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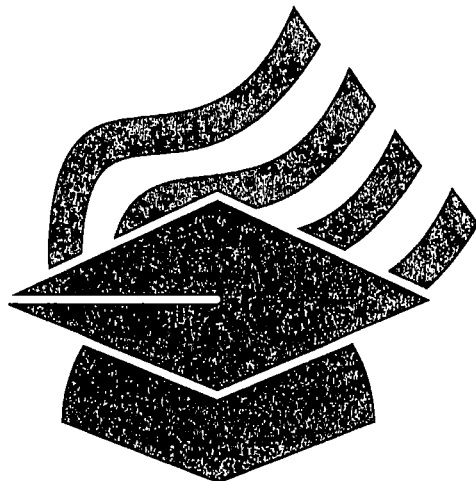
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KEY HIGH SCHOOL REFORM STRATEGIES:

An Overview of Research Findings



**NEW AMERICAN
HIGH SCHOOLS**
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

HIGH SCHOOLS AT THE LEADING EDGE OF REFORM

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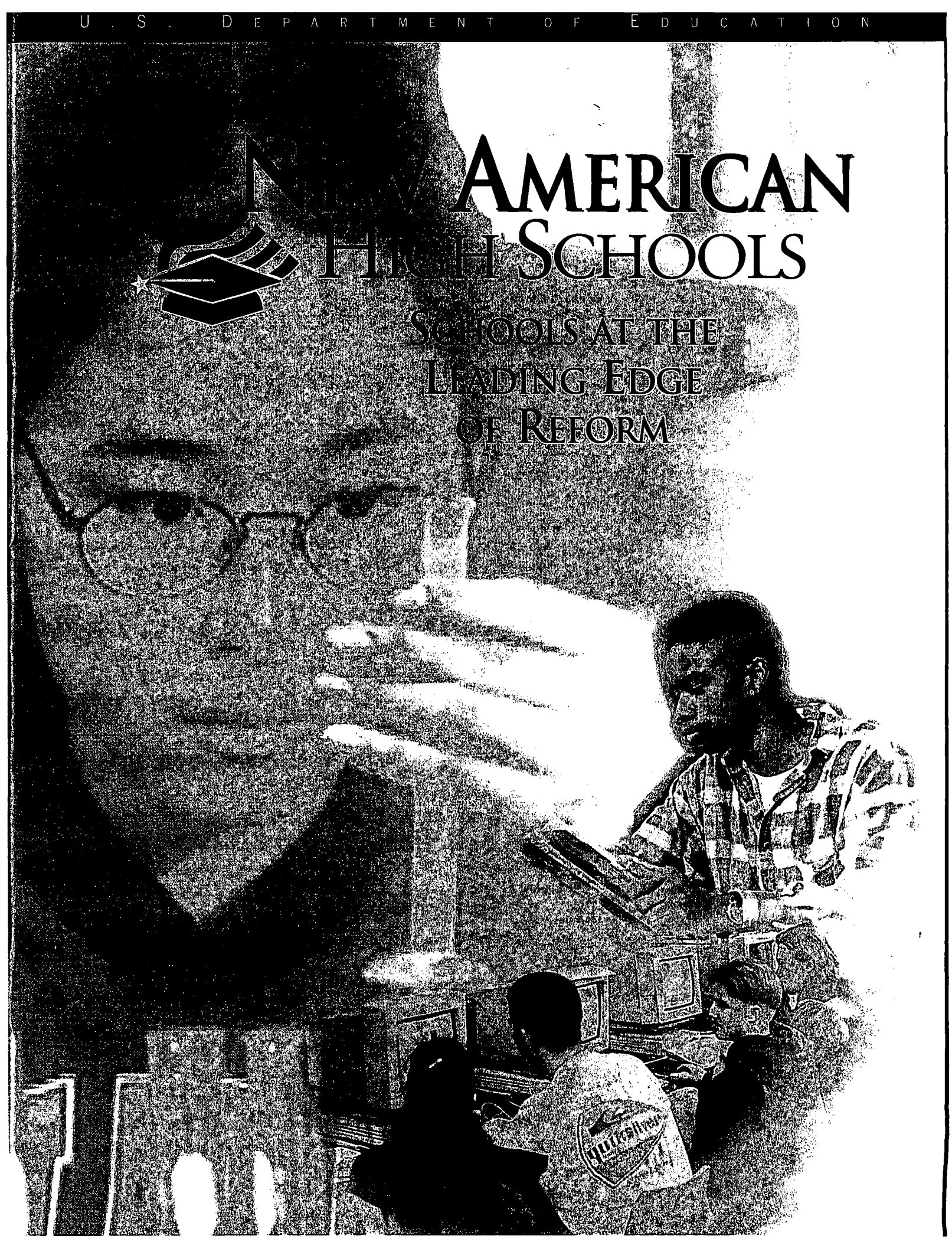
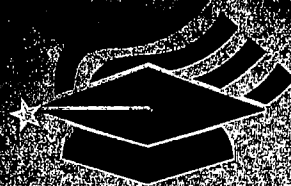
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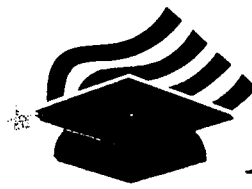
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NEW AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOLS

SCHOOLS AT THE
LEADING EDGE
OF REFORM





NEW AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOLS

New American High Schools is an initiative sponsored by the
U.S. Department of Education. For more information, call
(202) 205-5451, email ovae@inet.ed.gov or visit us on the
web at <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/nahs>



Bethany -
Please
read pg. 6
Thanks.
Tamara



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



NEWS

For Release: September 15, 1999

Contact: Melinda Malico (202) 401-3026

Remarks as prepared for delivery by
U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley

**Annual Back-to-School Address
Changing the American High School to Fit Modern Times
The National Press Club
Washington, D.C.**

Good afternoon. Over the last five years, I have had the opportunity to come to the National Press Club to make my annual back to school speech on a variety of topics. Last year, I used the occasion to make a set of policy recommendations about improving teacher quality. I am pleased to report back to you that we are seeing some progress on this central issue when it comes to improving American education.

Last year, Congress passed our \$75 million teacher quality legislation and put down a first installment to meet the president's challenge to reduce class size by supporting 100,000 new teachers in the early grades—teachers who have a special skill in teaching reading.

I also challenged America's higher education community to give the education of America's future teachers a much higher priority. I am pleased that over 100 college and university presidents are gathering in Washington today and tomorrow to join me at a University Presidents' Summit on Teacher Quality. Some of these leaders are in our audience today.

Why Have This National Conversation?

Today, I want to start a national dialogue on the American high school and make a set of recommendations to get that conversation going. There are several reasons why we need to put the spotlight on these high school years of learning.

The first is simply demographics. The Baby Boom Echo generation—53 million strong in 1999—is getting older and the pressure point is going to be more and more the American high school. In the next ten years, we will educate an additional 1.3 million high schools students.

Let us also recognize that how we learn and work has changed dramatically. We are in a new era, driven by science and technology, and our schools need to give young people both the capacity to do college-level work and the essential skills to prosper in our new economy.

A second reason is what young people are telling us themselves. Several weeks ago, I released a

poll of over 1,000 high school students—the Shell Poll. This poll told us that the great majority of America's high school students are optimistic, ambitious and have very good values. They want to go to college. They are thinking seriously about the future. But teenagers will tell you that growing up isn't easy. They told us in the poll that it is tough being a teenager and that they are looking for help. They feel increased pressure to go to college and get good grades. While the majority of students gave their high schools good marks, they also told us that they were bored and that many of them were willing just to get by.

Many of our young people have strong ambitions but no sense of direction about how to start achieving those ambitions. The poll also told us that about 20 percent of our nation's high school students—that's about 2.7 million teenagers—are being challenged by a host of problems such as drugs and alcohol, staying in school, or a troubled family life.

We need to listen hard to what our young people are telling us. Teenagers by their nature are passionate, creative, open to new ideas, and full of energy to discover the world around them. We need to find new ways to capture all of this positive energy, and we need to make sure that teenagers are part of the solution.

Finally, tragedies like Columbine have made all of us take a second look at the American teenage experience. Why are we losing some of our young people? What can we do in our high schools to make sure that every young person feels connected? For all these reasons and others, I believe that now is the right time to challenge ourselves to do some creative thinking about the future of the American high school.

Stuck in a Time Warp

Many experts have noted that the American high school is one of the most enduring and unchanging institutions in our society. Even as the world is changed all around them, the majority of our nation's high schools seem to be caught in a time warp from long ago. In his well-known book *Horace's Compromise*, published in 1984, Ted Sizer took a searching look at the American high school. He wrote,

as one visits communities one is gradually struck by how similar the structure and articulated purpose of the American high school are.... the framework of grades, schedules, calendar, courses of study, even rituals, is astonishingly uniform and has been so for at least 40 years.

Little has happened in the last 15 years to make Ted Sizer change his observation. Now, I am not somebody who believes in change simply for change's sake. Yet, there is something out of sync here in 1999, if we continue to accept the unspoken assumption that too often defined the American high school of 50 years ago.

Fifty years ago, one-third of the students were being prepared for college, one-third drifted through high school but eventually got decent jobs, and one-third were tagged as low achievers

and expected to drop out.

Years ago this assumption could prevail because we lived in an industrial era. Muscle power mattered as much as brain power when it came to making a living. In the South, where I come from, you could leave high school as early as tenth grade and make a decent living in a cotton mill. But those times are over and the old factory model of thinking needs to be left behind as well. Yet today, we still seem to be using America's high schools as "sorting machines," tagging and labeling young people as successful, run of the mill, or low achievers.

We need all of our young people learning to high standards in what Alan Greenspan has called the new economy of ideas.. This is why I continue to challenge the unspoken assumption in American education that we expect some young people to drop out, fail out or lose out and that there is nothing we can do about it. One fact I find especially troubling is the high Hispanic drop-out rate. Reforming our high schools must engage these Hispanic young people to stay in school.

So what are we to do about the American high school?

Leon Botstein, the president of Bard College, and a passionate champion of America's young people, has suggested in his book *Jefferson's Children* that the American high school is obsolete.. He goes on to argue that at the very least young people need to be finishing high school by age 16 and assuming a new set of responsibilities to increase their sense of adulthood.

While I disagree with Leon Botstein's premise that high schools are obsolete, there is merit in his assertion that the weakest part of America's educational system is located at the juncture of adolescence and schooling.. Leon Botstein goes on to make the salient point that our high schools, with their rigid structures, can deaden the curiosity of our young people precisely when they are most curious.

It seems to me that we need to go in a new direction. The American high school needs a purpose that is more than just helping students get through it. Yes, many of our high schools do a very fine job of preparing young people for college. At the other extreme, some high schools are little more than a way station for young people who already know that life is very unfair.

Some of you may have read the article a few days ago in the paper about a Jesse Jackson-led tour of two high schools in Chicago that exemplified these extremes.

One school—Neuqua High School in Naperville—is a \$62 million suburban high school on a 50-acre campus. The other—Harper High School—in center city Chicago has a science lab with no running water and a dropout rate of about 33 percent. This gives me the opportunity to express some frustration.

All of our efforts to improve American education not only require new thinking but also new investments. For three years now, President Clinton has been asking the Congress to help this

nation modernize and build more schools. We need to build 6,000 new schools to keep up with rising enrollment in the next ten years. Yet, the Republican-dominated Congress has done nothing to address this pressing issue. I remain perplexed by this partisan brick wall.

Congress needs to pass school modernization legislation, fulfill its promise to reduce class size, and provide the American people with a budget that makes education a high priority. We are not even near that now, and I remain disappointed by the current Congressional inaction.

There are other reasons why we need to go in a new direction to improve the American high school. While record numbers of high school seniors are going on to college, we still are not doing a very good job of preparing them to stay in college. Almost half of entering college freshmen drop out by the end of their second year.

And close to 30 percent of all students entering a four-year college have to take remedial courses. That's not good enough in my book. I think colleges and universities should be putting school districts on notice when they continually send them students who have to take remedial classes. So where can we improve?

Improving Academic Rigor

First, we need to accelerate learning. For six years now, I have been talking continuously about ending the tyranny of low expectations. This can only happen if our nation's high schools end the practice of putting some students into low-achieving or dead-end courses that tell these young people that we have just about given up on them.

High schools justly take great pride when their graduates go on to the best colleges and universities. But we can't place all of our focus only on the gains at the top. We need to have an unwavering focus on academic achievement, combined with a no excuses attitude for those at the bottom.

If a student is struggling, the answer has to be an intense intervention effort—some combination of tutoring, after-school, Saturday schooling and summer school—to help that student meet high standards.

I encourage local school districts to make the extra effort to test all of their eighth graders prior to entering high school to make sure that their reading and math skills are up to date.

If a child needs to improve his or her skills, do it during the summer before the student starts taking geometry and biology.

This leads me to, once again, urge high schools to encourage their students to take the tough core academic courses. Research tells us that the single most important factor in making sure a student gets admitted to college and completes the college degree is the academic intensity of the student's high school curriculum. Taking the tough courses counts much more than test scores

or class rank. This is especially true for minority students. Right now just over half of all high school students are taking the core academic courses. Let's set a goal of 75 percent by 2005.

I believe that every high school in America should be offering advanced placement (AP) or other advanced courses in the core subjects within the next two years, and a fuller range of AP courses within the next three to five years. Today, only 49 percent of our high schools offer AP courses and only 10 percent of our students take these demanding courses.

I remain deeply concerned that we continue to shortchange many of our young people, particularly our minority youth, by not even giving them the opportunity to stretch their minds.

This year, we have asked the Congress for \$20 million to expand AP opportunities. Distance learning and the Internet are surely two ways to get more AP courses to our nation's rural schools.

I encourage many more states to create high school exit exams where students demonstrate what they know and are able to do. About half of the states in the country have exit exams in place or in development. Years ago, I opposed high-stakes exit exams because minority students really had less chance to succeed in the days immediately following integration.

Today, I believe high school exit exams can help stimulate new efforts to raise up minority achievement, if we give every student the individual support needed to pass the exam.

Like other lawyers, I went to law school and then got ready to take the bar exam. Like most graduates of a law school, I discovered that the bar review helped me in many ways to integrate what I had learned in law school.

I believe that similar types of review courses could be established to help high school seniors achieve two goals: to help students prepare for high school exit exams; and to help them integrate what they have learned for a senior year portfolio.

Let me suggest one other way to raise standards. I believe that in this new economy every high school student should be close to fluent in a foreign language when he or she graduates. We should begin teaching foreign languages in our elementary schools, and then in middle schools and high schools. English is a beautiful language and every American student must be a master of it. English is surely a world language. But learning a foreign language exposes young people to new cultures and new horizons and helps them understand English better.

Now, all this push to get young people to learn more is going to provoke the question: When are they going to have time to do it? Between sports, the band, or other extra-curricular activities, between work, going to school and just hanging out, something has to give. Let me suggest the answer. We need to stop letting teenagers work more than 20 hours a week during the school year.

Helping young people develop a work ethic is an important part of growing up. The research, however, is quite clear. Students who work too much put earnings over learning and are too tired to study. Parents need to set limits on how much time young people spend working.

Building a Foundation for Change

Now, an important point. The effort to raise standards can't be done overnight, and we shouldn't assume that the current structure of the school day is the best and only way to get the job done.

You need to build a foundation and give teachers and principals the resources, the time and the flexibility to find the right way to help all of the young people. If we just add another layer of requirements on to a rigid school structure that already gives teachers little time to plan or interact with their students, then we will have missed the boat entirely.

Teachers are the heart and soul of our schools, and we have to do a better job of listening to them. And principals have to be close to magicians to balance day-to-day demands while redesigning their schools for the future.

So we need to support creative principals and teachers who see themselves as architects for a new type of high school that is more flexible, open, demanding and challenging.

This is why this Administration is asking the Congress for new support to reform America's high schools. We are seeking in our proposed Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization substantial new budget authority to help 5,000 high schools improve or redesign themselves. And we have created a network of high schools on the cutting edge of reform. These New American High Schools are setting a new standard of excellence for all students.

Start with Good Teaching

Building a new foundation for America's high schools has to begin and end with good teaching. This is why 100 college presidents have graciously come to Washington for this important summit on improving teacher education. We simply have to elevate the task of preparing the next generation of teachers to the highest level of university leadership.

High school teachers, and for that matter all teachers, have to be given the opportunity to raise their professional standards. They have to be masters of their field whether it is history, physics, technology or music.

This intense effort to give future teachers the tools they need is only the beginning. As one principal wrote me, 98 percent of her students are "digital children." New teachers simply have to be masters in knowing how to teach using technology and, frankly, we're not there yet.

Another high school principal made this important point which I support. She said that her dream would be to have her students in class nine months of the year, but have her teachers

working an extra month to six weeks to plan the curriculum, to understand how to teach to new high standards and to learn new teaching skills. It seems to me that the high school of the future is simply going to have to go in this direction.

This requires teachers to have a central role in redefining how they teach. If we ask teachers to do the extra work to raise achievement levels, I believe we should pay them for the effort. You can't get good teachers on the cheap.

Helping Young People Build Connections

I also believe that we need to find ways to create small, supportive learning environments that give students a sense of connection. That's hard to do when we are building high schools the size of shopping malls. Size matters.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals in their important study, *Breaking Ranks*, makes the key point that students learn best in schools with about 600 students. While we may not be able to change the size of every high school building, there are many ways that we can make young people feel more connected.

We can create schools-within-schools, academic houses, and make sure that every high school student has an advisor for all four years that the student can count on all the time. At Central Park East High School in New York City, the morning home room has been turned into a student advisory period. The students get focused about what they are doing and relate it to their lives.

Certainly we need many more counselors and mentors in our high schools and not just to help young people get ready for college. Growing up is tough, teenagers tell us, and they are looking for guidance and support. Given the recent violent tragedies, I support the new efforts in the Congress to increase funding both for counselors and mental health counselors.

Two Key Transitions: Ninth and Twelfth Grades

Two very important transitions points take place in the American adolescent experience: when young people first enter high school; and when they graduate. These transitions really amount to rites of passage, as they come at key moments in adolescent development. We need to see them in a new light.

The typical eighth grader, for example, leaves a much smaller elementary or middle school and suddenly find himself in a very big and, at times, impersonal high school. The transition can, at times, be overwhelming. The result is that some students become low achievers, some drop out and some decide that they are not college material.

And suicide prevention experts tell us that ninth grade is the most troubling year. So this first transition deserves our attention. Several recommendations come to mind.

Schools can create a smoother transition in a number of ways, such as freshmen academies, regular contact with the same group of teachers and advisors, and transition courses that address new challenges from study skills to understanding other cultures. The key is to create smaller and more personalized learning environments for these young people.

Parents need to stay very involved with their children when they enter high school. This is so important and goes against the common assumption that parents should give their teenagers more independence. The truth of the matter is that teenagers want to grow and have new experiences; at the same time, they want to know that their parents are there for them. Parents need to realize that they are still the most important source of support and guidance for teenagers. Sometimes it is hard to break through.

My message to parents is to stay involved. Slow down your lives. I hear a real concern from parents about their children being bombarded by a multitude of messages—some of them harmful—from television, movies, the Internet and even from their children's best friends.

Young people can be very tough on each other at a time when relationships are so important to them. They create cliques, groups, and select out those they do not want. Our high schools have to push back against this tendency, and students are telling us that this is where they need the most support. Community groups and faith communities can also play a positive role in helping schools meet this challenge. The message should be very clear—every teenager matters.

This is why I believe that schools should set a real goal that every student has some adult to turn to for advice and support. It may be a counselor, a mentor, a coach or a teacher. But the key is to make sure that every teenager has that sense of security about knowing whom to turn to when he or she is struggling.

The freshman year is also a crucial year for getting young people on the right track in terms of taking the right courses and getting them thinking about going on to college. This is why I want to recommend highly something that Gene Bottoms is doing as part of his High School That Works initiative that is supported by the Southern Regional Education Board.

Freshmen who participate in this program, which is now in more than 500 high schools across the South, sit down with their parents and a high school advisor and sketch out a six-year plan. The young people get the message that they have new and higher horizons and that going to high school has a larger purpose.

Creating New Pathways to Learning and Adulthood

We can also do more to create new pathways to learning and to adulthood. In a world exploding with knowledge, with teenagers hooked on the Internet as never before, the traditional seven-

periods-a-day way of learning may not be the best or the only way to educate our young people.

New pathways to learning and adulthood mean new connections to colleges and universities, new connections with other institutions in the community whether it is a hospital, a bank, a zoo, or a museum. Close to 230,000 high school students, for example, are now taking college-level courses across the country. Tech Prep courses and School-to-Work programs, for example, are great ways to link high school students to community colleges.

High schools of the future need to see themselves as the starting place where young people launch themselves into other learning experiences, and then come back to their high school to integrate what they have learned.

I also encourage schools to do some creative thinking about the senior year experience. Some high school seniors start checking out once they have filled out their last college application or received an early acceptance notice from college. The young people tell us in a very direct way that they want to move on.

Senior year should be a well-thought-out transition into adulthood with students being given increasing responsibility. They should be given many more opportunities to be out in the community in structured internships, apprenticeships or service-learning opportunities. By treating these young men and women as adults, we send a powerful message that we expect adult behavior from them as well.

Conclusion

I end now with this thought. Believe in our young people. I say that again—believe in our young people. Please help me give them a message of hope, promise and possibilities. I am tired and weary of the worn-out nostalgia and pessimism that seems to haunt American thinking when it comes to our young people.

Let us reject the twin belief that once there was a time in American education when all things were better; and the negative assumption that this generation of young people can't quite cut it. Our young people don't buy that and neither do I.

Surely, in this time of peace and prosperity, in this great nation—the world's best democracy and hope—we can send a more positive message than that to our nation's young people.

I believe in America's young people. They are optimistic and ambitious and they are looking for direction. If you don't know a high school student, go out and meet one.

The high school student you meet will be full of possibilities and bored at the same time; extraordinarily creative and, at times, absolutely clueless. High school students will be full of themselves, and scared to death about what people are thinking about them. They are our children and grandchildren. And in a few years, when all of us are in our rocking chairs, they will be our leaders.

Lets give them hope and promise for the coming times, and let's create high schools that are exciting, exploring, creative and challenging, high schools that spark all of our young people to see the full value of their God-given potential.

Thank you.

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