



U.S. MAYORS ADOPT ALLIANCE'S RECOMMENDATIONS ON TEACHER INDUCTION AT ANNUAL CONFERENCE

At their annual meeting last month, mayors from across the country agreed to become more active in influencing “the preparation, recruitment, induction and retention of teachers” in urban school systems. In addition, they unanimously adopted a series of education resolutions in support of reforming high schools, afterschool programs, equity and adequacy in education funding, quality pre-kindergarten education for all children, school construction, schools as centers of community, and urban summer education programs.

The resolution concerning teacher preparation and induction was in alignment with many of the findings and recommendations found in the Alliance for Excellent Education’s recent report *Tapping the Potential: Retaining and Developing High-Quality New Teachers*. Like the Alliance, the **U.S. Conference of Mayors** believes that urban school systems should use teacher preparation funds from the No Child Left Behind Act to provide comprehensive induction programs to all beginning teachers.

The mayors also asked Congress to include a comprehensive induction requirement for all grant recipients under Title II in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. Finally, the mayors asked Congress to provide new funding to “ensure that every new teacher in our nation’s highest need schools receives the support and training, and has quality work conditions necessary to continue to teach in urban schools.”

In the resolution on reforming high schools, the mayors chose to focus on ensuring that every student is adequately prepared for college or the workforce. They noted that “no state can currently claim that every student who earns a high school diploma is academically prepared for postsecondary education and the world of work.” In California, for example, 58 percent of the 38,086 freshmen who enrolled in the state university system in the fall of 2003 did not have basic English and math skills.

The resolution called for the federal government to take several steps to change this situation: to influence states to ensure that their standards are aligned with the knowledge and skills expected by colleges and employers; to require, through the Higher Education Act, reauthorization data on the numbers of students who take remedial courses in college; and to take steps to “provide influence and support such as providing student financial aid incentives for high school students who take a college or workplace readiness curriculum.” In their respective presidential campaigns, both **President George W. Bush** and **Senator John Kerry** have focused on the need for a rigorous high school curriculum.

U.S. Mayors Adopt Alliance's Recommendations on Teacher Induction

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These new resolutions come on the heels of another, passed at last year's annual conference, that called on Congress to pass and fund legislation that establishes an adolescent reading program. According to the resolution, the program would be "similar to Reading First, but focused on middle and high school students to ensure that they have the skills to complete high school, attend college, and be a part of America's 21st century workforce." The resolution further encouraged federal, state, and local governments to "address the academic and social needs of the six million children at risk of dropping out of high school."

The U.S. Conference of Mayors is the official nonpartisan organization of the nation's 1,183 U.S. cities with populations of 30,000 or more.

Learn more about the U.S. Conference of Mayors and its annual conference at <http://www.usmayors.org/>.

The Alliance's *Tapping the Potential* report is available at <http://www.all4ed.org/publications/TappingThePotential/index.html>.



CHICAGO TO CLOSE WORST-PERFORMING SCHOOLS: Approximately Sixty Schools to Close Over Six Years, Replaced by One Hundred Small Schools

Last week, **Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley** announced that he will close sixty of the city's worst-performing schools over the next six years. They will then be reopened as approximately one hundred small schools. Daley's plan, called Renaissance 2010, intends to recreate more than 10 percent of the city's schools—one-third as charter schools, one-third as independently operated contract schools, and the remainder as small schools run by the district—by 2010. He will close schools that have failed to show improvement on test scores, attendance, graduation rates, and other indicators.

While Renaissance 2010 will include some new construction, many existing school buildings—especially large high schools—will be divided into smaller schools-within-schools. The curriculum is expected to vary widely from school to school, with some focusing on college prep or job training and others becoming military academies or language, art, math, or science centers.

Supporters call Daley's plan the boldest move yet from a mayor who intends to make education reform part of his legacy. The *Chicago Tribune* called it the "most ambitious effort in a decade to remake the nation's third-largest school system." **Tom Vander Ark, executive director of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**, said the proposal was the "most important thing that's happened in high school reform in this generation." The plan is expected to put Chicago at the forefront of urban school systems that are turning to corporations and private foundations—such as the Gates Foundation—to help turn around struggling schools. Already, the Gates Foundation has invested \$20 million in Chicago schools.

"Despite our best efforts and the hard work of teachers, principals, parents and students, some schools have consistently underperformed," Daley said. "We must face the reality that—for

schools that have consistently underperformed—it’s time to start over. We have a sacred obligation to our children to give them the best education possible. Fear of the unknown can never relieve us of this obligation.”

Chicago’s business and civic community has eagerly pledged to step forward with financial capital. In fact, the **Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago**, an organization of leaders from seventy-five of the Chicago region’s largest corporations, professional firms, and universities, is establishing an organization called New Schools for Chicago, which plans to raise at least \$50 million in private support to attract and support new school leaders and to help subsidize expensive start-up costs.

“The current system is like having one supermarket in a little town,” said **R. Eden Martin, president of the Civic Committee**. “Monopoly breeds relative inefficiency and high costs. Those who don’t fare well in competition tend to fall by the wayside. We believe that New Schools for Chicago will provide families with educational options and create a more competitive environment—which will lead to higher academic standards and greater accountability in public schools.”

To learn more about the mayor’s plan, read “Daley Set to Remake Troubled Schools,” at <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-0406250358jun25,1,3227100.story?coll=chi-news-hed>.



LOCATING THE DROPOUT CRISIS: Almost 50 Percent of African-American Students Attend Weak High Schools

Nearly half of our nation’s African-American students and nearly 40 percent of Latino students attend high schools in which graduation is not the norm, according to a new study by researchers at the **Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University**. Using data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), **researchers Robert Balfanz and Nettie Legters** measured the “promoting power” of 10,000 regular and vocational high schools with enrollments of more than 300 students.

According to Balfanz and Legters, schools have “weak promoting power” if the freshman class shrinks by 40 percent or more by the time students reach their senior year. These schools are overwhelmingly attended by minority students. By comparison, only 11 percent of white students attend these aptly named “dropout factories.”

The statistics presented in their report, *Locating the Dropout Crisis*, are deeply troubling. In 2,000 high schools across the country, a typical freshman class shrinks by 40 percent or more by the time students reach their senior year. And the numbers are getting worse: between 1993 and 2002, the number of high schools with weak promoting power increased by 75 percent.

Nearly half of the nation’s dropout factories are in the South and Southwest. Five southern states—Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, and Texas— collectively lead the nation in both total number and level of concentration of high schools with weak promoting power. Northern states do not fare much better, according to the report. More than half of African-American students in Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania attend high

Locating the Dropout Crisis

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schools where the majority of students do not graduate on time, if at all. African-American students in these states are up to ten times more likely than white students to attend a high school with very weak promoting power, high numbers of dropouts, and low graduation rates.

Balfanz and Legters, who have worked to reform failing high schools for a decade, write that “these findings are a call to action. We must no longer tolerate the squandered potential, limited life chances, and social malaise that result from poorly educating our nation’s youth.”

The authors suggest several solutions to resolve the crisis faced by students who attend these underperforming high schools. Their recommendations include making middle schools more effective so that students come to high school prepared, and comprehensive high school reform (which includes changes in the way schools are organized, courses geared to the needs and interests of students, and extensive training and support for teachers).

They also call for a substantial increase in the resources available to transform or replace the high schools that produce the greatest number of dropouts. Additional resources would make a marked difference, they argue, since minority high schools with more resources (such as selective programs, higher per-pupil expenditures, and a suburban location) successfully promote students to senior status at the same rate as majority white schools.

The authors note that no one strategy or reform model will work for all schools or locations, but point out that a national effort to dramatically improve the education provided to students who attend the 2,000 high schools where graduation is not the norm would bring enormous economic and social returns to the nation.

Balfanz and Legters write, “Increasing momentum for high school reform is a promising development but must not become a passing fad. With sustained commitment and judicious use of resources, transforming the American high school will be a powerful vehicle to achieving a more just and prosperous society.”

The complete report, *Locating the Dropout Crisis*, including charts with state-by-state information, is available at http://www.csos.jhu.edu/tdhs/rsch/Locating_Dropouts.pdf.



IMPROVING THE ECONOMIC AND LIFE OUTCOMES OF AT-RISK YOUTH: New Report Finds That “Reconnection” Programs Must Focus on Education

At a time when having a high school diploma and postsecondary education is more important than ever to developing a successful career path, too many of this nation’s youth are stumbling down paths that lead to dead-end jobs, social disengagement, or imprisonment.

This disturbing trend is especially prevalent among low-income and minority youth, who are more likely to drop out of high school, less likely to complete college, and more likely to be imprisoned than their white counterparts and those from higher-income families. In fact, one-

third of Hispanics and one-fifth of African Americans between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four did not have a high school diploma and were not enrolled in high school or college in 2000. Furthermore, nearly 75 percent of state prisoners did not earn high school diplomas. We can no longer ignore the connections between low levels of educational attainment and the poor life outcomes faced by all too many young people in this country.

Robert Ivry and **Fred Doolittle** from **MDRC**, a nonpartisan social policy research organization, argue in *Improving the Economic and Life Outcomes of At-Risk Youth* that programs which are successful at reconnecting youth to educational and career development opportunities must “focus on education, including computer literacy; paid work or training; the involvement of caring and committed adults; special services for youth with language and reading difficulties, mental health, or other special needs; resiliency skills; and leadership development.”

Programs such as **Gateway to College at Portland (Oregon) Community College** do just that. Gateway to College allows high school dropouts with at least an eighth-grade reading level to enroll in small college preparatory courses of no more than twenty students. These courses are intended to improve their reading, writing, mathematics, and career-planning skills so that they can progress quickly to postsecondary work. In addition, each student is assigned to a resource specialist who provides them with individual support and advising. Upon successful completion of the preparatory courses, students enroll in standard Portland Community College courses that count toward their high school diploma and an associate’s degree.

Community colleges in other states, including Maryland and California, are beginning to recognize the success of Gateway to College and are replicating the program in their own communities. Other plans, such as **Youth Enhancement for Success and the Youth Skills Development and Training Program**, sponsored by the **Alternative Schools Network in Chicago**, are also making great strides in reconnecting youth to educational and career paths. These programs offer academic and career development advising, counseling, and other support services to youth who have dropped out of school.

Despite the achievements of these and other reconnection programs, Ivry and Doolittle explain that “many of the most comprehensive, intensive programs have a hard time enrolling and retaining young people.”

Missouri Juvenile Prison System Focuses on Reconnecting Young People

A recent *Los Angeles Times* article reports that approximately 50 percent of those released from California juvenile prisons will be imprisoned again within two years. In response to a similar problem, Missouri has redesigned its juvenile prison system, changing it from merely a long-term holding cell for disconnected youth to one that is focused on reconnecting young people to meaningful personal, educational, and career development. The new system in Missouri is centered around intense rehabilitation through individual treatment plans, academic development, group therapy sessions, highly trained staff, “trackers” who monitor each person’s progress and small group environments that foster trust and reliance on one another. Criminal justice administrators from several states, including Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, and New Jersey, are changing their systems in the hope of repeating Missouri’s success.

Improving the Economic and Life Outcomes of At-Risk Youth

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These program models demonstrate that there are features of youth reconnection initiatives that can be successful in a variety of settings—including academic and career guidance, individualized support networks, and small group environments. However, in order to overcome self-selection and serve greater numbers of at-risk youth, Ivry and Doolittle note that it is important for these programs to garner broader public support and make concerted efforts to actively engage disconnected youth, who are most at risk of dropping out of school and heading down a dangerous path.

While reconnection programs are clearly meeting a great need in our society, they should not be considered substitutes for quality middle and high schools that prepare students for postsecondary education and lasting careers through small learning environments, highly qualified and effective staff, and individualized support. Reconnection programs that have proved successful in improving the prospects for at-risk youth must continue to be developed while the nation acts on its public responsibility to provide quality educational opportunities to all students.

Improving the Economic and Life Outcomes of At-Risk Youth is available at <http://www.hewlett.org/Archives/Publications/improvingOutcomes.htm>.

Read more about Missouri's program at <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-juvie1jul01,1,3039931.story?coll=la-home-headlines>.

“Choosing Prisoners Over Pupils”

In an op-ed for the *Washington Post*, “Choosing Prisoners Over Pupils,” **Andrew Block and Virginia Weisz** argue that the educational opportunity that was promised in *Brown vs. Board of Education* is as “painfully out of reach as ever for our most disadvantaged children.” They write that this crisis is most apparent in high-poverty school systems, where “African-American males are now more likely to end up in jail or in prison than in college.”

The article notes that several states now place spending for correctional facilities at a higher priority than public and secondary education. In California, the authors write, state correction officials use the percentage of children who read at a fourth-grade level or lower to help gauge the number of prison beds they will need in the future.

This estimate is supported by research which has demonstrated that students who fail to graduate from high school are more likely to participate in criminal activity than students who do graduate. In fact, high school dropouts are 3.5 times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested in their lifetimes.

In their concluding paragraph, the authors make a plea for an investment in education now that will pay off many times over in the future:

Not only do we spend more to imprison, we spend less to fund alternatives to prison that are more productive and less costly. For those who waste years of life in prison, we pay a price tag of millions. With a significant fraction of that cost, we could educate and employ many of those same people. The question must be faced: Are we really leaving no children behind, or are we simply putting them out of sight, and, sadly, out of mind?

Read “Choosing Prisoners Over Pupils” at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A29806-2004Jul5.html>.



MURDOCH SAYS AMERICAN STUDENTS TO LOSE JOBS TO BETTER EDUCATED COUNTERPARTS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES: Urges Business Community to Offer More Support to Schools

In 1999, the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) found that American fourth graders are near the top in international comparisons when it comes to math and science, but that by the twelfth grade American students are near the bottom. In a speech last month before the New York City Leadership Academy, **News Corporation Chairman and CEO Rupert Murdoch** warned that unless public schools are turned around, American students are going to lose jobs to their better educated counterparts from other countries.

“Unless we get education right, this new American century may not last more than a couple of decades,” Murdoch said. “Frankly, I think too few of my peers in the corporate world are stepping up to that responsibility to support the schools. After all, their corporations will be some of the major beneficiaries if this initiative works.”

Murdoch’s speech was the first such annual lecture at the Leadership Academy, which was opened last year to train school principals and will soon graduate its first class of seventy-seven principals. It is a cornerstone of **Mayor Michael Bloomberg** and **New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein’s** Children First Reform efforts and was established to recruit and train outstanding principals to lead New York City’s public schools.

For more information, visit

<http://www.nycenet.edu/FundForPublicSchools/News/rupert+murdoch.htm>.

Nestlé and Reading Is Fundamental Sponsor Competition to Name the Very Best in Youth

The Nestlé Very Best In Youth, cosponsored by **Nestlé** and **Reading Is Fundamental (RIF)**, honors thirty young people who have made reading a priority and in the process have made tangible contributions to the quality of life in their communities. The youth, selected from nominations from RIF coordinators, volunteers, parents, and teachers, will be featured in a special publication and honored at a ceremony in Los Angeles in July 2005. Nomination forms must be submitted by November 1, 2004.

Every day, all across the country, young people are making their communities better. To help, Nestlé donates \$1,000 to the favorite charity of each Nestlé Very Best In Youth winner. In the past, winners have used the money to set up a RIF program at a local elementary school, create sports programs for handicapped kids, augment food programs for the homeless, and buy books for underprivileged youngsters.

More information, including nomination forms and eligibility requirements, is available at <http://www.rif.org/what/eventscontests/verybestinyouth/default.msp>.

Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, D.C., and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a nonprofit organization working to make it possible for America’s secondary school students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.



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