



Info Center

The Small Schools Workshop
College of Education, University of Illinois at Chicago

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Common Features

What Do Small Schools Look Like?

What Are the Benefits of Small Schools?

Common Misconceptions about Small Schools

As the name indicates, size is one determining characteristic of a small school, yet small schools are about much more than size. The concept of small schools is based on the premise that, in contrast to large, factory-model schools, small schools can create a more intimate learning environment that is better able to address the needs of those within the school. Students, teachers, and parents may all be better served if the school is small enough to allow for communication to flow, opportunities for collaboration to be cultivated, and meaningful relationships to be fostered.

COMMON FEATURES

- Each small school is unique to the community that it serves, however, there are some common features that often characterize good small schools.
- A maximum population of 250-300 students in a heterogeneous mix that represents the local school community
- A non-exclusive admissions policy
- A consistent educational experience for students over an extended period of time (more than one year)
- A coherent focus and philosophy of education, and a curriculum that is integrated around that focus
- A cohesive group of teachers that collaborate and discuss the needs of their students
- A sense of shared leadership and investment among those in the small school
- Involvement of families in the school community

WHAT DO SMALL SCHOOLS LOOK LIKE?

Organization:

Each small school may be configured differently. Small schools may be:

- Free-standing small schools: Small school with their own facilities and administration
- Schools-within-schools: One or more small schools which develop within a larger, "host" school
- Multiplex: One building specifically intended to house several small schools

- Scatterplex: Two or more small schools at different sites that share a principal
- Charter schools: Independent, often small, public schools, designed and operated by educators, parents, community leaders, educational entrepreneurs and others

See **Small Schools by Design from Catalyst**

Physical Environment:

A small school may want to consider how its physical environment, from the architecture of the building (or the choices about how the pre-existing building is used), to the aesthetics of the hallways and classrooms, can facilitate its functioning and reflect its educational goals.

Physical Learning Environment **Links**

Physical Learning Environment **Articles**

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SMALL SCHOOLS?

Research shows that some of the benefits of small schools include:

- Higher student achievement
- Students are more visible
- Reduced violence and disruptive behavior
- Improved attendance and graduation rates
- Increased teacher satisfaction

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SMALL SCHOOLS

Small schools mean small class size - Not necessarily. A small school may or may not have classes of small size. However, some of the benefits of small class size (more personalized instruction and more manageable classroom atmosphere) can be achieved in a small school regardless of class size. A small school offers an environment in which students are more visible. In other words, students can be better known by their teachers, allowing teachers to more easily identify individual talents and unique needs of each student and therefore offer a more personalized educational experience. A small school staff size allows more opportunity for teachers to know each other well, more easily share information about their students, collaborate to solve problems, and generally support one another.

Small Schools is just another program - False. Small schools are a way of restructuring schools and the human relationships inside them.





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Research shows that small schools can

- Raise student achievement
- Combat student anonymity and isolation
- Reduce incidents of violence or disruptive behavior
- Increase attendance and graduation rates
- Elevate teacher satisfaction
- Improve school climate
- Be as good or better than big schools

Raise student achievement

NEW! From ERIC : The Effects of Size of Student Body on School Costs and Performance in New York City High Schools

This report analyzes the relationship between size of student body and school costs and performance in New York City public high schools, using Board of Education school-level data (1995-96) on budgeted expenditures, student characteristics, and performance.

NEW! From Education Week : Reading Scores Surge at Small N.Y.C. Schools

An analysis of test scores in a network of small schools in New York City has found a one-year jump of 5 percentage points in the proportion of students reading at or above grade level. "Progress Report: Outcomes Study, January 1999," free, from the New York Networks for School Renewal; (212) 369-1288.

From NWREL : Small Schools Superior for Students

The research is clear: Small is better when it comes to school size. A new report from NWREL finds overwhelming evidence that student attitudes, behavior, and participation are better when school size is smaller. As for student achievement, small schools get results at least equal to, and in many cases superior to, big schools.

From ERIC : What Research Says about Small Schools

Reviews findings on the effects of school size on student achievement and participation. Concludes that small size, in itself, does not lower academic achievement, and does enhance opportunities for students to participate in school activities and assume leadership roles. Contains 44 references.

From ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools : Current Literature on Small Schools

This Digest presents a brief overview of research literature on the effectiveness of small schools. It then describes current topics researchers have begun to explore, including discussion of associated policy issues, individual successes and failures, and essential elements and other implementation considerations.

From ERIC/CRESS : School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance

See how these factors affect education.

The 1998 Robert D. Krey Competition Award Winner : Small Schools, Educational Achievement and Cost Effectiveness.

Realignment, consolidation, closure are some of the words used to describe what has been happening to small schools around the United States. Combining small districts or schools to offer more courses at a more reasonable price seems like a good idea.

From The Institute for Educational Research in NSW : Research Paper From New South Wales on Small Schools

This paper examines two related research questions. First, irrespective of other school and student background variables, does school size make a difference to achievement in the HSC examination? Second, does school size affect HSC achievement after taking into account school and student background characteristics, student academic motivation and the educational component of the school culture?

From ERIC : Taking Stock : The Movement To Create Mini-Schools, Schools-Within-Schools, And Separate Small Schools

Experience has steadily added support for the conclusion that small schools are preferable to large ones. But such a conclusion poses problems: many of the schools built over the last 75 years were designed to accommodate enrollments of 2,000-4,000 or more.

From The Small Schools Workshop: Small Schools : The Numbers Tell A Story

There is now a compelling body of research showing that, on a wide range of measures, when students are part of smaller, more intimate learning communities, they are more successful.....- by Michael Klonsky

From ERIC : Outcomes of School Downsizing

This report covers the extent to which downsizing creates separateness, autonomy, and distinctiveness, three qualities said to be of practical significance.

Combat student anonymity and isolation

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itself, does not lower academic achievement, and does enhance opportunities for students to participate in school activities and assume leadership roles. Contains 44 references.

From ERIC : Reducing Student Alienation in High Schools: Implications of Theory

Newmann develops six guidelines for reducing student alienation, and shows why current efforts in school reform have failed to provide a comprehensive solution to the problem.

From ERIC : School Size and the Importance of School Activities.

Among the results, in a sample of 1,562 ninth through twelfth graders from large and small high schools, it was found that students in the smaller schools participated in more school activities and that their participation was more strongly related to feelings of personal worth.

From ERIC : Adolescent Identity Formation and the Organizational Structure of High Schools

The author describes aspects of the size and organizational structure of high schools which reduce human contact and have a negative influence on the sense of community, the development of relationships, and the formation of personal identity.

From ERIC : How School Size Affects Student Participation, Alienation

Cites evidence that students in small high schools participate in cocurricular activities more and are less alienated than students in large schools.

From the Small Schools Workshop : Eight Steps to Creating Small Schools

Research You Can Use From the Small Schools Workshop.

From Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory : Monthly column : Big Learning at Small Schools

Kids usually go for big ice cream cones and giant rides at the fair. But when it comes to school size, research clearly says that kids thrive on small; it's often better for student learning....

From Educational Leadership : The Big Benefits of Smallness

As New York's celebrated Central Park East schools have shown, small schools work-for seven good reasons.

From The Seattle Times : In education, size seems to count

Situated in New York's Spanish Harlem neighborhood, Central Park East Secondary School is ringed by red-brick public housing. Nearly 70 percent of its middle-school students qualify for free school lunches, as do 40 percent of high-school students. The school has more than double the percentage of children with learning disabilities than the average for New York schools. But despite those statistics, Central Park East Secondary School (CPESS) has attracted national attention by graduating about 90 percent of students who start the ninth grade, compared with an average of about 55 percent in regular New York high schools. Even more striking, between 85 and 95 percent of the graduates

go on to college each year, mostly to four-year institutions, according to independent follow-up studies.

From The National Center for Urban Partnerships : Schools Where Kids Are Known

The title of this article is cribbed from Gerald Grant, professor of education at Syracuse University, who says that about half the students in urban United States attend schools with an average enrollment of nearly 1,200. Too big. Much too big. In today's urban society, students need a personalized learning environment in which they are known--and matter.

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From ERIC : School Size and School Disorder

This paper uses a national survey of secondary schools to examine the relation between size and orderliness in secondary schools and to test alternative theories linking school disorder to school size. Manning theory and social control theory, taken together, predict that larger schools will experience more disruption because a smaller proportion of the student population will be involved in meaningful activities. In addition, previous research suggests that larger schools experience more disorder because they cannot be managed as effectively as small schools due to communication problems.

From ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools : Current Literature on Small Schools

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Increase attendance and graduation rates**From ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools : Current Literature on Small Schools**

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See how these factors affect education.

From National Center for Policy Analysis : Small, Alternative NYC Schools Do Better

In recent years, New York City has been experimenting with smaller high schools that enroll 600 or fewer students. The aim has been to determine whether they can better serve struggling students from poorer sections of the city.

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From ERIC : Outcomes of School Downsizing

This report covers the extent to which downsizing creates separateness, autonomy, and distinctiveness, three qualities said to be of practical significance.

Elevate teacher satisfaction

NEW! From ERIC : Managing Change in Small Primary Schools

This report summarizes a two-phase research project on the strategies used by headteachers in small Scottish primary schools to manage mandated education changes. The findings suggest the benefits of a small-school management style involving creation of a collegial team; networking with outside colleagues and resources; and situational management based on realistic assessment of context, tasks, and available resources.

From ERIC/CRESS : School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance

See how these factors affect education.

From The Coalition of Essential Schools : The School Change Study; A Collaborative Inquiry on School Change

Drawing on the faculties' responses and their own observations, the research teams explore three main themes: how the nine Common Principles are put into practice; how whole-school change occurs; and what factors affect the momentum of change.

From Educational Leadership : The Big Benefits of Smallness

As New York's celebrated Central Park East schools have shown, small schools work--for seven good reasons.

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Improve school climate**From Educational Research Service (ERS) Bulletin : Small Urban Schools**

Big schools often have harmful effects on many students, teachers, and parents, and given the right conditions, small schools can create an academic climate in which a sense of belonging and rich teaching and learning can flourish, write Michelle Fine and Janis I. Somerville in *Small Schools, Big Imaginations: A Creative Look at Urban Public Schools...*

From ERIC : Optimum Setting for the Early Adolescent: Junior High or Middle School?

Article discussed what constitutes the optimum school organization for early adolescents.

From ERIC : Adolescent Identity Formation and the Organizational Structure of High Schools

The author describes aspects of the size and organizational structure of high schools which reduce human contact and have a negative influence on the sense of community, the development of relationships, and the formation of personal identity.

From the Small Schools Workshop : Eight Steps to Creating Small Schools

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From the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, US department of Education : The Advantages of Small Schools

Education has proclaimed that "bigger is better" for so long that many have become believers in a doctrine which they have not truly examined.

From Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory : Monthly column : Big Learning at Small Schools

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Be as good or better than big schools

NEW! From ERIC : Research Roundup - School Size: Is Small Better?

In the past three decades, steadily mounting evidence indicates that children and adolescents do best in schools with well under 1,000 students, with some critics arguing that even 200 may be too many.

NEW! From Eric : Downsizing schools in big cities

OVER THE LAST 30 YEARS research and experience have suggested that students benefit in many different ways from attending small schools, as opposed to large ones. Many existing schools, however, and even most under construction, can accommodate 2,000-4,000 students.

NEW! From ERIC : Curriculum Adequacy and Quality in High Schools Enrolling Fewer Than 400 Pupils (9-12)

One widely recognized challenge facing small schools is their ability to maintain a broad curriculum with a diversity of course offerings. By contrast, one of the alleged benefits of "bigness" is breadth of the core curriculum, vocational offerings, special services, and extracurricular opportunities. Evidence presented in this Digest will illustrate that many small high schools maintain programs in these areas that are comparable in quality to curricula of larger schools.

NEW! From ERIC : School Size

There is a natural predilection in American education toward enormity," said William Fowler (1992), "and it does not serve schools well."

From Educational Research Service (ERS) Bulletin : Small Urban Schools

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From Pathways to School Improvement : Large Schools

Extensive research evidence indicates that a supportive climate for learning can be severely damaged by the very large secondary schools...

From ERIC : School Size and the Importance of School Activities.

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From ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools: Ongoing Dilemmas of School Size : A Short Story

Recent national reports reinforce the growing perception that small schools are good schools. Is this new appreciation the result of changing fashion? Is it the latest fad in schooling? Does solid research suggest the superiority of small schools, and if so, how is it possible that the truth about school size could have been altered so dramatically in the space of a single generation?

From the Small Schools Workshop : Eight Steps to Creating Small Schools

Research You Can Use From the Small Schools Workshop.

From ERIC/CRESS : School Size, School Climate, and Student Performance

See how these factors affect education.

From ERIC/CRESS : Ongoing Dilemmas of School Size: A Short Story

Learn about the problems facing rural and urban school systems.

From the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association : SSTA Research Centre Reports on Small Schools

Research addressing: What strategies will strengthen small schools and overcome size-related limitations? What are the some of the challenges facing small schools today? What are the problems associated with school enrollment in Saskatchewan? What are the implications of declining enrollments in rural Saskatchewan?

From National Center for Policy Analysis : Small, Alternative NYC Schools Do Better

In recent years, New York City has been experimenting with smaller high schools that enroll 600 or fewer students. The aim has been to determine whether they can better serve struggling students from poorer sections of the city.

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Education has proclaimed that "bigger is better" for so long that many have become believers in a doctrine which they have not truly examined.

From ERIC : Creating Accountability In Big City Schools

This publication was produced by the ERIC Clearinghouse of Urban Education and is an important piece on accountability and testing.

From Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory : Monthly column : Big Learning at Small Schools

Kids usually go for big ice cream cones and giant rides at the fair. But when it comes to school size, research clearly says that kids thrive on small; it's often better for student learning....

From Texas Center for Educational Research : Bigger Is Better Versus Small Is Beautiful : Issues in the Debate over District, School, and Class Size

Advocates of small is beautiful view are interested in effectiveness that can be achieved through intimacy and smaller proportions. They are likely to be concerned with student achievement. Quality experiences are the focus. They are also concerned with the learning environment and the totality of the student experience.

From The Institute for Educational Research in NSW : Research Paper From New South Wales on Small Schools

This paper examines two related research questions. First, irrespective of other school and student background variables, does school size make a difference to achievement in the HSC examination? Second, does school size affect HSC achievement after taking into account school and student background characteristics, student academic motivation and the educational component of the school culture?

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SMALLER SCHOOLS ARE SAFER SCHOOLS IN THE CONGRESIONAL RECORD

HON. JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR.

Of Tennessee in the House of Representatives

Tuesday, September 21, 1999

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, we have done a very good job in this Nation bringing class sizes down. But we have made a bad mistake going to large, centralized schools and closing down thousands of small neighborhood and community schools particularly at the high school level. This point was made in a very articulate way in a letter entitled "Smaller Schools are Safer Schools" in the August 30th issue of the Christian Science Monitor. I commend this letter by Michael Klonsky to my colleagues and other readers of the Record.

Smaller Schools Are Safer Schools

Regarding "Safer Places of Learning" (Aug. 20): The new "militarization" of schools may do more harm than good. Tens of millions of dollars are now being spent, without much thought or planning, on security cameras, metal detectors, and police may make school violence the expected norm. This trend also shifts the responsibility for teaching children away from teachers to counselors and police. When the shootings first took place, there was some serious discussion about the size and culture of schools. All the shootings occurred in large schools where kids outside the mainstream could easily fall through the cracks. Teachers and administrators claimed ignorance of the threat from neo-Nazi gangs and antisocial cliques. But now the discussion has shifted almost entirely toward militarization and regimentation of schools and side issues of student dress codes. Calling on students to eat lunch with kids they don't normally eat with is a nice idea but it avoids many of the responsibilities that adults should bare, like school restructuring. Over the next decade we will spend billions in the construction of new gigantic high schools and junior highs. This is a recipe for more Littletons. If we are serious about safe schools, one of the first things we need to consider is the creation of smaller communities of teachers and learners where kids are known by the people charged with educating them.





Speeches and Testimony

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.
September 15, 1999**

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 as 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.

Let's 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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ON WHOLE-SCHOOL CHANGE:

To succeed and really make a difference in the lives of children, school change has to be comprehensive and sustaining. Piecemeal and small pieces do not work. You must **involve all stakeholders** - all teachers, parents, external partners, and students.

Yes, change is **hard, but it is also exciting**. Change is attractive, exhilarating, and change certainly can be risky. In the process of change, we can be **creative** and **innovative** and just play with the possibilities...we can create a better product, develop a better system or simply bring in the wrecking crew and start all over again. Some say this is exactly what we did at CVS. I am happy to report that funding from the Annenberg Challenge Grant has provided us the flexibility and opportunity to engage in sustained educational change aimed at **whole school improvement**.

Sustained change requires attitudinal changes - to **change attitude** requires a well-defined comprehensive **on-going professional development** program. It does not work using "Hit

or miss" - "drive by" type staff development.

ON TRANSFORMING SCHOOL CULTURE:

The investment that we made in teacher training is a phenomenal success story in itself. Teachers who once locked their doors, covered their windows, lectured for 50 minutes and then gave a pencil and paper test on Friday are now **inviting administrators and other colleagues into their classrooms** where students are actively engaged in **cooperative** learning activities, **project-based** learning and **authentic** performances. These same teachers are meeting before and after school, scripting lessons and engaging in **reflective dialogue** with their **Critical Friends Groups**. They collaboratively review student work which informs teacher practice. They are reaching out to parents and hosting "Parents Go Back To School" Nights where freshman parents follow the schedule of their children and the teacher conducts a lesson. The entire school culture has changed - **isolation has turned into collaboration** and we now have the greatest school/business/community interaction that the school has ever enjoyed.

As intended, **students have been the greatest beneficiaries** of the on-going professional development training. Our students are comfortable when the teacher teams with a person from industry to conduct class at a worksite, or other remote location; they are excelling in producing interdisciplinary, technology-enhanced projects; they are articulate, confident creators and innovators; they are critical thinkers and analyzers; they are active in their own learning. **Results...**impressive student portfolios; superior final exhibitions; academic scholarships to highly selective colleges and universities

ON EQUITY IN EDUCATION:

Most of us can attest to the deficiencies that exist in our public school budgets. We are also very much aware of the **disparities that exist** in public school funding between affluent and low-income communities. The point is, without the support of private foundations it would be impossible for Chicago Vocational and many other schools to **explore new, creative and innovative ways to transform teaching and learning**.

It is well-documented that **to significantly improve education, we must invest in radical change** and provide adequate funding to sustain a quality educational program that is available on an equal basis to low, moderate and upper income children.

ON SMALL SCHOOLS RESTRUCTURING AT CVCA:

When we hypothesized that students would post **higher gains in smaller schools**, we converted to a small school and academy framework that has permitted us to really **personalize learning**. In these personalized learning environments, our kids are nurtured by caring teachers who function as a **cohesive team**. By adding a daily 25 minute Advisory Period on the freshman and sophomore levels and designing **flexible schedules** that

accommodate common planning time, we have **empowered teachers** to really **connect with the students** and get to know them and their families well.

Success indicators include: improved **attendance**, less disruptive **behavior**, behaviors that result in suspensions have decreased by 76% in the last few years. Just as important, **academic achievement** has increased significantly. Prior to the implementation of this model, 41% of our freshmen and sophomores failed one or more subjects; now less than 24% of the freshmen and sophomores fail one or more classes.

By investing in extensive, on-going teacher training, expanding home/school/community **collaboration** and engaging teachers in cognitive coaching activities and peer coaching that **improve pedagogy**, we are meeting the needs of students who come to us with varying learning styles and abilities.

Reforming CVCA was risky and expensive. It was a real challenge trying to convince our Board to fund the annual 6-8 week Summer Laboratory School where teachers were trained in curriculum integration, authentic instruction, alternative assessment, team building, collaborative practices, Socratic questioning and a number of new teaching methods and strategies that helped us achieve engaged learning in all of our classrooms. But with the help of the Annenberg Foundation, we have been able to retrain 98% of our staff. It was not an easy task, but it was absolutely necessary.

Chicago Vocational Career Academy's reform formula includes: (1) Maximum personalization in the form of small schools/academies, advisory periods, parents in the classroom, individual learning plans; (2) Teacher training in innovative teaching methods and strategies...team-building; collaborative practices; authentic instruction and assessment; curriculum development; and (3) Improved community connections where the school becomes the hub of the community. We know that this formula works. Current educational research says it works, but I have proof.

Teaming works - when the school teams with the home, there is progress; when the school teams with business/industry, there is success; when teachers team, there are greater opportunities for kids; when kids team, kids learn.

ON SYSTEMIC CHANGE:

The added support supplied by Annenberg and our other external partner encouraged us to be **risk-takers**...to take those giant steps that create systemic change.

Chicago Vocational has been in a state of reform for the past 8 years. This extensive work has not gone unnoticed, for in 1997, the **New Urban High School Project**. Through this involvement we are able to **disseminate our most successful models** and design principles to school districts throughout the United States.

Annenberg has helped CVCA develop and implement sound innovations that can be adapted to improve schools in every corner of the world.

As reformers and innovators, we have a **big challenge**. With so many of our leaders espousing a Back-to-Basics Movement, we must be diligent in **informing the public** about what really does work and why we cannot afford to invest in this reactionary movement. We must **spread the word** and **help other schools** and districts in their reform efforts. But most importantly, we must convince our superintendents and fiscal officers to provide the funding we need to continue our programs and extend them to other schools.





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I found this essay in the Fall '91 issue of *Whole Earth Review*. It finally clarified for me why school is necessarily such a spirit-crushing experience, *and* suggested what to do about it.

Before reading, please set your irony detector to the on position. If you find yourself inclined to dismiss the below as paranoid, you should know that the design behind the current American school system is very well-documented historically, in published writings of dizzying cynicism by such well-known figures as Horace Mann and Andrew Carnegie.

The Six-Lesson Schoolteacher

by John Taylor Gatto, New York State Teacher of the Year, 1991

Call me Mr. Gatto, please. Twenty-six years ago, having nothing better to do, I tried my hand at schoolteaching. My license certifies me as an instructor of English language and literature, but that isn't what I do at all. What I teach is school, and I win awards doing it.

Teaching means many different things, but six lessons are common to schoolteaching from Harlem to Hollywood. You pay for these lessons in more ways than you can imagine, so you might as well know what they are:

The first lesson I teach is: "Stay in the class where you belong." I don't know who decides that my kids belong there but that's not my business. The children are numbered so that if any get away they can be returned to the right class. Over the years the variety of ways children are numbered has increased dramatically, until it is hard to see the human being under the burden of the numbers each carries. Numbering children is a big and very profitable business, though what the business is designed to accomplish is elusive.

In any case, again, that's not my business. My job is to make the kids like it -- being locked in together, I mean -- or at the minimum, endure it. If things go well, the kids can't imagine themselves anywhere else; they envy and fear the better classes and have contempt for the dumber classes. So the class mostly keeps itself in good marching order. That's the real lesson of any rigged competition like school. You come to know your place.

Nevertheless, in spite of the overall blueprint, I make an effort to urge children to higher levels of test success, promising eventual transfer from the lower-level class as a reward. I insinuate that the day will come when an employer will hire them on the basis of test scores, even though my own experience is that employers are (rightly) indifferent to such things. I never lie outright, but I've come to see that truth and [school]teaching are incompatible.

The lesson of numbered classes is that there is no way out of your class except by magic. Until that happens you must stay where you are put.

The second lesson I teach kids is to turn on and off like a light switch. I demand that they become totally involved in my lessons, jumping up and down in their seats with anticipation, competing vigorously with each other for my favor. But when the bell rings I insist that they drop the work at once and proceed quickly to the next work station. Nothing important is ever finished in my class, nor in any other class I know of.

The lesson of bells is that no work is worth finishing, so why care too deeply about anything? Bells are the secret logic of schooltime; their argument is inexorable; bells destroy past and future, converting every interval into a sameness, as an abstract map makes every living mountain and river the same even though they are not. Bells inoculate each

undertaking with indifference.

The third lesson I teach you is to surrender your will to a predestined chain of command. Rights may be granted or withheld, by authority, without appeal. As a schoolteacher I intervene in many personal decisions, issuing a Pass for those I deem legitimate, or initiating a disciplinary confrontation for behavior that threatens my control. My judgments come thick and fast, because individuality is trying constantly to assert itself in my classroom. Individuality is a curse to all systems of classification, a contradiction of class theory.

Here are some common ways it shows up: children sneak away for a private moment in the toilet on the pretext of moving their bowels; they trick me out of a private instant in the hallway on the grounds that they need water. Sometimes free will appears right in front of me in children angry, depressed or exhilarated by things outside my ken. Rights in such things cannot exist for schoolteachers; only privileges, which can be withdrawn, exist.

The fourth lesson I teach is that only I determine what curriculum you will study (rather, I enforce decisions transmitted by the people who pay me). This power lets me separate good kids from bad kids instantly. Good kids do the tasks I appoint with a minimum of conflict and a decent show of enthusiasm. Of the millions of things of value to learn, I decide what few we have time for. The choices are mine. Curiosity has no important place in my work, only conformity.

Bad kids fight against this, of course, trying openly or covertly to make decisions for themselves about what they will learn. How can we allow that and survive as schoolteachers? Fortunately there are procedures to break the will of those who resist.

This is another way I teach the lesson of dependency. Good people wait for a teacher to tell them what to do. This is the most important lesson of all, that we must wait for other people, better trained than ourselves, to make the meanings of our lives. It is no exaggeration to say that our entire economy depends upon this lesson being learned. Think of what would fall apart if kids weren't trained in the dependency lesson: The social-service businesses could hardly survive, including the fast-growing counseling industry; commercial entertainment of all sorts, along with television, would wither if people remembered how to make their own fun; the food services, restaurants and prepared-food warehouses would shrink if people returned to making their own meals rather than depending on strangers to cook for them. Much of modern law, medicine, and engineering would go too -- the clothing business as well -- unless a guaranteed supply of helpless people poured out of our schools each year. We've built a way of life that depends on people doing what they are told because they don't know any other way. For God's sake, let's not rock that boat!

In lesson five I teach that your self-respect should depend on an observer's measure of your worth. My kids are constantly evaluated and judged. A monthly report, impressive in its precision, is sent into students' homes to spread approval or to mark exactly -- down to a single percentage point -- how dissatisfied with their children parents should be. Although some people might be surprised how little time or reflection goes into making up these records, the cumulative weight of the objective- seeming documents establishes a profile of defect which compels a child to arrive at a certain decisions about himself and his future based on the casual judgment of strangers.

Self-evaluation -- the staple of every major philosophical system that ever appeared on the planet -- is never a factor in these things. The lesson of report cards, grades, and tests is that children should not trust themselves or their parents, but must rely on the evaluation of certified officials. People need to be told what they are worth.

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It is the great triumph of schooling that among even the best of my fellow teachers, and among even the best parents, there is only a small number who can imagine a different way to do things. Yet only a very few lifetimes ago things were different in the United States: originality and variety were common currency; our freedom from regimentation made us the miracle of the world; social class boundaries were relatively easy to cross; our citizenry was marvelously confident, inventive, and able to do many things independently, to think for themselves. We were something, all by ourselves, as individuals.

It only takes about 50 contact hours to transmit basic literacy and math skills well enough that kids can be self-teachers from then on. The cry for "basic skills" practice is a smokescreen behind which schools pre-empt the time of children for twelve years and teach them the six lessons I've just taught you.

We've had a society increasingly under central control in the United States since just before the Civil War: the lives we lead, the clothes we wear, the food we eat, and the green highway signs we drive by from coast to coast are the products of this central control. So, too, I think, are the epidemics of drugs, suicide, divorce, violence, cruelty, and the hardening of class into caste in the U.S., products of the dehumanization of our lives, the lessening of individual and family importance that central control imposes.

Without a fully active role in community life you cannot develop into a complete human being. Aristotle taught that. Surely he was right; look around you or look in the mirror: that is the demonstration.

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The current debate about whether we should have a national curriculum is phony; we already have one, locked up in the six lessons I've told you about and a few more I've spared you. This curriculum produces moral and intellectual paralysis, and no curriculum of content will be sufficient to reverse its bad effects. What is under discussion is a great irrelevancy.

None of this is inevitable, you know. None of it is impregnable to change. We do have a choice in how we bring up young people; there is no right way. There is no "international

competition" that compels our existence, difficult as it is to even think about in the face of a constant media barrage of myth to the contrary. In every important material respect our nation is self-sufficient. If we gained a non-material philosophy that found meaning where it is genuinely located -- in families, friends, the passage of seasons, in nature, in simple ceremonies and rituals, in curiosity, generosity, compassion, and service to others, in a decent independence and privacy -- then we would be truly self-sufficient.

How did these awful places, these "schools", come about? As we know them, they are a product of the two "Red Scares" of 1848 and 1919, when powerful interests feared a revolution among our industrial poor, and partly they are the result of the revulsion with which old-line families regarded the waves of Celtic, Slavic, and Latin immigration -- and the Catholic religion -- after 1845. And certainly a third contributing cause can be found in the revulsion with which these same families regarded the free movement of Africans through the society after the Civil War.

Look again at the six lessons of school. This is training for permanent underclasses, people who are to be deprived forever of finding the center of their own special genius. And it is training shaken loose from its original logic: to regulate the poor. Since the 1920s the growth of the well-articulated school bureaucracy, and the less visible growth of a horde of industries that profit from schooling exactly as it is, have enlarged schooling's original grasp to seize the sons and daughters of the middle class.

Is it any wonder Socrates was outraged at the accusation that he took money to teach? Even then, philosophers saw clearly the inevitable direction the professionalization of teaching would take, pre-empting the teaching function that belongs to all in a healthy community; belongs, indeed, most clearly to yourself, since nobody else cares as much about your destiny. Professional teaching tends to another serious error. It makes things that are inherently easy to learn, like reading, writing, and arithmetic, difficult -- by insisting they be taught by pedagogical procedures.

With lessons like the ones I teach day after day, is it any wonder we have the national crisis we face today? Young people indifferent to the adult world and to the future; indifferent to almost everything except the diversion of toys and violence? Rich or poor, schoolchildren cannot concentrate on anything for very long. They have a poor sense of time past and to come; they are mistrustful of intimacy (like the children of divorce they really are); they hate solitude, are cruel, materialistic, dependent, passive, violent, timid in the face of the unexpected, addicted to distraction.

All the peripheral tendencies of childhood are magnified to a grotesque extent by schooling, whose hidden curriculum prevents effective personality development. Indeed, without exploiting the fearfulness, selfishness, and inexperience of children our schools could not survive at all, nor could I as a certified schoolteacher.

"Critical thinking" is a term we hear frequently these days as a form of training which will herald a new day in mass schooling. It certainly will, if it ever happens. No common school that actually dared teach the use of dialectic, heuristic, and other tools of free minds could last a year without being torn to pieces.

Institutional schoolteachers are destructive to children's development. Nobody survives the Six-Lesson Curriculum unscathed, not even the instructors. The method is deeply and profoundly anti-educational. No tinkering will fix it. In one of the great ironies of human affairs, the massive rethinking that schools require would cost so much less than we are spending now that it is not likely to happen. First and foremost, the business I am in is a jobs project and a contract-letting agency. We cannot afford to save money, not even to help children.

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one of the only alternatives on the horizon for most families is to teach their own children at home. Small, de-institutionalized schools are another. Some form of free-market system for public schooling is the likeliest place to look for answers. But the near impossibility of these things for the shattered families of the poor, and for too many on the fringes of the economic middle class, foretell that the disaster of Six-Lesson Schools is likely to continue.

After an adult lifetime spent in teaching school I believe the method of schooling is the only real content it has. Don't be fooled into thinking that good curricula or good equipment or good teachers are the critical determinants of your son and daughter's schooltime. All the pathologies we've considered come about in large measure because the lessons of school prevent children from keeping important appointments with themselves and their families, to learn lessons in self-motivation, perseverance, self-reliance, courage, dignity and love -- and, of course, lessons in service to others, which are among the key lessons of home life.

Thirty years ago these things could still be learned in the time left after school. But television has eaten most of that time, and a combination of television and the stresses peculiar to two-income or single-parent families have swallowed up most of what used to be family time. Our kids have no time left to grow up fully human, and only thin-soil wastelands to do it in.

A future is rushing down upon our culture which will insist that all of us learn the wisdom of non-material experience; this future will demand, as the price of survival, that we follow a pace of natural life economical in material cost. These lessons cannot be learned in schools as they are. School is like starting life with a 12-year jail sentence in which bad habits are the only curriculum truly learned. I teach school and win awards doing it. I should know.

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If you have any information about Gatto's current activities, please send email to ncm@cantrip.org. If you maintain a web page, you are encouraged to add a link to this one.

Return to The Cantrip Corpus.

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I found this essay in the Fall '91 issue of *Whole Earth Review*. It finally clarified for me why school is necessarily such a spirit-crushing experience, *and* suggested what to do about it.

Before reading, please set your irony detector to the on position. If you find yourself inclined to dismiss the below as paranoid, you should know that the design behind the current American school system is very well-documented historically, in published writings of dizzying cynicism by such well-known figures as Horace Mann and Andrew Carnegie.

The Six-Lesson Schoolteacher

by John Taylor Gatto, New York State Teacher of the Year, 1991

Call me Mr. Gatto, please. Twenty-six years ago, having nothing better to do, I tried my hand at schoolteaching. My license certifies me as an instructor of English language and literature, but that isn't what I do at all. What I teach is school, and I win awards doing it.

Teaching means many different things, but six lessons are common to schoolteaching from Harlem to Hollywood. You pay for these lessons in more ways than you can imagine, so you might as well know what they are:

The first lesson I teach is: "Stay in the class where you belong." I don't know who decides that my kids belong there but that's not my business. The children are numbered so that if any get away they can be returned to the right class. Over the years the variety of ways children are numbered has increased dramatically, until it is hard to see the human being under the burden of the numbers each carries. Numbering children is a big and very profitable business, though what the business is designed to accomplish is elusive.

In any case, again, that's not my business. My job is to make the kids like it -- being locked in together, I mean -- or at the minimum, endure it. If things go well, the kids can't imagine themselves anywhere else; they envy and fear the better classes and have contempt for the dumber classes. So the class mostly keeps itself in good marching order. That's the real lesson of any rigged competition like school. You come to know your place.

Nevertheless, in spite of the overall blueprint, I make an effort to urge children to higher levels of test success, promising eventual transfer from the lower-level class as a reward. I insinuate that the day will come when an employer will hire them on the basis of test scores, even though my own experience is that employers are (rightly) indifferent to such things. I never lie outright, but I've come to see that truth and [school]teaching are incompatible.

The lesson of numbered classes is that there is no way out of your class except by magic. Until that happens you must stay where you are put.

The second lesson I teach kids is to turn on and off like a light switch. I demand that they become totally involved in my lessons, jumping up and down in their seats with anticipation, competing vigorously with each other for my favor. But when the bell rings I insist that they drop the work at once and proceed quickly to the next work station. Nothing important is ever finished in my class, nor in any other class I know of.

The lesson of bells is that no work is worth finishing, so why care too deeply about anything? Bells are the secret logic of schooltime; their argument is inexorable; bells destroy past and future, converting every interval into a sameness, as an abstract map makes every living mountain and river the same even though they are not. Bells inoculate each

undertaking with indifference.

The third lesson I teach you is to surrender your will to a predestined chain of command. Rights may be granted or withheld, by authority, without appeal. As a schoolteacher I intervene in many personal decisions, issuing a Pass for those I deem legitimate, or initiating a disciplinary confrontation for behavior that threatens my control. My judgments come thick and fast, because individuality is trying constantly to assert itself in my classroom. Individuality is a curse to all systems of classification, a contradiction of class theory.

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The fourth lesson I teach is that only I determine what curriculum you will study (rather, I enforce decisions transmitted by the people who pay me). This power lets me separate good kids from bad kids instantly. Good kids do the tasks I appoint with a minimum of conflict and a decent show of enthusiasm. Of the millions of things of value to learn, I decide what few we have time for. The choices are mine. Curiosity has no important place in my work, only conformity.

Bad kids fight against this, of course, trying openly or covertly to make decisions for themselves about what they will learn. How can we allow that and survive as schoolteachers? Fortunately there are procedures to break the will of those who resist.

This is another way I teach the lesson of dependency. Good people wait for a teacher to tell them what to do. This is the most important lesson of all, that we must wait for other people, better trained than ourselves, to make the meanings of our lives. It is no exaggeration to say that our entire economy depends upon this lesson being learned. Think of what would fall apart if kids weren't trained in the dependency lesson: The social-service businesses could hardly survive, including the fast-growing counseling industry; commercial entertainment of all sorts, along with television, would wither if people remembered how to make their own fun; the food services, restaurants and prepared-food warehouses would shrink if people returned to making their own meals rather than depending on strangers to cook for them. Much of modern law, medicine, and engineering would go too -- the clothing business as well -- unless a guaranteed supply of helpless people poured out of our schools each year. We've built a way of life that depends on people doing what they are told because they don't know any other way. For God's sake, let's not rock that boat!

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Guiding Principles for the High School Exit Examination Standards Panel

Purpose of the Examination

“In order to significantly improve pupil achievement in high school and to ensure that pupils who graduate from high school can demonstrate grade level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics, the state must set higher standards for high school graduation.” (Senate Bill 2, Ch. 1, Statutes of 1999).

The Examination

1. The examination must be aligned to the *California English-Language Arts Content Standards* and the *California Mathematics Content Standards* at a grade level or levels; the *Reading/Language Arts Curriculum Frameworks* and the *Mathematics Curriculum Frameworks*. The High School Exit Examination (HSEE) Panel may recommend which of these standards are best suited as the basis for the examination design—that is, not all of the possible California content standards need to be used. Careful documentation of which standards are the basis of the examination and the match of the specific California content standard and specific examination item must be clear.
2. The examination must be criterion referenced in nature, with the California content standards as the guiding criteria.
3. The examination must give a credible and reliable score for individual students and have discrimination sensitivity around the possible “cut score” range of student performance.
4. (Not yet approved by the panel.) The examination must be rigorous and challenging and must allow for increasing the passing levels on the examination over time. We have set the level of difficulty somewhat below our final expectations in order to allow for a phase-in period. Over time, the examination should become more rigorous to meet the increasing demands on high school graduates. We will set a timetable of expectations for this increase in rigor.
5. The examination must include both multiple-choice and performance items in both the language arts and mathematics content tests as suitable for the specific standards that the items are intended to test. It must be in a format similar to that of other California tests, so that teachers, students, and the public are familiar with it.

6. The performance items must be able to be scored in a consistent, cost-effective, and timely manner—a turn-around time of eight weeks must be met, but students must also have flexibility in using successfully-completed parts of the test in their finals scores. Note: Section from the High school Exit Examination legislation referring to passing parts of the examination:

Education Code Section 60851 (d) states: “The results of the exit examination shall be provided to each pupil taking the examination within eight weeks of the examination administration and in time for the pupil to take any section of the examination not passed at the next administration. A pupil shall take again only those parts of the examination he or she has not previously passed and may not retake any portion of the exam that he or she has previously passed.”

7. The examination must be linguistically sensitive and reflect full consideration of California’s diverse population and provide districts with appropriate accommodations for special needs students. Note: Sections from the High School Exit Examination legislation referring to special needs students:

- Education Code Section 60850 (e) (2): “The examination, regardless of federal financial participation, shall comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 2000d et seq.), its implementing regulations (34 C.F.R. Part 100), and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1701).”
- Education Code Section 60850 (g): “The examination shall be offered to individuals with exceptional needs, as defined in Section 56026, in accordance with paragraph (17) of subsection (a) of Section 1412 of Title 20 of the United States Code and Section 794 and following of Title 29 of the United States Code. Individuals with exceptional needs shall be administered the examination with appropriate accommodations, where necessary.”
- Education Code Section 60852: “Notwithstanding Section 60851, if a school district determines that a pupil does not possess sufficient English language skills to be assessed pursuant to Section 60850, the district may defer the requirement that the pupil pass the high school exit examination for a period of up to 24 calendar months of enrollment in the California public school system until the pupil has completed six months of instruction in reading, writing, and comprehension in the English language. Nothing in this section shall be construed to allow any pupil to receive a diploma of graduation from high school without passing the exit examination, in English, prescribed by Section 60850.”

Alternatives must be considered for low performing students. Note: Sections from the High School Exit Examination legislation referring to special needs students:

- Education Code Section 60853 (a): “In order to prepare pupils to succeed on the exit examination, a school district shall use regularly available resources and any available supplemental remedial resources, including, but not limited to, funds available for programs established by Chapter 320 of the Statutes of 1998, Chapter 811 of the Statutes of 1997, Chapter 743 of the Statutes of 1998, and funds available for other similar supplemental remedial programs.
(b) It is the intent of the Legislature that a school district consider restructuring its academic offerings reducing the electives available to any pupil who has not demonstrated the skills necessary to succeed on the exit examination, so that the pupil can be provided supplemental instruction during the regularly scheduled academic year.
(c) A school district should prepare pupils to succeed on the exit examination. In preparing pupils to succeed, school districts are encouraged to use existing resources to ensure that all pupils succeed. The state has created programs such as the Class Size Reduction Program, staff development programs,

after school programs, and others, in addition to providing general purpose funding, in order to assist school districts in providing an education that will help all pupils succeed.”

Note: Sections from the High School Exit Examination legislation referring to alternatives:

- Education Code Section 60856: “After adoption and the initial administrations of the high school exit examination the State Board of Education, in consultation with the Superintendent of Public Instruction, shall study the appropriateness of other criteria by which high school pupils who are regarded as highly proficient but unable to pass the high school exit examination may demonstrate their competency and receive a high school diploma. This criteria shall include, but is not limited to, an exemplary academic record as evidenced by transcripts and alternative tests of equal rigor in the academic areas covered by the high school exit examination. If the State Board of Education determines that other criteria are appropriate and do not undermine the intent of this chapter that all high school graduates demonstrate satisfactory academic proficiency, the board shall forward its recommendations to the Legislature for enactment.”

Curricular Validity of the Examination/Connection to Instruction

8. The curricular and instructional validity of the examination questions must be clearly demonstrated in a process to be designed by the HSEE panel. The intent is to have an examination that reflects a demanding yet feasible “opportunity to learn” environment for students in the future.
9. To the extent possible, the examination must be connected to, and enhance, specific curriculum/course offerings in schools and support any of several approaches (such as integrated math or the algebra/geometry sequence).
10. The examination must provide useful, user-friendly results to schools, parents, and students that will improve the quality of teaching and learning.
11. The examination must enhance the proposed instructional focus on helping all students succeed on the examination.

The Policy/Political Context for the Examination

12. The examination must have credibility with educators and the public. . It must be possible to have a large item bank that can be used to support multiple testing opportunities per year. The tests developer must develop a sample test to be distributed prior to the administration of the first tests. The California Department of Education, school districts and county offices of education must invest time and effort in explaining the purposes and expectations of the examination to educators (including post-secondary), students, parents, and the public and must ensure articulation of educational programs between kindergarten and grade eight and the high schools.
13. The examination needs to be capable of withstanding a variety of possible legal challenges.

14. To the extent possible, the examination support an integrated and useful assessment system in California, kindergarten through college.
15. Students should be provided alternatives for demonstrating their ability to meet English-language arts and mathematics content standards at a designated level of performance on other examinations.
16. The examination must be seen as one necessary requirement among others for graduation. This connection needs policy coherence and full communication.
17. The real and potential consequences of the examination need to be carefully considered, including the administrative and fiscal impact on California's schools.

Development Process for the Examination

18. Serious consideration should be given to modifying an existing test for use as the high school exit examination and/or to developing the examination using items from other test(s) that are aligned with California's English-language arts and mathematics content standards.
19. Exit examinations developed by other states and countries should be reviewed by the panel prior to the selection of content for the California examination.
20. The exit panel will attempt to reach consensus on goals whenever possible.
21. Educators and other stakeholders, including the HSEE Panel, must be involved in the construction and review of examination items.

BIGGER ISN'T BETTER

Smaller Schools Can Stem Violence and Boost Student Performance

BY ANDREW ROTHERHAM

The murders and woundings at high schools in Colorado and Georgia this spring have sent politicians in Washington scurrying for new ways to stem violence in schools. Proposals range from posting the Ten Commandments in classrooms to beefing up the federal Safe and Drug-Free Schools Act, which researchers and state and local officials say accomplishes neither of its stated goals.

Lost in the din was a thoughtful idea from Vice President Al Gore that didn't seek to lay blame for school violence and didn't make promises Washington couldn't keep. Instead, Gore quietly called attention to the connection between school size and school safety.

"We've done some things wrong in education, and here's one of them: herding all students ... into overcrowded, factory-style high schools," Gore said. "When teachers and principals must practice crowd control, it becomes impossible to spot the early warning signs of violence, depression, or academic failure — and it becomes even harder to do something about it." He pointed out that Washington could play a role by helping localities make their schools smaller, more personal, and more community-oriented.

Gore's idea didn't materialize out of thin air: A growing body of research suggests that smaller schools work better. Gore is the first national politician to recognize that in addition to yielding academic benefits, smaller schools might be one of the best ways to deal with disaffected young people.

When Bigger Isn't Better

"Bigger is better" has been a defining slogan of the American Century, and schools have been part of the trend. Since the end of World War II, the number of schools nationwide has declined 70 percent while average enrollment in schools has grown fivefold. Today more than 25 percent of American secondary schools enroll more than 1,000 students, and enrollments of 2,000 and 3,000 are common. New York City has nine schools with more than 4,000 students. JFK High School in the Bronx enrolls 5,300.

The thinking was that due to economies of scale, large schools would offer more extracurricular opportunities, more diverse curricula, and generally more resources to students. Intuitively, this makes sense. But research shows, and the public seems to understand, that when it

comes to school size, smaller is better.

According to researchers, oversized schools are a detriment to student achievement, especially for poor children. Such schools may be more economically efficient and may offer students more of everything, but those factors haven't translated into more successful students. In fact, the research is fairly clear on this point: Smaller schools promote learning. And contrary to prevailing wisdom, research shows that small schools can offer a strong core curriculum and, except in extremely small schools, a level of academically advanced courses comparable to large schools.

Other research shows that students from smaller schools have better attendance records and that when students transfer from large schools to smaller ones their attendance improves. Smaller schools also have lower dropout rates and fewer discipline problems. A 1992 study by researchers Jean Stockard and Maralee Mayberry stated that "behavior problems are so much greater in larger schools that any possible virtue of larger size is canceled out by the difficulties of maintaining an orderly learning environment."

In a 1996 study, researcher Kathleen Cotton discovered that students in large schools do not participate in extracurricular activities at a greater rate than students in small schools. In fact, Cotton found that students in smaller schools were more likely than large-school students to be involved in extracurricular activities and to hold positions of responsibility in these activities. Nor are larger schools necessarily more efficient. A 1996 study by Valerie Lee and Julie Smith found that large schools are actually more expensive because their sheer size requires more administrative support. Those added layers of bureaucracy, in turn, translate into less flexibility and innovation.

Second Thoughts in Suburbia

Other research suggests that economically advantaged students can thrive in large schools. The problem is, economically *disadvantaged* students are the ones most likely to be concentrated in oversized schools. In any event, the shootings at Columbine High School in suburban Denver and Heritage High School in suburban Atlanta are giving suburban parents second thoughts about large local schools, no matter what research says about their children's prospects in them.

One suburban parent with a daughter in a large school recently told me she would readily trade some extracurricular activities for smaller school size if the change meant that "teachers and counselors have more daily contact with the kids."

Her response shouldn't come as a surprise. A 1997 study of charter schools by the Hudson Institute asked parents why they chose such schools for their children over traditional public schools. Fifty-three percent cited the schools' small size. It was the most common response, ranking ahead of higher standards, educational philosophy, greater parental involvement, and better teachers. It is also telling that urban parents, whose children are those most likely to attend excessively large schools, are also the parents most likely to express dissatisfaction with their public schools.

While researchers don't agree on the ideal size, the general consensus is that the top limit is between 300 and 400 students for elementary schools and 1,000 students for secondary schools. Most researchers also agree that any school with enrollment above 2,000 is much too large.

The Proper Federal Role

In his State of the Union address, President Clinton again called on Congress to pass school construction legislation. Rising enrollment, aging buildings, federal mandates, and deferred maintenance have combined to create an infrastructure crisis in school districts. Clinton proposes to use interest-free school bonds, subsidized by

federal tax credits, to stimulate school construction and repair. After bitterly opposing Clinton on this score for several years, congressional Republicans have indicated they will offer a competing proposal.

School construction is an important issue that demands national attention. But before Democrats and Republicans rush to outspend each other on bricks and mortar, they should heed Gore's sound advice and use a school-construction bill to address the issue of school size.

Washington shouldn't micro-manage local decisions about individual school design. On the other hand, taxpayers have a right to expect that their tax dollars are being spent in ways that help children. The sensible approach is to include broad guidelines in school-construction legislation that encourage building designs that maximize benefits for kids. And as Gore proposes, school districts that plan to build smaller schools or subdivide large schools into smaller units should be first in line for funding. Finally, Washington should collect more data and sponsor more research on the effects of school size.

Every aspect of our education system should be designed to facilitate high academic performance. School buildings are no exception. In the coming century, schools should be smaller, more autonomous, more flexible, more accountable for results — and above all, safer. Gore's proposal points us in the right direction. ♦

Andrew Rotherham is director of the Progressive Policy Institute's 21st Century Schools Project.

THE DANCE OF DENIALS

There Must Be an Immediate Cease-fire in the Marketing of Violence to Children

BY JOE LIEBERMAN

Over the last decade, our society has sporadically engaged in a debate on whether the entertainment media harm our children with their violent and sexually graphic movies, music, video games, and television. This maddeningly repetitive debate might be called the dance of denials: Hollywood's standards plummet, advocacy groups and political leaders alternately express outrage or appeal for restraint, industry leaders claim there is no evidence that their products have negative effects, more violent and prurient products get sold, and little changes except for the profit margins.

But the school massacre in Littleton, Colo., coming on the heels of the other school shootings, has momentarily halted this fruitless dance and, I hope, fundamentally

shifted the debate. Now the question most Americans seem to be asking is not whether the romanticized and sanitized vision of violence the entertainment media present to our kids is in fact harmful, but what we as a national family are going to do about it.

This consensus is reflected in public opinion surveys conducted in the wake of Littleton. They indicate that a clear majority of Americans are worried about the media's impact on kids. For example, a NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll found that 79 percent believe that the influence of violent and sexually explicit media is serious problem.

Of course, there are still doubters and naysayers, mostly in the entertainment industry, who insist on denying the evidence — the persuasive weight of scien-



Speeches and Testimony

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.
September 15, 1999**

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 as 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 transition 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.

Let's 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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This page last modified September 16, 1999 (pjk)



Contact: Julie Green (202) 401-3026

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

America's High School Students: Their Values & Expectations

**Commonwealth Club of Silicon Valley
San Jose, California
August 25, 1999**

Good afternoon. It is a great pleasure to be here in San Jose and to be part of the Commonwealth Club tradition. This is my third day in California visiting with teachers, parents, students and technology leaders. Today, I would like to talk to you about the hopes and aspirations of America's teenagers.

I am pleased to base my observations on the *Shell Poll* of over 1,000 high school students, which we are releasing today. I thank Shell for its very generous contribution. Peter Hart, the very well known and respected pollster, conducted this poll. I will tell you that this is a very honest poll. Over 20% of the students who were polled said flat out that they hated school or liked it only a little.

Now, the first thing you may be asking is why even do such a poll. Well, my answer is very simple.

We have more young people in our nation's schools than ever before - over 53.2 million - and many more of them are going to be high school students. Right now, 13.5 million young people go to our nation's high schools. In the next ten years, we are going to have to educate and find space for an additional 1.3 million high school students.

California is at the very center of this rising tide of teenagers. In the next ten years, California is going to have to find additional classrooms for over 260,000 more teenagers. That's a lot of young people. So it makes a good deal of sense to me to take a closer look at the values and expectations of all of these young people.

There is another reason why we need to put the "spotlight" on the American high school. There is a tendency in America to stereotype just about everything. Our high schools are no exception. Movies from "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" to "Clueless" to Matthew Broderick's latest movie, "The Election" have a wonderful time portraying the American high school as full of perky blonde cheerleaders, dumb jocks, quirky nerds and teachers who haven't a clue.

But as you will see in this revealing poll, our high school students deserve

a much more sophisticated and well-rounded image - one that is more promising, ambitious, striving and open to the future.

The first very big thing that America's teenagers are telling us is that it is "tough" to be a teenager. Two out of three teenagers use the word "tough" to describe their lives. This number is even higher for young women and African-American teenagers. So why do America's teenagers describe their lives as "tough"?

Well this is what they tell us. They feel a great deal of pressure to get good grades (44%) and to get into college (32%), and those two pressures outweigh the pressure they feel to "fit in socially" (29%) use drugs (19%) or be sexually active (13%).

In my opinion, this is good news. America's teenagers are more worried about getting good grades than using drugs or being sexually active. Yet, the pressure to be sexually active is very strongly felt by 9th and 10th grade girls.

At the same time, America's teenagers in overwhelming numbers feel happy (90%), cared about (91%), confident (90%) motivated (86%) and fortunate (84%). Our children are optimistic, resilient, and three-fourths of them think the future looks very promising.

There is a wonderful hopefulness in our teenagers, which stands in sharp contrast to a consistent negativity that all too often seems to define how we adults think about our young people.

Last year, for example, the *Public Agenda* released a study entitled "Kids These Days" which told us that a majority of adults in America viewed teenagers in the "negative" and saw them as "rude, irresponsible and wild." This study went on to suggest that the majority of adults believed that our young people were "failing to learn such values as honesty, respect and responsibility."

Yet, our poll of America's teenagers gives us a very different picture. They rank being honest, working hard, being a good student, and helping others as being far more important than all the things that make someone popular - like having lots of friends, being a great athlete, having a lot of money or having a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Our young people seem to have their heads on their shoulders. They recognize that the stakes are high in this new time when learning how to learn and keep on learning is the key to future success.

Let's give our young people the vote of confidence they deserve. They may dress differently, look differently, and listen to music that is simply beyond us, but they are not a lost generation or a negative generation. They are quite the opposite of slackers. By and large, America's teenagers are thinking hard about their future. A large majority is planning to go on to college.

Eighty percent of our teenagers believe that "it's better to aim high and have big ambitions" rather than just play it safe or muddle through. These are encouraging findings. They suggest to me that we really do need to develop a new language and mindset that reflects the hope and aspirations our high school students have for the coming times.

Are all of America's high school students doing well? Our poll tells us that 80% of teenagers seem to have their act together but there is another 20% that really does need our help.

One in 5 teenagers say they have their hands full grappling with five or more serious problems and all at one time. Just listen to some of the problems that they are contending with: doing poorly in school, pressure to use chugs and alcohol; a difficult family life; being worried about violence; an unwanted pregnancy, and not having enough to do. In real numbers that's about 2.7 million teenagers.

Here is another piece of news that may surprise you. When America's teenagers look for help and guidance they turn to their parents. About 80% of all teenagers "rely a lot for support" and guidance on their parents. This finding should reassure parents that all of their hard work pays off. Despite the fact that your teenagers may have a big "keep out" sign on their bedroom door - your teenagers depend on you to be there when they need advice.

The *Shell Poll* tells us two other fascinating facts about how involved parents can make a real difference in the lives of their teenagers.

The first fact goes back to the earliest days of parenting. Teenagers who were read to as young children every day seem to make much more of an effort "to do their best" in school. The lesson here is that all those nights reading to a toddler really do pay off in the end.

The other fact speaks to how parents can help their teenagers prepare for the future. Teenagers are getting the message from parents about drugs, drinking, sexual relations, and which kids to hang out with. Most parents are getting through when it comes to helping young people make good choices.

At the same time, teenagers are telling us that they could use some help when it comes to sorting out their emotions and making good choices about career and job decisions. Only 40% of our sample told us that they were very confident about dealing with their emotions, and only half felt very confident about making good career choices.

When it comes to getting an education, America's teenagers give their school solid marks. Sixty-six percent of our sample give their school a grade of "B" or better for giving them a good education.

We asked teenagers to rate their high school in 16 different categories from teaching core academic subjects like math and science, to computer availability, to racial harmony, to feeling safe at school. In 15 of the 16 categories teenagers gave their high schools a rating of "B" or better.

Young people give high schools very high marks for giving them access to technology, teaching the arts and music, giving them advice on how to prepare for college and generally challenging them.

Seven in ten teenagers say they have a teacher that they feel close to, and close to half of those polled say they have had a teacher who has changed their lives. Teaching Mrs. Tingle, a current movie which portrays a teacher in a very harsh light, is now in movie theaters across the

country - but it certainly doesn't reflect the thinking of America's high school students.

Three-fourths (77%) of all high school students feel very safe going to school. That's a very solid number given the tragedies of the last two years. African-American teenagers, however, feel less confident when it comes to safety. Over 40% of African-American students give their schools a "C" or lower when it comes to safety.

America's high school students also have some very clear opinions about how they would improve the American high school experience. They don't like big, impersonal schools. Nearly half of our sample gave high schools low marks when it comes to providing students with smaller classes and more personal attention. High school students also believe that smaller schools are safer. This is one more reason why this nation should get on with the business of building more high schools.

Let's remember that many of our nation's high schools are already overcrowded, and they are going to get even more crowded in the years ahead. This is why President Clinton has been asking the Congress to pass school construction and modernization legislation for the last three years.

While young people give schools high marks for encouraging racial harmony (72%), almost half of our sample gave their schools low marks for encouraging "respect" among each other. Even though 4 out of 5 high school students feel like they "belong" to their school, they are also telling us that they need help connecting with and respecting each other.

In this post-Columbine environment, we need to be sensitive to this issue and make sure that no teenager feels alienated or disconnected. Here is an opportunity for schools to invite the community in, and to expand opportunities like peer mentoring and conflict resolution classes to help young people learn how to respect each other.

The poll also confirms that high school students are looking for help in sustaining their own positive values. The day-to-day social scene at the typical American high school seems to be at the heart of their concerns.

The pressure to be popular and the values associated with popularity seem to be "out-of-step" with the positive values that matter most to the majority of our young people.

Our teenagers are also telling us that for all their ambition and looking to the future, nearly 40% of all teenagers work "just hard enough" to get by in school. Here we see a gender gap emerging with a solid 67% of all girls making their best effort compared to only 53% of all boys.

Girls are also thinking much more about the future compared to teenage boys. Eighty-four percent of all girls have thought hard about their futures compared to just over 70% of all boys. While young men and women are equally happy and confident, young women do a lot more "worrying" - a gender gap of 18%.

This poll suggests two other areas of concern that deserve our attention.

First, we need to tune into the fact that 43% of our teenagers are telling

us that drug and alcohol use is a very serious problem among their friends. Last week, the National Household Survey on Drug Abuse reported that drug use among teenagers is dropping. That is very good news. But today's poll tells us that we have a long way to go before we can rest easy when it comes to drugs and alcohol.

A second concern, while the great majority of our young people are looking to the future with a strong sense of optimism and are preparing to go to college, we still have 19% who are not college bound. These young people seem less confident about the future, and 44% of them are asking for more advice and guidance about their lives. This group of young people should not be forgotten or ignored.

I think by now you have a sense of the hope and promise as well as the concerns and worries of America's teenagers. Overall, I believe this survey is a positive report that should give us some satisfaction that our young people are heading in the right direction.

Our teenagers feel the pressure of growing up but they are coping well and they are confident. The future is there to grab if we help them. Yes, America's teenagers are optimistic and striving. Their willingness to aim high and accept new challenges surely should encourage us to have the same sense of optimism when it comes to improving American education.

Let's put away the nostalgia that some people seem so determined to hold on to at all costs - the belief that once there was a time in the past when everything in American education was somehow better. Let's see our high school students for who they are and what they want to become and help them in the here and now.

I believe that America's high school students are prepared to accept more responsibility rather than less, and challenge of making good choices about their lives - if we help them. They are a striving group and full of promise.

If we believe in them - and aim as high as they do - I believe America will be more prosperous, more hopeful, a more educated and a better nation in the years to come. Thank you.

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This page last modified August 26, 1999 (etn/jls)