



StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress



ACHIEVE AND NGA HOST NATIONAL EDUCATION SUMMIT ON HIGH SCHOOLS: Governors, Educators, and Business Leaders Meet to Discuss High School Reform

On February 26–27, forty-five governors joined educators and business leaders at the 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools to discuss strategies to transform America’s high schools and restore the value of a high school diploma. The summit, which was cosponsored by Achieve, Inc., and the National Governors Association (NGA), sought to redefine the role of the high school in America while better connecting its curriculum to the expectations that high school graduates will face in college and the workforce.

“This summit is a major step forward in what I hope will be sustained momentum towards comprehensive reform in dozens of states throughout the country,” said **NGA Chairman and Virginia Governor Mark Warner (D)**. “When this summit ends, our work in states and territories will just be beginning. It’s time to turn rhetoric into reality.”

During the summit, governors and participants focused on an array of reform-related issues that were released as part of a five-point action agenda states can follow to raise graduation rates and close preparation gaps. According to the action agenda, governors and business and education leaders can ensure that all high school graduates are prepared for postsecondary education and work by developing a comprehensive plan for their states to

- restore value to the high school diploma;
- redesign high schools;
- give high school students the excellent teachers and principals they need;
- set goals, measure progress, and hold high schools and colleges accountable; and
- streamline and improve educational governance.

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, who addressed the attendees, remarked on the similarities between the governors’ action agenda and President Bush’s High School Initiative. She said that improving the quality of high school education is a problem that has been building for years. “It’s one we cannot avoid—a national priority,” Spellings said.

At the end of her speech, Spellings said that a tremendous battle must be won to reform American high schools. “Change is hard,” she said. “Getting every child to graduate high school—with a meaningful diploma in their hands—is one of the biggest challenges our country faces. It’s never been done. That’s why there is push-back from both sides of the political spectrum. In Washington, when both sides attack you, it means you’re doing something right.”

Achieve and NGA Host National Education Summit on High Schools (Continued from p. 1)

In the keynote address, **Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft and cofounder of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation**, observed that today's high schools are unequipped to adequately prepare the workforce of the twenty-first century. "Training the workforce of tomorrow with the high schools of today is like trying to teach kids about today's computers on a fifty-year-old mainframe," he said. "It's the wrong tool for the times."

Gates, whose foundation has invested nearly \$1 billion so far to help redesign the American high school, talked about the three building blocks of better high schools, the "new three r's": Rigor—making sure that all students are given a challenging curriculum; Relevance—ensuring that students have courses that clearly relate to their lives and goals; and Relationships—seeing to it that kids have a number of adults who know them and can push them to achieve. All of these, he said, are easier to promote in smaller high schools. Currently, the Gates Foundation is supporting more than fifteen hundred new or redesigned high schools across the country.

In discussing his rationale for focusing on high schools, Gates said, "We have decided that high schools are a crucial intervention point for equality because that's where children's paths diverge—some go on to lives of accomplishment and privilege; others to lives of frustration, joblessness, and jail."

At the conclusion of the summit, the NGA and six partner foundations announced a \$42 million initiative to ensure the summit's call to overhaul the nation's high school system translates into action. The six foundations, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, The Wallace Foundation, The Prudential Foundation and the State Farm Foundation, committed \$23 million to help states create and implement policy strategies designed to improve graduation and college-readiness rates. The remaining \$19 million will come from matching funds from state grant recipients.

"An Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools" is available at [http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/actionagenda2005/\\$file/actionagenda2005.pdf](http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/actionagenda2005/$file/actionagenda2005.pdf).

Bill Gates's speech is available at http://www.2005summit.org/en_US/pdf/GatesRemarks.doc.

Thirteen-State Coalition Formed to Improve High Schools

At the close of the 2005 National Education Summit on High Schools, Achieve, Inc., announced that a group of thirteen states have formed a new coalition to improve high schools. The states, which together educate more than a third of all U.S. students, agreed to significantly raise the rigor of their high school standards, assessments, and curricula to better align them with the demands of postsecondary education and work.

"For the first time, a group of states will reshape an American institution that has far outlasted its effectiveness," said **Ohio Gov. Bob Taft, co-chair of Achieve**. "More than five million American students each year—35 percent of public school students nationwide—will be expected to meet higher requirements under this landmark initiative."

In agreeing to join the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network, the states—Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Texas—will develop a specific plan and timetable for addressing ADP Network objectives, while Achieve will report regularly on each state's progress. The ADP Network is managed by Achieve, Inc., and carries forward the agenda of the ADP, which last year identified the skills that students need in order to succeed after high school.

More information is available at <http://www.achieve.org/achieve.nsf/ADP-Network?OpenForm>.



PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND COLLEGE-READINESS RATES: New Report Finds 71 Percent National Graduation Rate, 34 Percent College- Readiness Rate

Only 71 percent of the Class of 2002 graduated with a regular diploma, according to a new report from the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. Among minorities, graduation rates were even more grim, with only 56 percent of black students and 52 percent of Hispanic students earning high school diplomas, compared to 78 percent of white students. The report, *Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates: 1991–2002*, also found that only 34 percent of students who entered ninth grade in public schools left school with both a regular diploma and the “abilities and qualifications required to even apply to a four-year college.”

The report takes issue with the way graduation rates are calculated by government agencies, referring to them as “consistently among the least plausible,” at both the national and state levels. “Unfortunately, even in this era of increased public school accountability and transparency, officially reported graduation rates are often misleading,” the report reads. “Some states’ official graduation rates are so improbably high that they would be laughable if the issue were not so serious.”

To calculate graduation rates, the report “estimates the number of students who enter a ninth-grade class, makes some adjustments for changes in the population, and then divides the resulting number into the number of students who actually graduated with a regular diploma.” The formula used enrollment data provided by the U.S. Department of Education in its Common Core of Data. As the report’s authors explain, enrollment data act as a more reasonable foundation on which to base a calculation of graduation rates because a large portion of state and federal funds that a school receives is directly related to the size of its enrollment. Schools, therefore, have a strong motivation to accurately count all students who walk through their doors. Also, because of the linkage between school spending and enrollments, state officials have an incentive to check enrollment counts for accuracy.

Based on the data and formula described above, the following states had the highest and lowest high school graduation rates for the Class of 2002:

Highest		Lowest	
New Jersey	89%	South Carolina	53%
Iowa	85%	Georgia	56%
Wisconsin	85%	Tennessee	57%
North Dakota	85%	Alabama	58%
Minnesota	84%	Alaska	59%
Nebraska	83%	Florida	59%

What is College Readiness?

To be considered “college ready,” students must cross three hurdles. First, they must graduate with a regular diploma (as opposed to a GED or other form of certification). Second, students must have met the academic requirements of minimally selective four-year colleges—four years

Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates

(Continued from p. 3)

of English, three years of math, and two years each of natural science, social science, and foreign language. Third, a student must be basically literate—in this case, he or she must score at the basic level or above on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reading test.

Nationwide, only 34 percent of all students of the Class of 2002 cleared all three hurdles and were considered college ready. White students were slightly better prepared for college (40 percent), while only 23 percent of African Americans and 20 percent of Hispanic students graduated college ready.

In many states, college-readiness rates were half the reported high school graduation rates. According to the report, this disparity occurs because the minimum standards for earning a high school diploma are often lower than those required to enter even a “minimally selective four-year college.”

The following states posted the highest and lowest college-readiness rates in 2002:

Highest		Lowest	
New Jersey	45%	Alaska	27%
Pennsylvania	41%	Indiana	28%
West Virginia	41%	Illinois	29%
Arkansas	40%	South Carolina	29%
New Hampshire	40%	Four states tied with	30%
Virginia	40%		

When compared to the 1991 national graduation rate of 72 percent and college-readiness rate of 25 percent, the report concluded that while schools are graduating about the same percentage of students as before, more of the students who graduate leave high school with the qualifications necessary to attend college. It attributes higher college-readiness rates to “increased standards and accountability programs over the last decade,” which have required students to take more rigorous coursework.

The complete report is available at http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_08.htm.



RISING TO THE CHALLENGE: High School Graduates, College Instructors, and Employers Lament Lack of Graduates' Preparation for College and Work

Nearly two in five college students say that there are gaps between the education they received in high school and the “overall skills, abilities, and work habits that are expected of them today in college and in the work force,” according to a recent survey conducted for Achieve, Inc. *Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work?* is based on a survey of college students, high school graduates who went directly into the workforce, college professors, and employers. Even among students who thought they were “extremely or well prepared” for college-level work, the study found that 31 percent still had to take at least one remedial class in college. Among noncollege students, 49 percent said that high school left them

unprepared for the workforce, and 84 percent said they will need more formal education or training to “achieve what they hope for in life.”

“We’re hearing a clear message from our graduates that we do them no favors if we set the bar for performance too low,” said **Ohio Governor Bob Taft (R), a cochair of Achieve, Inc.** “Young people are telling us loudly and clearly that they want to be challenged. This message should come as a wake up call to governors and other state officials to do all that is in their power to ensure that their states’ graduates are better prepared for success.”

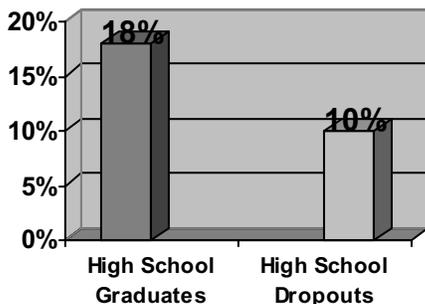
College instructors and employers agree that their students and employees are poorly prepared by their high schools. Only 18 percent of college instructors felt that most of their students were extremely or well prepared for college. Even at selective colleges, only 30 percent of instructors said that most of their students were well prepared. Instructors cited math and writing as the biggest needs for remediation in their students, estimating that fully half of the students at their schools were not adequately prepared to do college-level work in these subjects. Seven in ten instructors reported spending at least some amount of class time on material that should have been taught in high school. Overall, college instructors estimated that 42 percent of public high school graduates are not prepared for college-level classes.

Employers estimated that 46 percent of high school graduates who apply for jobs at their companies are “inadequately prepared for the work habits they will need on the job.” They say that 40 percent of applicants do not have adequate math skills, and 38 percent lack the writing skills that are needed to do the job. They also estimate that 45 percent of high school graduates do not have the skills needed to advance beyond entry-level jobs.

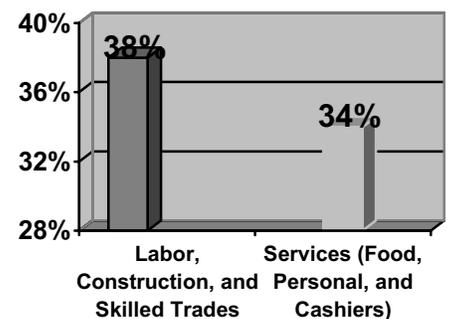
What Employers Are Saying ...

As the chart below demonstrates, employers think high school graduates are only slightly better prepared than high school dropouts for advancement in their companies. Only 19 percent of employers said that high school graduates with no further education represent a large proportion of the employees they hire.

Prepared for Advancement in My Company...



Most Common Jobs Filled by High School Graduates



Rising to the Challenge

(Continued from p. 5)

The study implies that we need to have higher expectations and more rigorous coursework at the high school level in order to adequately prepare students for college and the workforce. As the survey discovered, higher standards, tougher courses, and more evaluations were supported by college instructors and employers alike; and the high school graduates agreed. Sixty-five percent of college students and 77 percent of workers say that if they had known in high school what they knew later about college and the workforce, they would have worked harder and applied themselves more in high school, even if it meant less time for other activities.

The complete study is available at

[http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/pollreport/\\$file/pollreport.pdf](http://www.achieve.org/dstore.nsf/Lookup/pollreport/$file/pollreport.pdf).



ON COURSE FOR SUCCESS: Report Examines Successful High Schools, Reports on Necessary Components That Help Prepare Students for College and the Workplace

High schools that provide all students with high-level college-oriented content, well-qualified teachers, flexible teaching styles, and extra tutorial support are more successful in preparing their students for college and the workplace, according to a new study by ACT, an independent, not-for-profit organization, and the Education Trust. The report, *On Course for Success*, also defines the “specific rigorous academic skills,” as well as complete, detailed descriptions of courses in English, math, and science, that students need to be ready for college and work.

“Our previous research has shown how important it is for students to take not only the right *number* but also the right *kind* of courses in high school,” said **Cynthia B. Schmeiser**, ACT’s **senior vice president for research and development**. “With this study, we take the next step forward by specifying what these courses need to look like to successfully prepare students for college-level work.”

In completing the report, researchers and content experts from ACT and the Education Trust examined nine high schools with significant minority (40 percent or more) and low-income student (50 percent or more) populations from across the country. The schools they studied have been successful in producing a higher than average proportion of graduates who are college ready according to ACT’s College Readiness Benchmarks.¹ They observed classes, met with and surveyed teachers, reviewed instructional materials and course syllabi, and studied course procedures to determine the major characteristics shared by these high-performing high schools:

¹ In a spring 2003 study, ACT was able to identify assessment scores on the ACT test that were associated with successful performance in first-year college courses in English composition, college algebra, and college biology. The results showed that students with an ACT Assessment English score of 18 typically have a 50 percent chance of earning a B or higher grade, or an 80 percent chance of a C or higher grade, in standard English composition. In math, an ACT Assessment Mathematics score of 22 typically predicted college success, while an ACT Assessment Science score of 24 served as the benchmark for success in college-level science classes. Thus, students who meet or exceed these college-readiness ACT Assessment benchmarks are likely to be successful in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses, and could be considered to have graduated “college ready.”

- **High-level, college-oriented content in core courses.** Researchers found that each school offered “coherent sequences of courses focused on college-readiness content at a level beyond most state and district standards.”
- **Qualified and experienced teachers.** All teachers were certified in their subject area and nearly all had a master’s degree or higher. The report also noted that three-quarters of teachers had been teaching for ten or more years, with an overall average of nineteen years.
- **Teaching that is flexible and responsive to students.** Teachers frequently asked and answered questions and used real-world examples to help students make connections to the content.
- **Out-of-classroom support for students.** Students received extra, non-classroom-based support from tutors, teachers, and others, including peers and adults from the community.

“The national conversation about high school reform has come not a moment too soon,” said **Kati Haycock, director of the Education Trust.** “In this economy, the skills and knowledge needed for college are the very same as those that young people need to find and hold a decent job. Yet, too many high school courses leave seniors unprepared for the world they will face after graduation.”

The complete report is available at <http://www.act.org/path/policy/reports/success.html>.

Education Still High on the Public’s Mind

According to a Harvard University/Kaiser Family Foundation/Washington Post survey on Social Security, education remains very high on the public’s mind. The poll was conducted February 4–6, 2005, and has a margin of error of +/- 3 percent.

The question read: “For each issue I name, please tell me what kind of priority you think President Bush and the Congress should give it—the highest priority, a high priority but not the highest, or a lower priority than that?” Percentages listed below represent a combination of the responses indicating that issue should either be the highest priority or a high priority.

The Economy:	93 percent
Health Care:	91 percent
Education:	91 percent
Social Security:	87 percent
The Situation in Iraq:	85 percent
The War on Terror:	85 percent
The Environment:	81 percent
The Federal Budget Deficit:	80 percent
Taxes:	77 percent

Complete polling results are available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/sspoll020905.pdf>. The question listed above is available under part II of the poll.

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.



ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

1201 Connecticut Ave., NW
Suite 901
Washington, DC 20036

Phone 202 828-0828
Fax 202 828-0821
Alliance@all4ed.org
www.all4ed.org

StraightA's

Public Education Policy And Progress

Volume 5 No. 4: February 28, 2005

Bob Wise
President

Jason Amos
Editor

P R S R T
First Class Mail
U.S Postage
PAID
Permit No. 534
Woodbridge, VA

Volume 5 No. 4: February 28, 2005

In this issue:

- Achieve and NGA Host National Education Summit on High Schools: Governors, Educators, and Business Leaders Meet to Discuss High School Reform
- Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates: New Report Finds 71 Percent National Graduation Rate, 34 Percent College-Readiness Rate
- Rising to the Challenge: High School Graduates, College Instructors, and Employers Lament Lack of Graduates' Preparation for College and Work
- On Course for Success: Report Examines Successful High Schools, Reports on Necessary Components That Help Prepare Students for College and the Workplace



ALLIANCE FOR
EXCELLENT EDUCATION

<http://www.all4ed.org>