developing teaching hospitals, and improving medical education for more than 40 years.

Investing in skilled educators is also critical to local school innovation. If schools are to be trusted to make good decisions about educational matters, teachers and school leaders must be deeply knowledgeable about teaching, learning, curriculum, and school improvement. When the public lacks confidence in the professional judgment of educators, legislators increase bureaucratic straitjackets, even when these reduce, rather than increase, school effectiveness. Our failure to build a strong profession and to ensure that all educators have the supports they need has gradually reduced teachers' voices in how our children are educated. From the details of teaching children to read to rules for grade promotion, we have turned over more and more decisions to centralized authorities.

The problem with this bureaucratic solution is that children are not standardized; hence, effective practice cannot be reduced to routines. By its very nature, bureaucratic management is incapable of providing appropriate education for students who do not fit the mold upon which all of the prescriptions for practice are based. As inputs, processes, and measures of outcomes are increasingly standardized, the cracks into which students can fall grow larger rather than smaller. This is because the likelihood that each of the accumulated prescriptions is suitable for a given child grows smaller with each successive limitation upon teachers' abilities to adapt instruction to students' needs. Ironically, prescriptive policies created in the name of public accountability ultimately reduce schools' responsiveness to the needs of students and the desires of parents. Faceless regulations become the scapegoats for school failure, since

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A McKinsey study of 25 of the world's school systems, including 10 of the top performers, found that investments in teachers and teaching are central to improving student outcomes.

no person in the system takes responsibility for their effects on students.

Reinstating trust in the ability of our teachers to be educational leaders means first and foremost that we invest heavily in the education of and support for our teachers and school leaders, so that every school has well-qualified and committed adults in charge of making important decisions. Then we must provide our educators with the space and time for engaging with communities in guiding their joint work. In this way we create a situation where the means of public education are consistent with its ends — as young children are in the company of caring and competent adults who demonstrate how to make important decisions in consultation with peers and the community.

The federal government has a unique and necessary role in accomplishing this. Although No Child Left Behind set an expectation for hiring highly qualified teachers, it has not included the policy supports for doing so. Unlike the U.S., where teachers either go into debt to prepare for a profession that will pay them poorly, or enter with little or no training, high-achieving countries made a decision to invest in a uniformly well-prepared teaching force by recruiting top candidates and paying them to go to school. Slots in teacher training programs in these nations are highly coveted and teacher shortages are unheard of. Like

these nations, we must develop universal access to high-quality teacher education to build a teacher pool that is well prepared in terms of both pedagogical skill and content knowledge. We must demand our most vulnerable children have the most competent teachers. And we must provide incentives for redesigning schools, so that once teachers are on the job, they have the kind of time most countries build into their teaching day for professional consultation and development.

A McKinsey study of 25 of the world's school systems, including 10 of the top performers, found that investments in teachers and teaching are central to improving student outcomes. Top school systems emphasize: 1) getting the right people to become teachers; 2) developing them into effective instructors; and 3) ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child.⁶⁰

The United States has previously committed national resources to strengthening our teacher corps in the face of an external threat. In the 1950s, in response to the seeming technological superiority of the Soviet Union (flagged by its launch of the Sputnik satellite) President Eisenhower signed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). Key among the provisions of that law was funding for thousands of young people to become teachers in high-need fields and locations, as well as investments in a range of teacher education innovations. By the end of 1970s, the shortages of teachers that had been widespread were ended for a period of time. Unfortunately, these programs were cancelled in the early 1980s and were not re-instated as shortages of teachers later re-emerged in response to declining salaries and underinvestment in training. While the risk we face today is self-imposed, the lesson we learned nearly half a century ago still applies — we can make a national commitment to a high-quality teacher corps.

INVESTING IN TEACHERS TO IMPROVE STUDENT LEARNING: Finland's Climb to the Top

Finland has been a poster child for school improvement since it rapidly climbed to the top of the international rankings after it emerged from the Soviet Union's shadow. It now ranks first in the world on the PISA assessments. Leaders in Finland attribute these gains to their intensive investments in teacher education. Prospective teachers are competitively selected from the pool of college graduates and receive a three-year graduate-level teacher preparation program, entirely free of charge and with a living stipend. Their program includes both extensive coursework on how to teach and at least a full year of clinical experience in a school associated with the university.

Over 10 years the country overhauled preparation to focus more on teaching for higher-order skills like problem-solving and critical thinking. Teachers learn how to create challenging curriculum and how to develop and evaluate local performance assessments that engage students in research and inquiry on a regular basis. Teacher training emphasizes learning how to teach students who learn in different ways, including those with special needs. The egalitarian Finns reasoned that if teachers learn to help students who struggle, they will be able to teach all students more effectively and, indeed, leave no child behind. Teachers are well-trained both in research and in pedagogical practice. Consequently, they are sophisticated diagnosticians, and they work together collegially to design instruction that meets the demands of the subject matter as well as the needs of their students.

Policymakers decided that if they invested in very skillful teachers, they could allow local schools more autonomy to make decisions about what and how to teach — a reaction against the oppressive, centralized system they sought to overhaul. This bet seems to have paid off. By the mid-1990s, the country had ended the highly regulated system of curriculum management (reflected in older curriculum guides that had exceeded 700 pages

of prescriptions) as well as the practice of tracking students into different streams by their test scores. The current national core curriculum is a much leaner document (featuring fewer than 10 pages of guidance for all of mathematics, for example) which guides teachers in collectively developing local curriculum and assessments. There are no external standardized tests used to rank students or schools. Samples of students are evaluated periodically (generally at the end of the 2nd and 9th grades) to inform curriculum and school investments. A recent analysis of the Finnish system summarized its core principles as follows:

- ▶ Resources for those who need them most
- ▶ High standards and supports for special needs
- ▶ Qualified teachers
- ▶ Evaluation of education
- ▶ Balancing decentralization and centralization

This approach has clearly paid off over the last decade of steeply improving performance in Finnish schools.⁶¹ In summarizing lessons learned from the reforms that allowed Finland to climb from a low-performing education system to the very top of the international rankings, a Finnish official noted this key lesson:

Empowerment of the teaching profession produces good results. Professional teachers should have space for innovation, because they should try to find new ways to improve learning. Teachers should not be seen as technicians whose work is to implement strictly dictated syllabi, but rather as professionals who know how to improve learning for all. All this creates a big challenge for initial teacher education around the world that certainly calls for changes in teacher education programs. Teachers are ranked highest in importance, because educational systems work through them.⁶²



To build a framework that makes high-quality teachers available in every classroom and supports them in their practice, the federal government should undertake a “Marshall Plan” for teaching.

Building on the forward-looking Miller-Kennedy TEACH Act, the federal government could support high quality teachers in every classroom by developing a “Marshall Plan for Teaching.” For an annual investment of \$4 billion, or less than what we are currently spending in one week in Iraq, the nation could underwrite the high-quality preparation of 40,000 teachers annually (enough to fill all the vacancies that are filled by unprepared teachers each year), improve teachers’ preparation so that they can meet the needs of students in today’s schools, seed 100 top-quality urban teacher education programs, ensure mentors for every new teacher hired each year, provide incentives to bring expert teachers into high-need schools by improving salaries and working conditions, and dramatically improve professional learning opportunities for teachers and principals.⁶³ Specifically, the federal government should:

1. CREATE INCENTIVES FOR RECRUITING TEACHERS TO HIGH-NEED FIELDS AND LOCATIONS.

Most high-achieving nations completely subsidize several years of teacher preparation for all of their candidates, so that the most talented will enter and all will be well-prepared. The U.S. should, at minimum, provide service scholarships that underwrite the full preparation of teachers who will teach in shortage areas and low-income schools for at least four years, the point at which most will continue in the profession. Those who prepare

to teach mathematics in an inner city school, for example, should be prepared completely at government expense in high-quality programs. Virtually all of the positions currently filled by unqualified teachers could be filled in this way for only \$800 million a year.

In addition, incentives should be put in place to attract to these schools expert teachers who can serve as mentors and curriculum leaders. These incentives should address the key factors found to affect recruitment and retention: principals who are strong instructional leaders, colleagues who are like-minded and similarly committed, supportive teaching conditions — including reasonable class sizes, plentiful materials and equipment, time for collaboration, and input into decisions — and adequate compensation.⁶⁴ Experience shows that changing these conditions in hard-to-staff schools transforms their ability to recruit and retain teachers. Additional pay that rewards the commitment of teachers willing to take on these challenges should be part of the mix, but, evidence suggests it will not transform staffing without these other elements, as teachers are most strongly motivated by working in settings where they are enabled to succeed with students — the reason they entered the profession in the first place.

An annual allocation of \$500 million, matched by states and localities, could award \$10,000 to each of 100,000 accomplished teachers annually, recruiting them to high-need schools to serve as mentors and coaches. An additional \$300 million, also matched, could be used to improve working conditions so that these schools become attractive places to teach and learn.

2. STRENGTHEN TEACHERS’ PREPARATION FOR TEACHING DIVERSE LEARNERS. Studies show that teachers who are fully prepared when they enter stay in the profession longer and are more effective in promoting

student achievement.⁶⁵ Yet the quality of both traditional schools of education and alternative route programs is highly variable. While there are some extraordinarily effective preparation programs,⁶⁶ there has been no mechanism to spread effective practices to others and to upgrade the quality of the enterprise as a whole. This important mission should be launched through incentive grants to schools of education to strengthen teachers' abilities to teach a wide range of diverse learners successfully, including students with exceptional needs and English language learners. It should also include support for implementing teacher performance assessments that evaluate whether prospective teachers can actually teach successfully in classrooms. Existing initiatives in several states have shown that such measures of performance can provide information on teacher effectiveness, while leveraging improvements both in candidates' practice and in program quality.⁶⁷

Finally, investments should focus on the establishment of professional development schools which, like teaching hospitals in medicine, partner with universities to offer top-quality learning settings for children, prospective teachers, and veteran teachers alike. These school-university partnerships create the opportunity for those entering the profession to learn best practices and to develop their skills under the wing of experts while taking coursework on teaching and learning that is tightly integrated with clinical practice. Evidence shows that well-implemented professional development schools improve both teachers' skills and their students' achievement⁶⁸ and are part of a necessary strategy for ensuring that teacher education is grounded in good practice. A total allocation of \$300 million, with incentives tied to accountability for performance, would enable major improvements in the quality of preparation.

3. LAUNCH TEACHING RESIDENCY PROGRAMS IN HIGH-NEED COMMUNITIES. These kinds of programs are most needed in communities where they are often least available and where schools have often been difficult to staff. Rather than bringing in teachers with the least training to flounder as they struggle to teach the students with the greatest needs, the federal government should invest in high-quality teaching residency programs for candidates who will prepare in and commit to these districts. As piloted in cities like Chicago, Boston, and Denver, teaching residencies place prospective teachers in the classrooms of expert teachers — often in schools designed to exemplify high-quality practice for high-need students — for a full year, with a salary or stipend, while they complete tightly linked course work for certification and a master's degree from partner universities. Candidates learn sophisticated practices from the best urban teachers, and they pay back this investment by pledging to teach for four or five years in the district. Research shows that more than 90 percent of the graduates of these programs continue to teach in the districts where they were trained.⁶⁹

Such programs can prepare prospective teachers to integrate seamlessly into the environments where they will likely hold their first jobs — and not only to survive but to thrive and become leaders in the districts where their expertise is so needed. Further, schools of education can collaborate with local school systems to ensure that the professional learning from these residency programs and other professional development schools is made available to educators in others schools. Finally, these partnerships help train veteran teachers to provide mentorship to novices and to collaborate effectively with their peers, skills necessary to participate in the continuous reflection and improvement efforts that improve student learning. The costs of such an initiative would be modest. To create 100 such programs located in the nation's largest cities,

Professional development schools, like teaching hospitals in medicine, partner with universities to offer top-quality learning settings for children, prospective teachers, and veteran teachers.

A federal program that matches state and local investments in mentoring programs for novices could ensure coaching support for every new teacher in the nation, as is provided in every high-achieving nation as a matter of course.

for example, by allocating \$1 million to each program for each of five years, the annual cost would be only about \$100 million — a small fraction of the cost of poor education and high attrition these cities normally experience.

4. SUPPORT MENTORING FOR ALL BEGINNING TEACHERS.

With one-third of new teachers leaving within five years and with higher rates for those who are under-prepared, current recruitment efforts are like pouring water into a leaky bucket. Yet research has shown that mentoring for beginning teachers sharply stems attrition and increases competence.⁷⁰ For \$500 million annually, a federal program that matches state and local investments in mentoring programs for novices could ensure coaching support for every new teacher in the nation, as is provided in every high-achieving nation as a matter of course.

Such a program would more than pay for itself, as the costs of teacher attrition are enormous. Current estimates suggest that most school districts spend between \$15,000 and \$20,000 in replacement costs for every teacher who leaves, putting the national bill for teacher turnover at well over \$7 billion per year — money that could more productively be spent on a range of pressing educational needs.⁷¹

5. CREATE SUSTAINED, PRACTICE-BASED COLLEGIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHERS.

As part of its school improvement investments under ESEA, the federal government should invest in the systems needed to provide teachers with high-quality, sustained professional development, ensuring that teachers continue to learn. The critical need for investment in teacher learning has been made clear over and over again in efforts at educational change. Those who have worked to improve schools have found that every aspect of school reform — the creation of more challenging curriculum; the use of more thoughtful assessments; and the implementation

of decentralized management, the invention of new model schools and programs — depends on highly-skilled teachers.⁷²

Recent research has made clear both the qualities and impact of successful professional development, which differs substantially from the “hit-and-run” workshops typically held for teachers after school. Teacher learning that enhances student learning is:

- ▶ Focused on teaching specific students and specific curriculum content,
- ▶ Anchored by attention to students’ thinking and learning progress in relation to curriculum goals, teaching strategies, and formative assessments, and
- ▶ Embedded in long-term collaborative teacher planning, along with observation and analysis of classroom practice.⁷³

A recent study of high-performing, high-poverty schools confirmed these features, noting that such “turn-around” schools emphasize of



teacher collaboration and joint problem-solving that occurs when teachers work together to diagnose student learning needs through formative assessments, adapt instruction to meet these needs, and support each other in improving their practices.⁷⁴ A review of well-designed studies found that teachers who received substantial professional development — an average of 49 hours annually across the studies reviewed — boosted their students' achievement by more than 20 percentile points on average,⁷⁵ a significant difference in performance. This kind of improvement in practice can occur through guided learning at the school site, through content-based institutes and coaching, and through vehicles like National Board Certification that focus on close analysis of practice.⁷⁶

Not surprisingly, these features — which are extremely rare in American schools — are the norm in high-achieving nations, where teachers have between 10 and 20 hours a week to work with colleagues on developing lessons, participating in research and study groups, and engaging in seminars and visits to other classrooms and schools. Meanwhile, most U.S. teachers have no time to work with colleagues during the school day; they plan by themselves with little opportunity to share their knowledge or improve their practice.

If we want to improve the quality of learning, we need to direct incentives toward this kind of professional learning both by outlining the features of programs that will receive support in existing federal programs and by creating incentives for the rethinking of school schedules and organizational designs so they can routinely provide time for such collaboration to occur. Such incentives can be stimulated through grants — like the federal Small Learning Communities grants — that promote the redesign of the factory model schools we have inherited, as well as through incentives in professional development grants — which are

part of most federal programs — prioritizing the design of school structures that can enable intensive study and improvement of teaching. Much of this work could be done by better focusing the funds for professional learning in existing federal programs. An additional \$600 million could be used to triple the investments in Small Learning Communities grants and to provide \$2,000 per teacher for job-embedded professional learning for every teacher in the neediest 25 percent of schools.

6. DEVELOP TEACHING CAREERS THAT REWARD, DEVELOP, AND SHARE EXPERTISE. The current structure of the teaching career places teachers in egg-crate classrooms, doing the same thing on the first day they enter the profession as they do 30 years later, with little opportunity to share what they know with others. These systems create career pathways that place classroom teaching at the bottom, provide teachers with little influence in making key education decisions, and require teachers to leave the classroom if they want greater responsibility or substantially higher pay. The message is clear: Those who work with children have the lowest status; those who do not, the highest.

We need a different career continuum, one that places teaching at the top and creates a career progression that supports teachers as they become increasingly expert. Rewarding teachers for knowledge of subjects, additional knowledge for meeting special kinds of student and school needs, and excellence in the classroom — as well as willingness to take on mentoring, curriculum development, and other leadership responsibilities — would enhance the expertise available within schools. Creating stronger pathways for continuous teacher learning and sharing of expertise — through vehicles like National Board Certification as well as other professional development focused directly on practice — has been shown to improve overall school performance as well as classroom teaching.⁷⁷ Federal incentives of



We need a different career continuum — one that places teaching at the top and creates a career progression that supports teachers as they become increasingly expert.



face. While we have growing knowledge of the traits and skills that make principals effective — including their strong background as expert teachers of both children and adults — in most communities, we lack explicit strategies for identifying talented teachers with these traits and reaching out to them to cultivate their leadership abilities. One important role of the career ladders described above would be to consciously strengthen the principal preparation pipeline for those instructionally skilled teachers who also want to make a contribution to the management of the overall organization.

A major federal initiative would underwrite talented candidates who are recruited to attend leadership programs that offer strong training in how to support instructional improvement, organize productive schools, and lead change — and that provide a full-time internship under the wing of expert principals who have developed successful schools.⁷⁹ An average of 100 top-flight principals per state could be trained in state-of-the-art programs each year for \$300 million, providing a pipeline of well-trained human capital to lead the reforms that are essential to our success. Federal investments through a new ESEA should provide another \$300 million in funds for districts to develop strong professional development for principals, through learning networks and continuing engagement in instructional leadership training. And the federal government should set aside \$100 million to create a top-flight School Leadership Academy — a “West Point” for developing sophisticated expertise among the most able school leaders — so that they can take on the challenge of turning around failing schools in high-need communities with the all the knowledge and tools available to the profession.

These investments in educator quality will both develop greater excellence in our schools and address the federal role of ensuring equal access to high-quality education for

A major federal initiative would underwrite talented candidates who are recruited to attend leadership programs that offer strong training in how to support instructional improvement, organize productive schools, and lead change — and that provide a full-time internship under the wing of expert principals.

\$100 million could support innovative districts where teachers take leadership in designing such career pathways that enhance teacher compensation, help keep veteran expert teachers in the field, reward teachers for taking on tough assignments, provide supports for teacher learning, and enhance the opportunities for accomplished teachers to share what they know so that practice improves.

7. MOUNT A MAJOR INITIATIVE TO PREPARE AND SUPPORT EXPERT SCHOOL LEADERS.

Studies find that the quality of the school principal — especially the extent to which he or she engages in instructional leadership practices — is the second most important determinant of student achievement, right after teacher quality.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the single most important determinant of whether teachers stay in a particular school is the quality of the administrative support they receive from their school leader. Principals construct the conditions that can foster or undermine teaching quality — and either build or destroy the school culture that allows teachers and students to succeed.

Growing shortages of principals are a function both of the growing complexity of the job and the shortage of high-quality recruitment and preparation programs to enable principals to be well-prepared for the enormous challenges they

all of America's children. While the federal government cannot obliterate the long-standing educational debt overnight, it can enact policies that will provide qualified teachers for every child. This will support educational equity while empowering professionals and communities to lead local educational renewal.



FEDERAL PRIORITY #2: **Develop a World-Class** **Cadre of Skilled Educators**

- ▶ Create incentives for recruiting teachers to high-need fields and locations.
- ▶ Strengthen teachers' preparation by focusing on how to teach diverse learners, evaluating teacher performance, and creating professional development schools.
- ▶ Launch teaching residency programs in high-need communities.
- ▶ Support mentoring for all beginning teachers.
- ▶ Create sustained, practice-based, collegial learning opportunities for teachers.
- ▶ Develop teaching careers that reward, develop, and share expertise.
- ▶ Mount a major initiative to prepare and support expert school leaders.

Federal Priority #3: **Support Educational Research,** **Development, and Innovation**

The federal government has long embraced the charge of supporting educational research and information. However, funding for this function has declined precipitously since the 1970s, and little progress has been made in recent years to expand and disseminate what is known about successful practices. Today, federal research in the Department of Education comprises only 0.2 percent of the federal research budget. (See Figure 9). The collection of important data about what schools do (and with what results), who staffs them, and what the staff members know, has become less regular and less rapidly available. Studies of successful schools and teacher development programs are rarely funded, and large-scale tests of promising ideas are not affordable. As a result, the productive efforts of those in the field are not well articulated or widely understood or disseminated.

In addition, the development side of the "R & D" function has languished in recent years. There are pressing problems that require a concerted national effort to solve, as states do not have the resources to tackle them individually on their own. Among these are:

- ▶ The development of more appropriate and effective curriculum, teaching, and assessment strategies for new English learners and for special needs students;
- ▶ The development of more productive performance-based assessments that can be used for diagnostic purposes as well as for evaluation of learning;
- ▶ A greater understanding of how to design and stimulate productive uses of technology for learning, including a focus on the 21st century skills that will enable students to acquire, evaluate, manage,

and analyze information; develop new knowledge products; and frame and solve problems;

- ▶ Understanding and developing strategies for preparing teachers and school leaders to meet the demands posed by new students and new subject matter in schools; and
- ▶ Understanding how to develop and support schools as learning organizations, and how to support successful school turnaround and redesign.

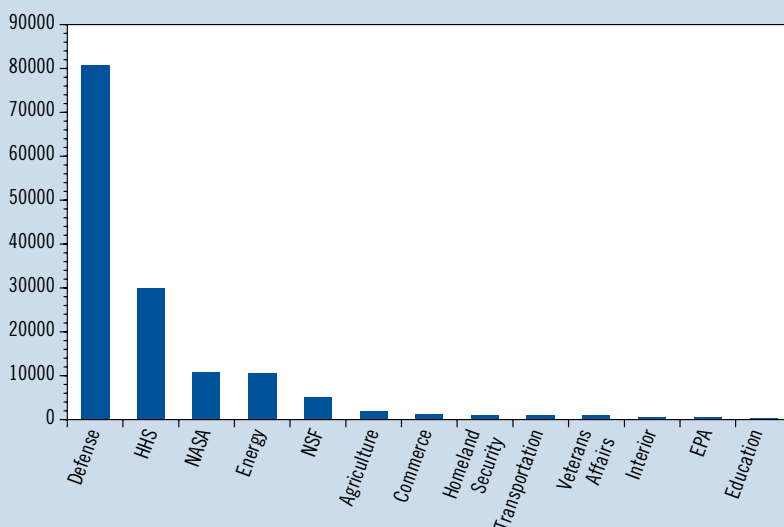
A strong, appropriate federal role does not require prescribing local decisions, which can undermine successful programs and practices in the field. Consider, for example, the impact of the current federal approach on the teaching of reading and the use of rigorous assessments. As recent investigations by the Inspector General have shown, the

administration of the federally mandated “Reading First” program narrowed the choice of reading programs eligible for federal funding on non-scientific grounds, forcing many districts to abandon reading programs that were working and replace them with programs of dubious quality. Further, these decisions were sometimes made by individuals who stood to benefit financially from their connections to the approved programs. Some analysts believe that some of these programs under-emphasize the comprehension skills needed for reading in the upper grades and may be implicated in the declines in 8th grade reading scores.

Federal micro-management has also resulted in a narrow definition of acceptable information for measuring school and student success. While NCLB calls for measures of higher-order thinking skills, states have had difficulty gaining approval from federal education officials for performance assessments that resemble those used in higher-achieving nations, and have often been forced to rely on external standardized tests that are poor measures of complex problem-solving. Several states that had developed systems assessing research, writing, and extended problem-solving have had to abandon or curtail these elements of their systems.

Instead of prescribing practices, the federal role should be to support research, development, and innovation needed to support and inform local educational renewal. This is one of the most important ways in which the central government can support a more effective educational system. Our democratic system is predicated upon a faith that those closest to an issue or problem are the most able to resolve it appropriately. The role of the federal government is to support citizens in exercising wise judgment. The educational research agenda should address the most urgent and challenging issues of

FIGURE 9: Federal R&D Spending Request for 2009 (in millions)





the day and be aimed at building capacity in our schools. It should support local and state efforts that bring communities together to enable their local schools to make sound educational decisions.

For these purposes, we recommend that at least 1 percent of the total national education budget (\$4 billion annually) be allocated to build knowledge and practice. While research and development, data management, and innovation investments at the federal level would absorb about one-third of this increased investment, at least two-thirds would be spent to decentralize capacity for knowledge production and use — to improve the capacities of state education agencies, regional laboratories, and local districts to conduct applied research, disseminate best practices, and build strong data systems and assessments that are directly related to improving learning. Such a decentralized system could be modeled on the network of agricultural field sites, involving the current system of regional educational laboratories more closely with grassroots research and practice. The Strategic Educational Research Partnership or SERP is a model of research and practice designed by a working group of the National Academies of Sciences in 2002

that suggests the contours of such a national plan. Linking closely with state and local educators in setting priorities for a research agenda will ensure that the system is focused on meeting practitioners' needs and building capacity nationwide.

1. EVALUATE, DOCUMENT, AND DISSEMINATE PROMISING PRACTICES.

Throughout this country, there are thousands of innovative and promising efforts being carried out by states, districts, and schools. Teaching strategies, curriculum programs, technology uses, and new school designs that appear to be successful need to be studied and, when found to be productive, disseminated. The questions of how and where our children learn — in a range of settings beyond those represented by traditional models of schooling — should be asked and answered through a sustained program of research. There is also substantial basic research that needs to be more deeply pursued and its educational implications understood. For example, the critical role of language development in early childhood — a major source of the achievement gap at the start of formal schooling — is well established, but analysis of efforts to accelerate language development, especially for low-income children, is in its infancy.

Recent advances in cognitive science are an important focus for continued investment, especially as this work is turning toward the teaching and learning strategies that support higher-order thinking and performance skills.⁸⁰ Other aspects of learning also deserve attention. Evidence suggests that systematic support for students' social and emotional learning is associated with significantly stronger academic performance, which is reflected in better grades and higher graduation rates. Such support also results in lower levels of drug use, violence, and delinquency, as well as more positive peer relationships, caring and empathy, and social engagement —

Teaching strategies, curriculum programs, technology uses, and new school designs that appear to be successful need to be studied, and when found to be productive, disseminated.



largely static and entirely English speaking. As the immigrant population is projected to increase, it is safe to assume that all educators will be called to address the needs of learners who will require access to efficient and effective English language instruction and effective instruction in the standard curriculum of the state. Further, as increasing numbers of special-need-learners are integrated into the typical classroom, effective strategies for serving all of them will be required.

Studies that help us understand how to create productive professional learning communities in schools are needed to begin the process of transforming 20th century designs into approaches that can stimulate the much more sophisticated and coherent practice needed in the 21st.

some of the critical values for membership in a democratic community.⁸¹ We need to understand what kinds of classroom and school strategies support these attainments.

The federal government should turn its considerable resources to the development of a systemic model for researching and evaluating a range of education processes and programs.

Given the appropriate and intense focus on academic achievement in schools serving low-income and minority students, the federal educational research agenda should provide guidance for the staff and communities of these students by providing rich documentation of “turn-around” strategies that have been attempted and proven effective. In addition, organizational studies that enable stronger understanding of how to create productive professional learning communities in schools are needed to begin the process of transforming 20th century designs into approaches that can stimulate the much more sophisticated and coherent practice needed in the 21st.

Specific areas of teaching research and development are critically important. The needs of English language learners (ELL) continue to challenge teachers and principals across the nation. Often such learners are recent members of the school population in communities that were, until very recently,

Technology applications in all disciplines of the curriculum offer promise but are underdeveloped. Recent advances in understanding teaching practice have helped us to unpack competent teaching as a complex interaction of content, pedagogical skill, and technologies as these intersect with student needs and interests.⁸² Teachers need access to carefully evaluated and well-documented technology applications that can support productive instruction of engaging and rigorous content.

In addition to research, the government should fund development and innovation. Federal support for educational innovation has been an important part of our past successes. Funds for science education during the “Sputnik Era” improved science teaching, provided for curriculum development, enhanced teacher preparation, and increased the supply of laboratories in our schools. In the arts, federal efforts have expanded student access to both visual and performing arts programs. More recently, the Small Learning Communities grants have led to efforts to reorganize our secondary schools on a more human scale. Funds to invest in — and study the effects of — creative learning programs, new uses of technology for learning, ways of imagining the transition from school to adulthood, and rethinking school size and organization could provide the incentive to make schools more engaging places for all of our students.

A COMMUNITY-BASED SCHOOL USING RESEARCH TO BEAT THE ODDS

As a young black male moving from one low-income neighborhood in San Francisco to the next, James Williams faced the kind of challenges that lead many young people in similar circumstances to drop out of school. His mother, who experienced health problems, was out of work for several years and struggled to raise a family on her own. James's dream to go to college seemed far off until his mother decided to enroll him in a brand new small public high school in San Francisco — June Jordan School for Equity. The school combines a college preparatory curriculum organized around social justice issues and civic engagement with highly personalized instruction.

With two other young children to care for, James's mother could not easily attend parent conferences, so June Jordan teachers went to her home to meet. James's advisor provided emotional, academic, and even financial support to help him get through rough patches when his family faced a number of hardships. James ultimately developed a passion for writing as a result of the school's continual emphasis on writing and inquiry as students regularly present research papers and essays in school exhibitions. Now attending college at UC Santa Cruz, he is considering a major in literature or writing, confident that "June Jordan got me ready for a four-year college."

Located in San Francisco, June Jordan School for Equity (JSE) was launched when a group of teachers, parents, and community members engaged in a large-scale community organizing campaign to convince the school district to open a small school for low-income students of color who often drop out of school. The four founding teachers gathered support for the project by citing research on the effectiveness of small, redesigned high schools elsewhere in the country, and designed the school around research outlining school practices that had worked with this population of students.

Although $\frac{3}{4}$ of its students come from low-income families, and most arrive far behind grade level in their skills, the hardy little school succeeded in sending 95% of its first cohort of graduates to college — and more than 70% to four-year colleges including the University of California and Yale University. It has accomplished this by organizing a rigorous, inquiry-based curriculum supported by highly scaffolded instruction that is adapted to student needs.

Teachers also use social justice themes to help students develop critical thinking skills and involve students in class projects and community service that allow them to apply what they are learning to real problems their communities face.

Intellectually challenging performance assessments motivate students as well. Students must complete portfolios of their work to progress to 11th grade and, later, to graduate. These portfolios include "masterpiece" samples of work in four academic content areas — an original research paper (social studies), a piece of scientific research (science), a literary analysis (English), a mathematical application (math), as well as a work sample from Creative Arts or Community Service. These are defended in front of a panel consisting of teachers, a community member, parents, and students. They are evaluated using a rubric representing the school's six Habits of Mind: precision of expression, relevance, originality, perspective, evidence, and logical reasoning.

Every student meets daily with a teacher-advisor who is responsible for a group of fifteen students for two years. In the 11th and 12th grades, advisory provides support to students applying to and preparing for college. It is also the place where students reflect on their internship experiences. Parents and students have their advisors' cell phone numbers, and teachers often talk to parents on a weekly, if not daily, basis. As Principal Matt Alexander explains, "One of our founding parents said we want a school where it's like parents and teachers are raising the same child. So that's been our philosophy."

Teachers focus on how to meet students' needs by looking at student work and evidence about practice during their regular joint planning time organized as part of the school day, in bi-monthly professional development sessions, and during an annual 2-week retreat. One of the school's many committees is devoted to teacher development and support. Democratic decision-making incorporates all stakeholders through committees that include teachers, parents, students, and community members in collecting information and making decisions about school practices and policies, student supports and outcomes, and curriculum development. The school illustrates the power of educators and communities working together with access to knowledge about successful practice that supports innovation.

Source: Diane Friedlaender & Linda Darling-Hammond et al., *High Schools for Equity*, Stanford, CA: School Redesign Network at Stanford University, 2007.



A new research and development agenda could explore what other nations as well as many states have done to create standards and assessments that nurture critical skills and to invest in the development of new model standards by professional disciplinary associations in consortium with states.

Many of the most important changes in educational practices that have improved student achievement have come from the work of those in the field. The list of such efforts covers volumes and would include networks of secondary school innovators, reading programs grown from work in the field, community-based school improvement programs, and many others. Discovering, evaluating, supporting, and disseminating the most promising educational innovations is an important priority for federally supported research. A pressing area for this kind of research is to understand what it takes to turn a school into a learning organization, and what the ingredients and processes are for turning around schools that have previously been failing. Taking the lead from earlier successes, the government should invest in state and local efforts that disseminate this knowledge and unleash the intellectual and creative powers of communities and schools.

2. INVEST IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER-QUALITY STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS FOR GENUINE ACCOUNTABILITY.

A critically important area for such research and development is a rethinking of standards and assessments for learning, so that they represent what we want our students to know to succeed in a 21st century world and to participate fully in our democracy. It has always been the case that in order to meet the demands of democratic life, citizens and citizens-to-be have needed to construct and organize knowledge, consider alternatives, apply what they have learned and know to complex problems, and publicly defend or justify their ideas. As America moves into a learning economy, these skills are now needed as much for success in the world of work as for citizenship. As Antonia Cortese and Diane Ravitch observed in the introduction to a recent Common Core report, “What we need is an education system that teaches deep knowledge, that values creativity and originality, and that values thinking skills.”⁸³

The federal government could lead in supporting the development at the state and local levels of learning standards that embrace these higher-order skills. A new research and development agenda could help schools focus their curricula on in-depth knowledge, as well as invention and problem-solving, by exploring what other nations and many states have done in creating standards and assessments that nurture those critical skills. This agenda could also invest in the development of a new round of model standards by professional disciplinary associations in consortium with states.

The implementation of current federal educational policy has relied upon standardized test scores as the sole source of public information on education. As noted earlier, this approach has led to both narrowing the learning experiences of children and limiting the engagement of communities and teachers around issues of what children should learn. Rather than pushing states toward such limited measures, federal policy should be directed toward supporting the development of more productive assessments at the local, state, and national levels, with a goal of providing information to communities about outcomes that are fundamental to the higher-order skills citizenship and productive work require. Many nations have undertaken precisely such a path, causing their schools to increasingly focus curriculum on critical thinking and problem-solving to organize teaching around a curriculum focused on deep understanding.

Examples of such approaches exist both within our borders and internationally. While most U.S. students confront multiple-choice items asking them merely to remember discrete science facts, students in other countries are expected to think and act like scientists. For example, an item from the Victoria, Australia, high school biology test (which resembles those in several southeast Asian nations)

describes how a particular virus works, then asks students to design a drug to kill the virus, explain how the drug operates (complete with diagrams), and then to design and describe an experiment to test the drug — as real scientists would. Similar assessment tools have been developed in this nation, such as the state-designed science inquiry assessments used in Connecticut or the locally designed public speaking assessments in Nebraska.

Students in other countries also complete locally required assessments like laboratory experiments and research papers that help evaluate student learning in the classroom. These assessments, which together typically count as at least half of the total examination score, allow the testing of complex skills that cannot be measured in a two-hour test on a single day. They ensure that students receive stronger learning opportunities. And they give teachers timely information they need to help students improve — something that standardized tests that produce scores several months later cannot do.

Additionally, as that work is often designed and carried out at the local school level, communities are more engaged in what students are learning. Much more transparent than standardized testing, such assessments provide communities with information about what type of citizen their children will become

and empower them, if they deem it necessary, to make course corrections. When parents are informed about student development they can be more effective advocates for the resources and strategies required for further growth. The key issue is not as much the level of government at which tests are authorized and developed — other high-achieving countries have national, state, and local standards and assessments — as the *kind and quality* of the teaching and learning the assessments support.

Curriculum-embedded assessment systems that involve teachers in analyzing and scoring student work not only motivate teaching for understanding; they also create an engine for instructional improvement that can propel organizational change. As Tom Carroll notes:

The process of developing and using assessments is a powerful form of embedded professional development, which recognizes that teachers grow through well-focused dialogue and reflection about student learning. Authentic assessment that includes students and teachers in a more inclusive learning community helps both students and teachers better understand what [the students] know and how they learned it. Such assessments empower teachers and students to collaboratively create the knowledge and skills [the students] need for successful participation in a world that rewards continuous learning, sustained teamwork, and flexible adaptation to change....

But the recent emphasis of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) on high-stakes testing has stalled the growth of schools as learning organizations. NCLB's focus on one-time, end-of-year tests that were designed to assess student performance in factory-era schools has made it difficult to focus on what must be done to ensure that teachers are prepared, and schools are organized,

Curriculum-embedded assessment systems that involve teachers in analyzing and scoring student work not only motivate teaching for understanding, they also create an engine for instructional improvement.





Federal support for more thoughtful assessments could begin with revising the National Assessment of Educational Progress so it more closely resembles the original NAEP, which was designed as a set of open-ended performance assessments providing a much broader view of student achievement.

to teach for the future. The adverse consequences of the current implementation of NCLB are unfortunate, because when genuine learning organizations are allowed to thrive it is possible to create and meet high expectations for student learning without resorting to high-stakes assessments that are based on a narrow spectrum of learning.⁸⁴

Federal support for more thoughtful assessments could begin with revising the National Assessment of Educational Progress so it more closely resembles the original NAEP, which was designed as a set of open-ended performance assessments providing a much broader view of student achievement. A revamped data system would disseminate descriptions of student achievement based on these performance-based assessments to inspire communities to press for world-class standards for learning.

The federal government should also support the development work that would assist states or consortiums of states in developing systems for evaluating student progress that are performance-based, including assessments like essays, research papers, and science experiments that are embedded in the curriculum and scored by teachers using common criteria. These assessments — supported by moderated scoring or auditing processes that maintain standards — would help to leverage intellectually ambitious learning and provide information that continuously improves teaching. Such systems of assessment would also provide information to evaluate curricula and guide investments in professional learning — in short, the data they provide would help schools improve.

If the federal government would build states' capacity to involve communities and to distribute timely, relevant, and descriptive information about student achievement, then powerful partnerships and coalitions

supporting education could emerge. Just like the assessments for students, the aim of such information sharing would not be to punish or penalize schools and districts, but to inspire discussion and coalesce a local community around striving toward world-class standards.

3. DEVELOP DATA SYSTEMS, TOOLS, AND MEASURES.

Finally, the federal government can invest in the capacity of states and districts to develop data systems that are informative in guiding educational renewal — as well as intelligent instructional support systems that can help guide and leverage improvement. The goal should be to develop education data systems that enable sophisticated analyses of school inputs, processes, and outcomes, and insights for continuous improvement. In order to support productive analyses, these systems should provide information on the educational opportunities students receive, and their health and learning resources outside of school, as well as their outcomes on a range of measures. As part of this work, the federal government can lead a collaborative effort with states to facilitate agreement on uniform definitions for various learning resources as well as for critical concepts such as graduation and drop-out rates.

It is worth noting that the initial ESEA included, as part of Title V, investments in the capacity of state education agencies to develop and maintain data systems, research and evaluation divisions staffed by highly skilled professionals who could examine state and local programs on an ongoing basis, curriculum and assessment specialists to develop high-quality programs, and instructional leaders who could build strong professional development systems and guide school improvement. These capacities were substantially reduced when most Title V funding was discontinued in 1981. Given the enormous expectations of states to manage

school improvement and system redesign, it is imperative that their ability to do so be a target of investment once again.

Lastly, as part of its development agenda, the federal government should also invest in the development, by scholars and state agencies, of sharable tools for such important imperatives as appropriately evaluating English language learners and special education students, assessing students in productive ways for diagnostic and descriptive purposes across content areas, and uses of new technologies.

FEDERAL PRIORITY #3: **Support Educational** **Research, Development,** **and Innovation**

- ▶ Document and disseminate promising practices.
- ▶ Invest in the development of higher-quality standards and assessments for genuine accountability.
- ▶ Develop data bases, shared measures, and tools to advance educational practice.

Federal Priority #4: Engage and Educate Local Communities

A major purpose of public education is to build a knowledgeable and committed public for the nation. Yet, it is sometimes hard to find the public in today's public schools. There are many reasons for this, including the consolidation of school districts into larger and more impersonal units, the unplanned growth and shrinkage of communities, geographic barriers that divide communities



within districts and may reinforce segregation, and our nation's changing demographics as fewer families have children in school. Federal policies also play a role in this distancing of the schools from their communities. While lip-service is given to community and family involvement in schools, policies reflect only a marginal commitment to such involvement. The public's role is often limited to approving local plans to meet state or federal mandates rather than participation in determining the policy itself. Parents are rarely asked to engage in deciding what their children should learn or how to organize their schools. Their role, and that of the general public, is generally relegated to the most menial of democracy's tasks: approving a pre-developed plan to meet prescribed outcomes for an external evaluation.

We applaud the growing choice among public schools, which empowers parents to make selections among available options that may fit the needs of their children. However, we also recognize that creating individual consumer choice does not, by itself, ensure that there will be choices worth choosing — or that these

choices will bring communities together to create greater understanding and common ground, the foundation upon which democracy is built. As John Dewey noted:

There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men (and women and children, we might add) live in a community by virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge — a common understanding — like-mindedness as the sociologists say. Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another, like bricks; they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces. Consensus requires communication.

Democracy has a stake in bringing people together around their public schools to allow the sharing of experiences and the building of a larger common ground — as well as the education of a caring, concerned, communally engaged, and thoughtful public. To accomplish this, we need to re-knit the relationship between schools and their communities. As Wendy Puriefoy explains:

Despite America's deeply held belief in the value of public education, parents and, now, highly placed and influential politicians and policymakers have been the primary shapers of the direction of public education and local public schools, while the general public's role has remained limited in time, scope, and breadth. This, then, is our challenge: to mobilize the public on behalf of public education, inform the public about the value and benefits of quality public education, and build a broad base of



people who know what takes place in our public schools and know how to transform concern about public education into effective action.⁸⁵

Democracy will benefit from supporting the public's involvement in both shaping the schools their children attend and engaging with these schools in a regular fashion as the hub of a local community where common ground and community caring are built. We have seen the power of genuine parent and community engagement in the development of new school models and the reshaping of schools in cities as far-flung as New York, Chicago, and Oakland. These efforts have birthed new designs for schools that are more responsive to families and more successful for students.⁸⁶

The federal government has facilitated some of these new initiatives through its Small Learning Communities grants. It can further support genuine parent, teacher, and community involvement through a serious commitment to supporting school and community practices that allow for the time necessary for genuine

conversation between educators and other adults about the welfare of our children.

1. FOSTER FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOL LIFE AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT. The evidence regarding the importance of family/school/community collaboration in terms of student achievement and democratic well-being is clear, but too often ignored.⁸⁷ The ability of communities and parents to use information in making decisions about school programs and individual student needs is often sorely limited by barriers to public participation in the education of our children.

There are two equally important aspects of family and community involvement in schools. First, parents and guardians must be invited into the educational process to learn about what the school is doing, to share knowledge about their own children, and to support the child in his or her educational journey. Building strong bonds between parents and teachers allows the educational experience of the child — at home and at school — to become mutually reinforcing and enables parents and teachers to work as partners, rather than in parallel play. To facilitate genuine partnerships, new uses of time and new approaches to access must be part and parcel of how we allocate educational resources. Schools that structure regular parent-student-teacher meetings at times when parents can attend — at school or in home visits — and in ways that support genuine two-way communication, develop bonds that pay off in multiple ways. To facilitate this work, federal investments should prioritize using funds for:

- ▶ The additional time needed for teachers and advisors to meet with parents during and after school hours to share information about the child's progress and to plan and solve problems together.
- ▶ Time, supported by employers, for parents to meet with teachers and participate in school life — at least a half

day each year to enable parents to be involved in the education of their children.

- ▶ Resources, such as translators for families whose language is not English, which help parents or guardians communicate with teachers and schools.

We estimate that \$500 million would support time for each teacher to meet with individual parents about their children, as well as to provide readily available translators and communication resources.

2. PROVIDE FOR GENUINE COMMUNITY INPUT INTO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROCESSES.

Families and community members should be invited into the process of learning about what is happening in schools, participating in discussions about school change and improvement, and sharing their visions and resources for what schools can become. The use of site councils in democratically run schools in Chicago, formal contracts between parents and schools in many communities, and the kind of shared participation and governance demonstrated in the Comer school development model have all been successful in developing relationships between parents and schools.

Moreover, involving students actively in the lives of their communities strengthens the bond between school and neighborhood, while instilling the habits of civic concern and engagement in students and adults alike. This is illustrated in the example of a West Oakland teacher's connection of her students' work to the welfare of the community, shown in the box on the next page.

Students in this instance got to experience themselves as change agents in an important facet of the life of their community. They were able to witness and practice concerned engagement that resulted in improvements gained through the public system. Students

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Students must enjoy authentic relationships with adults and peers, and be genuinely interested in, and see the relevance of — what they are learning.

Consider for example, what students learned from a teacher of environmental science in West Oakland who designed a unit on the effects of lead in the environment after touring the neighborhood surrounding her school, the teacher noticed that many homes were located near highways and heavy industry. After teaching students how lead from industrial waste and car exhaust enters the atmosphere and becomes embedded in the soil, she had her students test the soil in neighborhood gardens for lead content. Upon learning that many of the gardens in the neighborhood were contaminated with lead (and recognizing that many families were eating vegetables from those gardens), the students insisted that they had a responsibility to do something about the dangers they had discovered. Recognizing this to be an extraordinary learning opportunity, the teacher compiled the student work into a report that she sent to the County Health Commissioner, who in turn responded by mailing a letter to residents of West Oakland warning them about the harmful effects of the toxic soil and offering any household that wanted it free top soil.⁸⁸



who have had experiences such as these will become adults committed to the importance of community-embedded public education. Experiencing the benefits from such engagement will reinforce to adults how crucial it is to support these unique community institutions.

In addition, the federally supported data systems described earlier should enable a dynamic process of knowledge development and use that stimulates inquiry at each level of the system — the local school, the district, the state, and the nation, including not only researchers and officials, but also members of local communities, in dialogue and applied research about what is going on in schools, what is working, and what is to be done. To support this kind of community engagement, federal investments should build upon the framework recommended by the Public Education Network which includes the following public engagement categories:

- ▶ **Information:** Most Americans have limited knowledge about what actually goes on inside the nation's public schools. Reliable information, such as called for in the research section above, widely dispersed and used, can make a major difference in how school improvement efforts are shaped and unfold.
- ▶ **Involvement:** To gain first-hand information on the challenges our schools face and the promise of public education, direct involvement in schools through community associations, volunteer opportunities, and similar efforts can be developed and supported.
- ▶ **Collaboration:** Research investments can include support for community initiatives in conceiving, directing and reporting local inquiries into what schools are doing and how they are meeting the needs of the community's children, as the basis for discussions of school direction.



- ▶ **Constituency Building:** While 90 percent of our children attend our public schools, only 30 percent of the population is made up of parents of school-age children. The federal government, like states and localities, can use research as well as its bully pulpit to explain our schools' contribution to our general welfare.

The federal government can play a vibrant role in providing citizens with information and the means to act upon it. Rather than dictating local practice, we turn to our national government both to safeguard equity, by protecting the individual rights of the public, and to jumpstart quality, by enabling local entities to do a better job of providing avenues for those rights to be exercised.

3. PLACE SCHOOLS AT THE CENTER OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION. For schools to play their role in nurturing democratic communities, they should be supported to become hubs of community involvement and gateways to critical social service providers without the burden of having to manage hundreds of small, disjointed categorical programs that come and go and create more barriers than opportunities. Communities would benefit from schools' abilities to offer family literacy programs, adult education courses, and on-site health clinics where substantial proportions of students might not otherwise have access to quality health and dental care. Efforts to put the federal investment in school nutrition programs to use in the fight against childhood

obesity and hunger should be expanded to serve more students all year and serve them more nutritious food. Extending federally supplemented opportunities for tutoring and enrichment before and after school could keep school buildings open in disadvantaged communities beyond traditional school hours, while family literacy, parenting, and integrated job training and placement opportunities should draw adults to schools for needed services in these traditionally underused hours. Supporting universal, high-quality preschool education for poor children in ways that can be accessed through information provided at local schools can draw students and parents early on into a seamless system of lifelong learning.

Funding and guidance for many of these programs, it should be noted, are already scattered throughout the federal government's portfolio. However, they land in communities in ways that create fragmentation, inefficiencies, and bureaucratic red tape rather than a coherent system that places the child and the family at the center. Even well-educated citizens can be overwhelmed by the complexities and the barriers this disjointed approach creates. Organizing these activities around schools, and maximizing their power to impact education, is the innovation that can fuel student achievement gains and enable students to fully realize their potential as stewards of our democracy. To accomplish this, more than coordination is needed. Federal leadership should help to:

- ▶ Create a "community schools" model of funding and service provision that enables local schools to become hubs of educational services for children and families;
- ▶ Support the use of school facilities for after school and summer programs; and
- ▶ Initiate collaborative programs that locate community resources such as libraries and wellness centers in schools.

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A compelling example of this idea's possibility comes through Yale's School of the 21st Century model that helps schools organize themselves to integrate before- and after- school care, vacation programs, health education and services, and early care and education. Start-up costs for developing these models could be underwritten in the neediest 25 percent of schools for an allocation of \$750 million.⁸⁹ By providing powerful examples of how democracy works to serve communities, such efforts can reinvigorate faith in civic life and involvement among children and adults alike.

FEDERAL PRIORITY #4: Engaging Local Communities

- ▶ Foster family engagement in school life and school improvement.
- ▶ Provide for genuine community involvement in school improvement processes.
- ▶ Place schools at the center of community education.

MINNESOTA COMMUNITY PUTS 'CHILDREN FIRST' IN COMMUNITY-WIDE INITIATIVE

In 1993, the city of St. Louis Park, Minn., became the first in the nation to embrace a “developmental assets” framework as the guiding approach to community-wide mobilization on behalf of young people. The framework was developed by the Search Institute, a Minneapolis-based non-profit organization concerned with children and communities.

The developmental asset framework identifies 40 “developmental nutrients” all youth need to be healthy, caring, and responsible. The assets are divided between internal and external. An example of an internal asset: “Achievement motivation: Young person is motivated to do well in school.” External: “Other adult relationships: Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.” Communities develop plans to build their assets for youth. Today, nearly 600 communities across the United States and Canada use asset-building approaches.

The initiative in St. Louis Park that directs much of that effort is called Children First. Founded by a partnership between the business, city, education, health, and faith communities, “Children First is about creating kids who are interested in giving back and making their world a better place,” said Debra Bowers, superintendent of St. Louis Park Public Schools.

This initiative was different from most community-wide efforts focused on children and youth: Instead of focusing on preventing specific problems, Children First emphasizes building strengths. The initiative has rapidly spread to organizations and individuals throughout the city, which is located just west of Minneapolis, and serves a community that is about 30% low-income and one-third students of color.

“It’s a philosophy rather than a program,” its supporters like to point out. One that has brought a powerful connection between the city and its schools. “Children First is an initiative, not an organization or a bureaucracy,” said Keith Broady, chair of the St. Louis Park Public Schools school board. “The adult leadership role in the initiative has rotated among the school, business, city, and non-profit communities within St. Louis Park.”

Children First calls the entire community to provide support for youth. More than 1,200 of students’ parents, along with over 250 community members, volunteer in St. Louis Park schools every year. The effort goes the other direction as well. For example, the school district’s athletic teams work to help senior citizens in a variety of projects from the mundane to the extensive. Children First is funded through donations. The school provides offices for the director and in-kind contributions.

Initiative encourages support for schools

The integration with its community, through Children First and its own directed programs, has benefited the school district in crucial ways. The St. Louis Park community approved an operating levy in 2001, and in 2004 voters approved both an operating levy and a bond referendum. “The 2004 vote was by about 2 to 1,” Bowers said. “The city council supported us, as did so many groups and agencies. All of those pieces came together.”

The school district pursues excellence voraciously. Ninety percent of the school district’s graduating class of 2004 chose to attend postsecondary school. In recent years, all seven St. Louis Park Public Schools have been designated Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence by the U.S. Department of Education. In 2005, St. Louis Park High School was once again ranked as one of the top 1000 public high schools in America by Newsweek magazine, entering the chart at No. 305.

A study on the district’s Children First efforts, released in 2003, showed that the community’s youth experience just over half of the 40 identified assets, but that the overall level had risen significantly over the life of the study. The study also revealed that the more assets a student experiences, the more likely the student is to do well in school. This is especially true for younger students. Risk behaviors have decreased in recent years among the community’s youth, the study reported. “Here in St. Louis Park,” Bowers notes, “it is easy to see how we are all woven together.”

Source: The Center for Public Education, an initiative of the National School Boards Association and the National School Boards Association Foundation. See <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/>.

IV. CONCLUSION

As we move into the 21st century, we will need a federal policy strategy that equalizes access to school resources, creates a 21st century curriculum for all students, and supports it with thoughtful assessments and access to knowledgeable, well-supported teachers. A total of \$29 billion annually beyond current commitments would pay for our proposals for meeting the federal funding obligation to high-needs students; providing pre-school and early learning opportunities; developing a world-class teaching and school leadership force; investing in research, development, and innovation; and supporting community engagement with schools. Such an investment costs about the same as one month of our involvement in Iraq, or less than 10 percent of the cost overruns the General Accounting Office identified this month in federal weapons programs⁹⁰ and about 3 percent of the Bush administration's tax cuts. These resources would return the federal share of total education costs to 12 percent, the level that was in place before 1981.

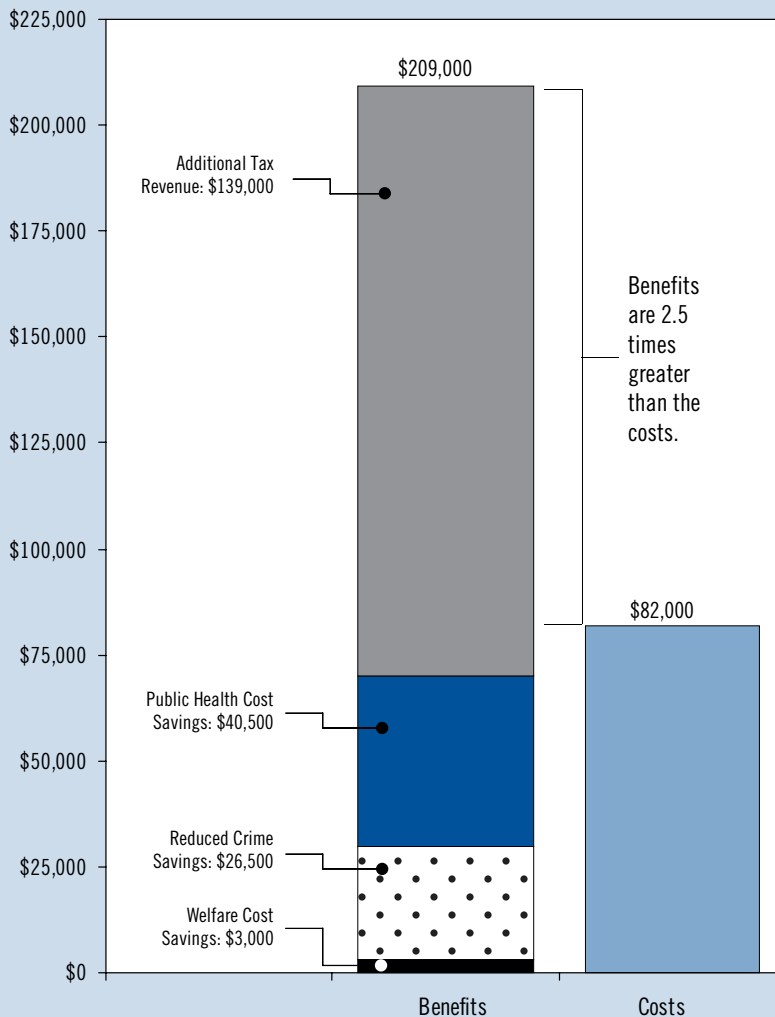
While it has become customary for us to believe that there is no room for additional funding for education, we are spending far more than these proposals would cost on the wasteful — and often tragic — outcomes of thoughtless policies that put our society at ever greater risk. Lost wages and taxes for dropouts cost the nation in excess of \$200 billion annually in each case,⁹¹ while deficits in basic skills for high school graduates are estimated

to cost students, businesses, and colleges up to \$16 billion annually for remediation and in loss of productivity.⁹² In fact, for every student who graduates from high school, the economy gains 2.5 dollars for each dollar invested in pre-school education, more qualified teachers, and more personalized school environments.⁹³

We are also spending more than \$50 billion a year for an exploding prison population that is largely the result of inadequate educational investments in low-income students, as most inmates are dropouts who are functionally illiterate and cannot engage the labor market.⁹⁴ A tripling of prison enrollments and an increase in corrections costs of over 900 percent in the two decades between 1980 and 2000⁹⁵ has eaten away the resources that should be going to prevent the illiteracy that creates much of



FIGURE 10: The Costs and Benefits of an Excellent Education Per High School Graduate



Source: Levin, H., Belfield, C., Muennig, P., Rouse, C. 2007. The costs and benefits of an excellent education for all of America's children. Teachers College, Columbia University. For more information, contact Tom Zembar at 202.822.7109 or TZembar@nea.org. Updated February 4, 2008.

this problem to begin with. And preserving the nation's commitment to Social Security in the years to come becomes possible only if every eligible worker is gainfully employed, rather than drawing on tax dollars in prison or on welfare.

In the long run, these proposals would save far more than they would cost. In addition to the savings associated with fewer dropouts, we would save additional tens of billions of dollars currently spent on grade retention, summer school, remedial programs, and special education for students who were not adequately supported in their early learning. We would also save several billion dollars now wasted each year because of high teacher turnover — and gain greater productivity and achievement from stemming the rapid turnover of beginning teachers, who become significantly more effective when they reach their third year of teaching.⁹⁶ And for each student who is educated in intellectually engaging ways, we gain the greatest strength that a democratic society must have: a wise and free community member able to think for him- or herself and able to contribute to society as a whole.

The challenge is clear: Improving education and improving democracy go hand in hand. We must ensure that our students acquire the knowledge, the employment and health skills, the appreciation of the arts, and the understanding of human rights and responsibilities that make a truly free citizen. Indeed, if we can think of education in these ways, we will create a stronger fabric of “We, the people” by the next, and much better, generation.

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Judith Browne-Dianis is a civil rights lawyer who currently serves as co-director of the Advancement Project, a national civil rights organization in Washington, D.C. Widely respected for her legal work in fair housing issues and in the public advocacy arena, Browne's work on discipline policies in public schools has received national recognition. In May 2000, she was named one of the "Thirty Women To Watch" by *Essence* Magazine. Browne-Dianis authored The Advancement Project's report *Derailed: The Schoolhouse to Jailhouse Track*. Browne works with grassroots organizations to improve educational opportunities for children of color through reform of practices such as high stakes testing, tracking, and discipline. She is Vice Chair of the Board of FairTest.

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Carl Glickman began his career as a Teacher Corps intern in the rural south and later was a principal of two award-winning schools. Glickman founded and directed the Georgia League of Professional Schools and currently serves on the steering committee of the national campaign for the *Civic Mission of Schools* co-chaired by Sandra Day O'Connor and Roy Romer. He has served on the boards of Kids Voting U.S.A. and the National Commission for Service-Learning and is the author of 13 books on school leadership, educational renewal, and the moral imperative of education. He was the editor and developer of *Letters to the Next President: What We Can Do About the Real Crisis in Public Education*, which was chosen by Foreword Magazine as one of the two outstanding books in education for 2004.

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Larry Myatt has been working with inner city schools for over 30 years and has been deeply engaged in education reform since 1983. He founded the highly successful Fenway High School, a pioneer in the small school movement and a model for many new schools across the nation. He led Fenway for 20 years, and is co-founder of Boston's Center for Collaborative Education, which supports progressive schools and networks in the Eastern MA region, including the high-performing Boston Pilots Schools. Currently, he works as a Headmaster-on-Assignment to the Gates Foundation-funded High School Initiative in the Boston Public Schools, and serves as the Director of the Greater Boston Principal Residency Network. Myatt was awarded the 2007 Harry S. Levitan Prize from Brandeis University for career accomplishment in education.

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