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ABSTRACT

This assessment of American education, carried out at the President's request, comes on the fifth anniversary of "A Nation at Risk," the landmark 1983 study of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. In this report, the Secretary of Education evaluates the progress of education reform during the last five years and sets forth the critical tasks that remain to improve American education. While noting that promising changes already underway may eventually show results, the Secretary warns of "bureaucratic inertia" and "those with a vested interest in the status quo," both of which may block worthwhile reforms. The report draws on advice from hundreds of individuals, a series of Education Department seminars on key topics of education reform, and on much research sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) measuring what students study and what they learn. A study of transcripts, comparing the courses taken by 15,000 high school students in 1987 with a similar group in 1982, reveals significant improvement. Nearly 30% of 1987 students completed the English, mathematics, science, and social studies portions of the "New Basics" curriculum recommended in "A Nation at Risk," compared with 13.4% in 1982. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) advance data from forthcoming reports indicates that math and science performance by American students is generally improving, but it remains weak compared to students in other countries. Five key imperatives are presented as recommendations that "should guide continued reform of American education": (1) strengthen content throughout the curriculum; (2) ensure equal intellectual opportunity for every student; (3) establish an ethos of achievement in every school; (4) recruit and reward good teachers and principals; (5) institute accountability throughout the education system for student learning. A Press Release and a copy of the Secretary's remarks at a Press Conference announcing the report are appended. (WTB)

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American Education

Making It Work

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William J. Bennett
U.S. Secretary of Education

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A Report to
the President
and the
American People

April 1988

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE SECRETARY

April 26, 1988

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On March 26, 1987, at an education symposium in Columbia, Missouri, you gave me "a little homework assignment": to prepare a report assessing America's educational progress since 1983, when the National Commission on Excellence in Education declared us "a nation at risk."

You asked that this new report explain "how far we've come and what still needs to be done, what reforms have worked and what principles should guide us as we move ahead."

In the months that followed, I consulted with many leaders in education and other fields, solicited and received written views from hundreds of interested Americans, and asked my staff to document -- with the best available research and information -- our successes and failures during this period.

On this, the fifth anniversary of the Commission's report, I am pleased to present the results of this endeavor to you, and to the American people.

Respectfully,

William J. Bennett

400 MARYLAND AVE., S.W. WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

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Introduction

Americans have always placed great trust in the power of education to improve their lives and the lives of their children. Indeed, to secure and protect the very conditions of liberty, America has counted on education. "No other sure foundation can be devised," Jefferson wrote, "for the preservation of freedom and happiness." Education, John Adams insisted, would be central to the national project: "Education for every class and rank of people down to the lowest and poorest."

Through much of our history, this faith in our schools as the prime engine of democracy, individual opportunity, and social mobility has been well-rewarded. There has never been a country whose system of education has served so many students so successfully for so many years and for such diverse ends. Ours is a tradition of educational achievement worthy of great pride.

Unfortunately, however, in recent decades our schools have too often failed to accomplish what Americans rightly expect of them. Though our allegiance to quality education remains firm, our confidence in the ability of our schools to realize that ideal has been battered by signs of decline: falling test scores, weakened curricula, classroom disorder, and student drug use. Five years ago, *A Nation At Risk,* the landmark report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, gave eloquent voice to the growing public sense of crisis about our children and their schools. "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future," the Commission warned. The American people agreed, and they have remained keenly interested in education reform as a national priority ever since. By sounding a needed alarm and by articulating sensible goals for improvement, *A Nation At Risk* helped focus and intensify a vigorous popular movement for reform of American education.

This report evaluates the state of American education today, five years later. It assesses what we have learned and accomplished in our efforts to restore purpose and quality to our schools. And it is a guide to the critical task that remains: putting our knowledge and experience together, applying it to each and every one of our schools, and once again making American education work.

Where We Stand Today

American education has made some undeniable progress in the last few years. The precipitous downward slide of previous decades has been arrested, and we have begun the long climb back to reasonable standards. Our students have made modest gains in achievement. They are taking more classes in basic subjects. And the performance of our schools is slightly improved. This is the good and welcome news: we are doing better than we were in 1983.

But we are certainly not doing well enough, and we are not doing well enough fast enough. We are still at risk. The absolute level at which our improvements are taking place is unacceptably low. Too many students do not graduate from our high schools, and too many of those who do graduate have been poorly educated.

Our students know too little, and their command of essential skills is too slight. Our schools still teach curricula of widely varying quality. Good schools for disadvantaged and minority children are much too rare, and the dropout rate among black and Hispanic youth in many of our inner cities is perilously high. An ethos of success is missing from too many American schools. Our teachers and principals are too often hired and promoted in ways that make excellence a matter of chance, not design. And the entire project of American education—at every level—remains insufficiently accountable for the result that matters most: student learning.

I base this capsule judgment of our accomplishments over the past five years on my own observations and on my analysis of the extensive student achievement and school performance data collected and synthesized for Part I of this report. Part I summarizes the best available recent education research and draws upon a good deal of as yet unpublished research conducted or commissioned by the Department of Education.

My judgment of the work that remains for American education is based on an appraisal of the progress and momentum of important reform measures already initiated. There are many such measures, and I will by no means deal with all of them in this report. But in Part II, I identify what seem to me to be the five fundamental avenues of reform we need to pursue: strengthening content, ensuring equal intellectual opportunity, establishing an ethos of achievement, recruiting and rewarding good teachers and principals, and instituting accountability throughout our education system.

The Work Ahead

Widespread and fundamental reforms remain necessary, but their direction and content are not mysterious. Indeed, discovering what works—establishing the ideas and practices that make for effective schools—has been a signal achievement of the reform movement to date.

Scattered across the landscape of American education are hundreds—even thousands—of good examples: fine schools, outstanding teachers, courageous principals, committed governors and legislators, and eager and accomplished students of every color, class, and background. Visiting 97 elementary and secondary schools, meeting students and educators, seeing them learn and work, has been the most gratifying experience of my three years as Secretary of Education. The success of many American schools is reason for hope and optimism. And their success should be a model and foundation for the future of education reform in America. Extending and applying the lessons of what works— to every school in every community and state in the nation—is the task that lies ahead.

Sound efforts to get the job done will enjoy wide public support. The American people endorse by overwhelming margins almost every significant school reform proposed in this report. Seventy-six percent of those surveyed by the latest Gallup education poll favor requiring school districts to seek higher academic achievement from their students; 70 percent favor reporting student test scores on a school-by-school basis; 71 percent believe parents should have the right to choose which local schools their children attend; 75 percent want school districts to require students to take more courses in basic subjects; and 72 percent favor reform of teacher education. The list goes on and on.

But needed reforms, however popular, will not take place overnight. Even those changes that are underway will take time to show results. And future reforms face serious obstacles. We have more than 100,000 elementary and secondary schools, and the sheer magnitude of the system creates a bureaucratic inertia that is difficult to overcome.

Above all, sound education reforms are threatened by the determined opposition they elicit. That opposition has taken various forms over the years. Early on it appeared as a form of denial—as a claim that things were not so bad as they seemed in our schools. A little later, the opposition to reform took a different tack, admitting that things might be bad, but insisting that they could not be fixed in the schools—that first "society" or "the system" must be altered. Today we tend to hear what might be called opposition by extortion, the false claim that to fix our schools will first require a fortune in new funding.

But more and more the opposition to school reform is now manifested in the narrow, self-interested exercise of political power in statehouse corridors and local school board meetings. Almost without fail, wherever a worthwhile school proposal or legislative initiative is under consideration, those with a vested interest in the educational status quo will use political muscle to block reform. And too often the anti-reformers succeed.

The Louisiana Association of Business and Industry recently issued a gloomy assessment of the ten-year effort for education reform in its state: "[T]hose who tried to change the system have time and again seen reform measures watered down, ignored, not properly implemented, taken to court by teacher unions, repealed, mired down in turf battles and power struggles between public bodies, or not funded." Other states and districts have suffered similar obstruction and backsliding. Under teacher union pressure, the Texas legislature eliminated the subject-knowledge section of its teacher competency exams. Alabama's legislature, facing opposition by both administrators and the teachers' union, abandoned that state's teacher career ladder. The Missouri legislature is considering a bill that would bar release to the public of student achievement test scores. A panel of superintendents and principals appointed by the governor of South Dakota recently urged that regulations governing school accreditation be weakened and that South Dakota's new, tougher high school graduation requirements be eliminated.

In cases like these, the organized opposition to education reform shows its power. If our schools are to improve, that power must be overcome. We know what works in education reform and we can improve our schools, even dramatically. But to do so, governors, legislators, educators, and parents must have the knowledge and tenacity to get the job done. Our children's future depends on making American education work.

William J. Bennett
U.S. Secretary of Education

Part I

How Far Have We Come?

How Far Have We Come?

Shortly after *A Nation At Risk* appeared, the Education Commission of the States counted no fewer than 275 state and local task forces at work on education issues. Within twelve months, 35 states had strengthened their high school graduation requirements.[1] At the same time, the country saw a wave of reports and studies further evaluating the troubled state of our schools.

Some of these reports extended the agenda of reform beyond that set by *A Nation At Risk*. Others served to alert the American people to commonly forgotten or ignored truths about education: the need for solid curricular content; the value of high expectations and equal academic opportunity for all children; the need for schools to infuse their classrooms with a strong ethos of achievement; the importance of professional leadership by skilled teachers and principals; and the need for mechanisms designed to hold educators, schools, and school systems individually accountable for their students' learning and achievement.

Of course, the identification of such principles posed a serious challenge to all those responsible for the quality of our schools. Translating educational principles into practice requires work by parents, teachers, principals, and elected and appointed officials; by schools, school districts, states, and the federal government. All have their parts to play. But the greatest authority to effect real and lasting change belongs to the state governments, where primary constitutional responsibility for our schools has always rested. Consequently, it has been to the states that our nationwide campaign for educational excellence has issued its strongest call to arms.

By and large, governors and state legislators have responded conscientiously, sometimes admirably. A notable example is *Time For Results*, the August 1986 report of the National Governors' Association, which put the governors on record in support of basic reforms such as higher quality teaching, better school leadership, and increased parental choice. It also promised yearly assessments of state reform efforts and continued gubernatorial leadership.[2]

That leadership has been, in part, fiscal. In recent years most states have spent generously in an effort to improve their schools. Between 1981 and 1986, per capita state spending for elementary and secondary education increased nationally by more than 40 percent.[3] In fact, education is now the single largest budget item in all but two of the 50 states.[4]

But more important than the size of education budgets has been state-level commitment to reform and improvement. Many of the most significant ideas advanced by the education reform movement are currently being put into practice—singly or in combination, by one state or another—with successful and promising results. New Jersey, for example, has conclusively demonstrated that we can and should look beyond teacher colleges when recruiting able instructors for our schools. Utah has shown that it is possible to reward teachers with salaries and professional status based on excellent performance, not mere length of service. Indiana has installed a new performance-based system of school accreditation. South Carolina is now in the third year of its incentive reward program,

which provides monetary awards to individual schools based on annual assessments of student achievement. Minnesota has instituted an open enrollment plan under which almost 100 school districts are offering parents and students their choice of attendance among local public schools.

In these and other states, in varying degrees, education reform is underway. Given these efforts, it is appropriate to ask: How much have we actually accomplished? What do the best available measures of achievement tell us about the effectiveness of our schools and the results of education reform? The answer to these questions properly begins with a review of student performance in the core academic skills and disciplines.

What Our Students Know

Scores on the Scholastic Aptitude (SAT) and the American College Testing Program (ACT) tests provide a broad measure of student achievement in core academic skills. SATs and ACTs are, to be sure, an imperfect standard of judgment. They may not capture the effect of reforms put into place only recently, and they are taken only by college-bound students. Yet that group includes students from every socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and geographic category. SAT and ACT scores are among the best available predictors of college performance, and they provide a serviceable means of measuring trends in student achievement according to constant norms.

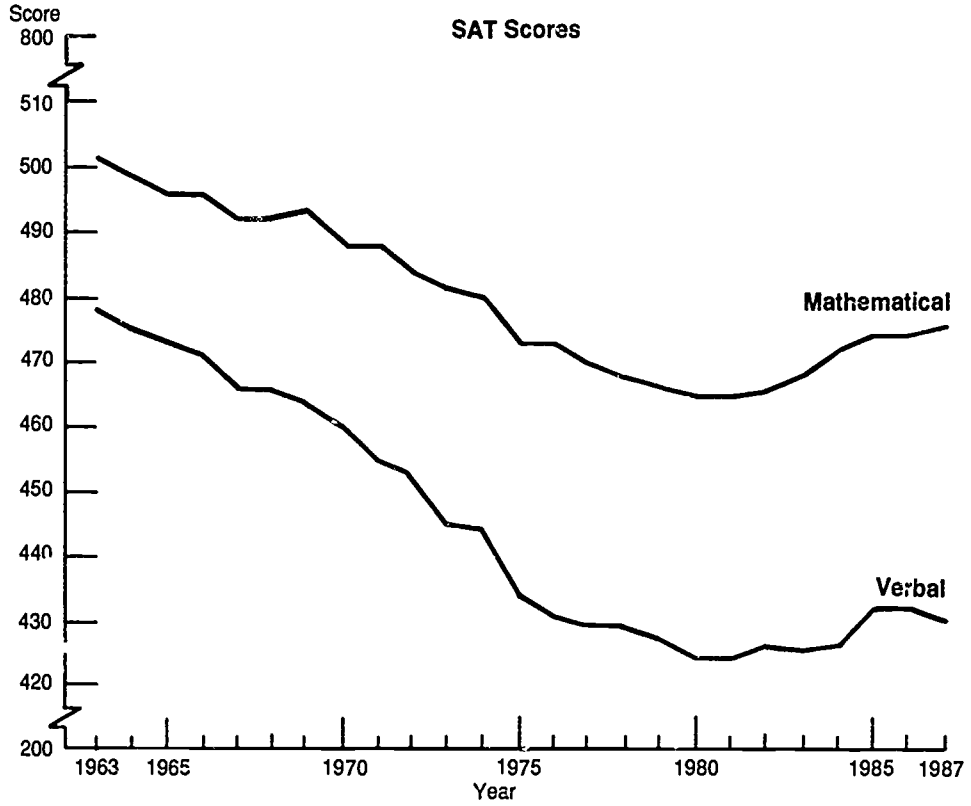
A sharp drop in SAT scores was noted in *A Nation At Risk:* between 1963 and 1980, combined average SAT scores fell 90 points. That plunge focused the American public's attention on a grave decline in student achievement. Since 1980, combined average SAT scores have recovered 16 points, though they have stalled for the last three years at an average score of 906. Chart 1 summarizes the recent history of SAT and ACT scores.

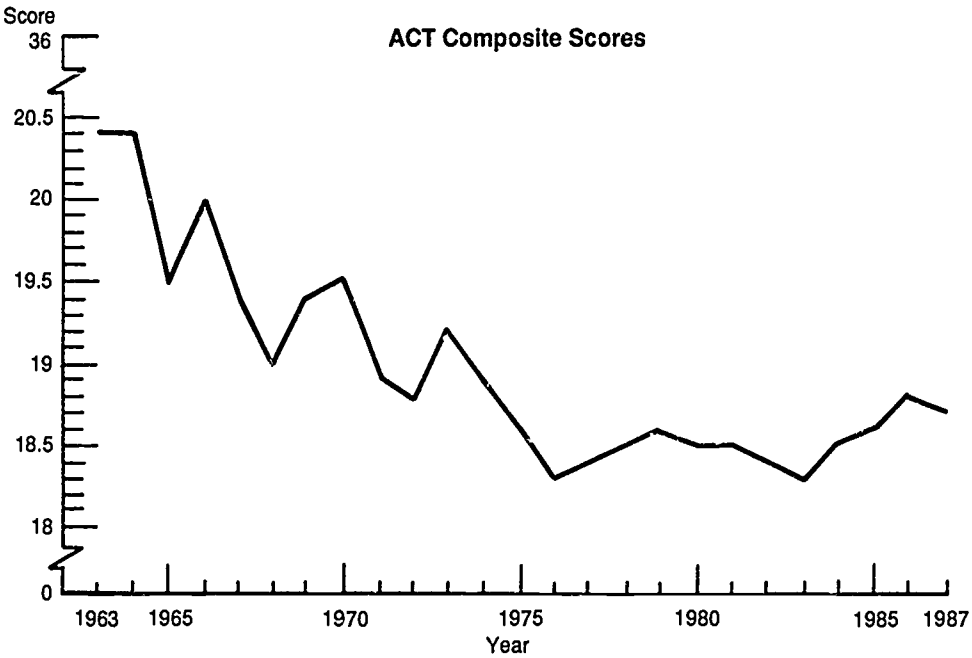
Among the highest achieving students—those scoring above 600 on either the verbal or the math scale—gains have continued. Between 1982 and 1986, high school graduates scoring better than 600 on the verbal SAT rose from 2.3 to 3.0 percent—a small but significant increase, restoring the proportion of high achievers to a level not seen since 1974. Gains in math during the same period were stronger still, with 6.5 percent of 1986 graduates scoring over 600, up from 5 percent in 1982.[5]

On the ACT examination, which measures knowledge of English, mathematics, social studies, and the natural sciences, scores were relatively flat between 1978 and 1983, rose half a point over the next three years, and dropped one-tenth of a point between 1986 and 1987.[6]

Test data show that black and Hispanic children are performing better. Minority participation in Advanced Placement exams has doubled since 1980.[7] Minority participation in the SAT test also has increased. These test-taking gains are themselves a good sign, but minority test scores are up, too. Between 1985 and 1987, ACT scores of black students gained nine-tenths of a point on the 36-point ACT scale and those of Hispanics gained eight-tenths of a point, while those of white students increased just two-tenths of a point.[8] The performance of minority students on the SAT has also been improving for the past decade, though scores for white students have declined slightly. Between 1976 and 1987, black students' composite scores gained 42 points (from 686 to 728), Hispanic students gained 22

Chart 1
Trends in College Entrance Examination Scores





Source: The College Board, the American College Testing Program, and U.S. Department of Education, *The Condition of Education* (Washington, DC: 1987), 20-22.

points (from 781 to 803), and white students lost 8 points (from 944 to 936).[9] Minority students are beginning to make needed progress, but scores for all students are still far too low. The gap between black and Hispanic students on the one hand, and white students on the other, is still large and overall improvement is slow.

Student performance in key skill and subject areas can also be gauged from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and other education surveys.[10] For the most part, these measurements also show that improvement is taking place, but at a disappointingly slow pace and still at excessively low levels of achievement.

Reading. Specific indicators of reading ability among young Americans suggest slight gains during the 1980s. According to a NAEP household survey of 21- to 25-year-olds, the "overwhelming majority" of young adults can "adequately perform tasks at the lower levels." Nevertheless, "sizable numbers appear unable to do well on tasks of moderate complexity." Whereas 96 percent of young Americans read well enough to select a movie from television listings, NAEP finds fewer than 40 percent able to interpret an article by a newspaper columnist. And the situation is worse among minorities: just one in ten black young adults and two in ten Hispanic young adults can satisfactorily interpret the same newspaper column.[11]

NAEP's most recent reading report, in 1986, shows virtually all in-school 17-year-olds (eleventh graders, for the most part) possessing at least a "basic" level of reading skill. Eighty-four percent are reading at an "intermediate" level, meaning they can answer questions based on longer written passages and can recognize paraphrases of that information. But fewer than 5 percent possess "advanced" reading skills, those which NAEP deems necessary "to comprehend material such as primary-source historical documents, scientific reports, or financial and technical documents"—in other words, reading skills "often needed to achieve excellence in academic, business, or government environments."[12] Chart 2 presents NAEP reading data along with a sample question at the "advanced" level—the level that 95 percent of our high school juniors have *not* attained.

Supplementary information about the reading skills of young adults is provided by tests given to United States military recruits by the Department of Defense. In 1981, the average reading grade level of recruits in all branches of the service was slightly below tenth grade (9.8). Since then, the military has become more selective in its recruitment; 92 percent of entering servicemen and women are now high school graduates, compared to 81 percent in 1981. However, their reading scores have barely inched up above a tenth-grade level (10.2). Indeed, in 1987, 40 percent of *high school graduates* entering the military read at the ninth-grade level or below—essentially junior high level.[13]

Writing. Among the generally high-performing students who take the College Board achievement tests—graded on the same 800-point scale as the SATs—English composition scores have risen ten points since 1979.[14] NAEP reports that the writing performance of American eleventh graders has improved slightly since 1979.[15] But the general picture for all students is still no better than it was in 1974, and NAEP's evaluation of its most recent (1984) writing assessment is that "performance in writing in our schools is, quite simply, *bad*."[16]

Fewer than one-fourth of all 17-year-olds tested in 1984 were able to perform at an "adequate" level on writing tasks considered essential to academic study,

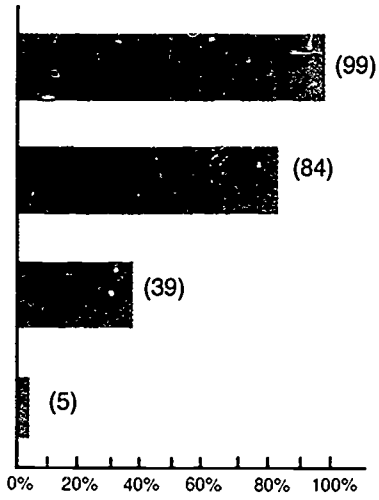
Chart 2
Percentage of In-School 17-Year-Olds at or Above Various Reading Proficiency Levels

Basic: Find information in a short paragraph.

Intermediate: Recognize paraphrases of lengthy passages.

Adept: Analyze moderately complicated passages about topics studied in high school.

Advanced: Extrapolate ideas in specialized documents common in professional and technical work.



Sample Question—Advanced Level

There is a myth, very popular these days, that the Court is divided into "liberal" and "conservative" wings, or, as some would put it, into "activists" and those who practice "judicial restraint." Labels of this kind are convenient but not accurate. Members of the Court, applying general constitutional provisions, understandably differ on occasion as
(6) to their meaning and application. This is inevitable in the interpretation of a document that is both brief and general by a human institution composed of strong-minded and independent members charged with a grave and difficult responsibility. But the inappropriateness of these labels becomes apparent upon even the most perfunctory analysis.

In line 6, what does the word "their" refer to?

A Citizens
B Conservatives
C Liberals
D Members of the Court
(E) Provisions
F I don't know

Only 5 percent of in-school 17-year-olds can answer questions at this level of difficulty.

Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress. *The Reading Report Card* (Princeton, NJ. Educational Testing Service, 1986), 16-17, 27.

business, and professional work. Only about 20 percent of them, when asked to write a letter to their principal requesting permission to take a particular schedule of classes, handled this relatively simple assignment satisfactorily. A similarly small percentage performed "adequately" when asked to write an imaginative passage describing a hypothetical situation and their reactions to it. Only 2 percent of 17-year-olds gained highest marks on this task by writing a clear, detailed, and coherent narrative.[17]

Literature. In 1986, NAEP conducted the first national research project designed to determine what American high school students know about major authors and works of literature. The answer turned out to be: not very much. A full national sample of 17-year-olds was asked 121 multiple-choice questions—mostly simple associations between titles and authors, or identifications of well-known literary passages. The average overall score was barely more than 50 percent correct. About half did not recognize F. Scott Fitzgerald as the author of *The Great Gatsby*. Similar numbers did not know Don Quixote was a fictional Spanish knight who attacked windmills, or that Byron, Keats, and Wordsworth were poets. Only 17 percent recognized Dostoevsky as the author of *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. Still fewer knew that Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America*.[18]

Mathematics. Math performance by American students has begun to recover a bit from declines in the 1970s. According to a forthcoming report by NAEP, though math achievement by 13-year-olds managed only to hold steady between 1982 and 1986, achievement by 9-year-olds and 17-year-olds improved.[19] And among the students who take the College Board achievement tests, math scores have moved up 11 points since 1979.[20]

But the absolute level at which these welcome gains are occurring remains low. Our students are getting better at math operations that can mostly be performed by hand-held calculators. But in the forthcoming NAEP survey, only 51 percent of 17-year-olds could adequately handle "moderately complex procedures and reasoning" and only 6 percent could perform adequately on math questions requiring algebra or multi-step problem solving.[21]

American students consistently rate at or near the bottom of most international comparisons of math performance. In 1982 the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) found American 17-year-olds in the lowest fourth of all nations studied on five of six basic math topics. For example, in an advanced algebra test involving students from 15 countries, our students placed fourteenth.[22] More recently, American first- and fifth-grade math students were found to be lagging badly behind similar groups of students in Japan, Taiwan, and China.[23]

Even our best students suffer in such comparisons. In an analysis based on the same 1982 IEA test, the top 5 percent of 17-year-old American mathematics students in the most advanced math classes were judged against the top 5 percent from eleven other nations. The United States finished last in tests of algebra and calculus performance. In fact, the best American students scored worse than the average Japanese 17-year-old taking comparable classes.[24]

Science. Recent years have produced some gains in science achievement by American students. The pervasive downward trend apparent through much of the 1970s appears to have been arrested. A forthcoming NAEP report shows that between 1982 and 1986, 17-year-old science students made up nearly all the

ground lost since the 1977 assessment. Black students scored particularly impressive gains on the NAEP test.[25] And scores on some of the College Board science achievement tests show modest gains since 1979—especially the physics test, where the mean score is up 17 points.[26]

Again, it is important to remember that these improvements are taking place within a general range of achievement that is very low. A new assessment places American science students in rough international perspective. Our 10-year-olds seem about average, scoring in 8th place among 15 countries tested. But our 14-year-olds are far behind their peers around the world, placing 14th out of 17 countries, tied with Singapore and Thailand. Advanced American science students (seniors in their second year of study in given disciplines) fare even more poorly: 9th place out of 13 countries in physics, 11th of 13 in chemistry, and last in biology.[27]

History. In 1987, the Education for Democracy Project—a joint venture of the American Federation of Teachers, Freedom House, and the Educational Excellence Network—issued a statement of alarm about young Americans' knowledge of history. "Many students," it concluded, "are unaware of prominent people and seminal ideas and events that have shaped our past and created our present."[28]

Data from NAEP's 1986 humanities assessment underscore that conclusion. Even though nearly 80 percent of tested 17-year-olds were then enrolled in United States history classes, their average score was only 51 percent correct on 26 questions of basic historical chronology. No points were deducted for questions students skipped altogether, and their scores were somewhat inflated by guessing. Still, 43 percent of them could not place World War I between 1900 and 1950. More than two-thirds of them did not know when the Civil War took place. More than 75 percent were unable to say within 20 years when Abraham Lincoln was president.

Knowledge of historical personalities was only slightly better. More than one-fifth of the students could not identify George Washington as the commander of colonial forces during the Revolution. Almost one in three did not know that Lincoln was the author of the Emancipation Proclamation. And nearly half failed to recognize Patrick Henry as the man who said "Give me liberty or give me death."

Questions requiring somewhat deeper understanding of American history produced still more discouraging results. Half the students did not know the meaning of the Monroe Doctrine. Fifty-seven percent did not know that Senator Joseph McCarthy was involved in a controversy about communism. Almost 70 percent did not understand what Jim Crow laws were designed to do. (Many thought these laws were enacted for the *benefit* of blacks!) And nearly 80 percent could not say what Reconstruction was.[29]

Geography. A small section of NAEP's 1986 humanities assessment measured rudimentary knowledge of geography. Here results were somewhat better—an average score of 71 percent correct on a group of 12 map questions. Still, nearly three in ten students failed to identify the Mississippi River on a map of North America. More than one-third could not find France on a map of Europe. And upwards of 40 percent did not recognize the territory acquired by Jefferson in the Louisiana Purchase.[30]

Civics. A 1982 NAEP study revealed grave shortcomings in 17-year-olds' understanding of our system of government. The 1986 assessment shows little

improvement in knowledge of American political philosophy, the Constitution, and basic civil rights. One-third of students tested in 1986 did not know that the Declaration of Independence signaled the American colonists' break from England. Sixty percent did not know that *The Federalist* was written to urge ratification of the Constitution, and 40 percent could not say even approximately when the Constitution was written and ratified. Only three students in five were able to recognize a definition of the system of checks and balances that divides power among the three branches of our federal government.[31] All students tested in that assessment have now attained full voting age.

What Our Students Study

Whether students succeed academically depends in large part on what they study—on the curricula schools offer them. It comes as no surprise that a serious deterioration in the rigor of American elementary and secondary curricula accompanied the precipitous declines in student achievement already noted.

A Nation At Risk had especially harsh words for high school curricula, which over the years had become "homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose." In 1983, the report concluded that "we have a cafeteria-style curriculum in which the appetizers and desserts can easily be mistaken for the main courses." Its authors were distressed to find that 25 percent of credits earned by "general track" students were in "physical and health education, work experience outside the school, remedial English and mathematics, and personal service and development courses, such as training for adulthood and marriage."[32]

To replace this smorgasbord of incoherent classwork, *A Nation At Risk* proposed a reinvigorated core curriculum for American secondary schools, one organized around a set of "New Basics": four years of English; three years each of mathematics, science, and social studies; one-half year of computer science; and, for those students planning to attend college, two years of a foreign language.

Today, five years after these recommendations were issued, we are still a long way from providing every American student with a solid academic curriculum. But there are now grounds for hope, and if visible improvements at the high school level are complemented by similar changes in the earlier grades—and are given a full chance to work—we may begin to see substantial benefits in learning.

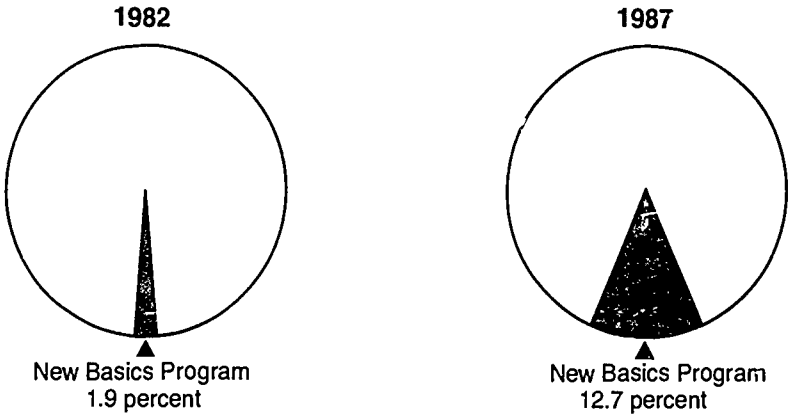
As part of its research for this report, the Department of Education undertook a national study comparing the transcripts of 15,000 1987 high school graduates with those of a comparable group of 1982 graduates. The news is encouraging. Less than 2 percent of the 1982 sample had completed the academic program suggested in *A Nation At Risk;* in 1987, 12.7 percent of graduating students had done so. When foreign language and computer science classes are omitted from the tally, improvement is more dramatic—from 13.4 percent of 1982 graduates to nearly 30 percent in the 1987 sample. Chart 3 summarizes these findings from the transcript study.

These figures mark a welcome break from a trend much lamented by *A Nation At Risk:* a 15-year migration of American high school students from solid academic work into vague "general track" courses. The proportion of students in the "general track" dropped from 35 percent in 1982 to 17 percent in 1987. Nearly all of this change reflects movement back into a more rigorous academic curriculum.

Moreover, the distribution of classes appears more focused on basics than it did in 1982. The Department's transcript study shows that 86 percent of 1987 graduates completed a United States history course; only 76 percent of 1982 graduates had done so. Seventy-one percent of 1987 graduates took at least one semester of civics or American politics, up from 57 percent in 1982.

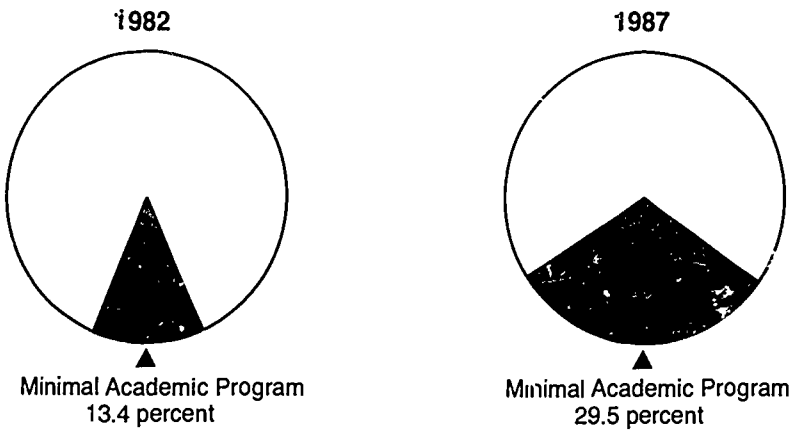
Students today also take an average of one semester more mathematics than did students in 1982, and enrollments in advanced math classes (geometry, second-year algebra, trigonometry, and calculus) are all up by at least a third. The number of students in pre-calculus has more than doubled. Enrollment in remedial

Chart 3
Percentage of High School Graduates Successfully Completing Various Combinations of Courses



New Basics Program

4 years of English, 3 years of Social Studies, 3 years of Math, 3 years of Science, 2 years of Foreign Language, and a half year of Computer Science



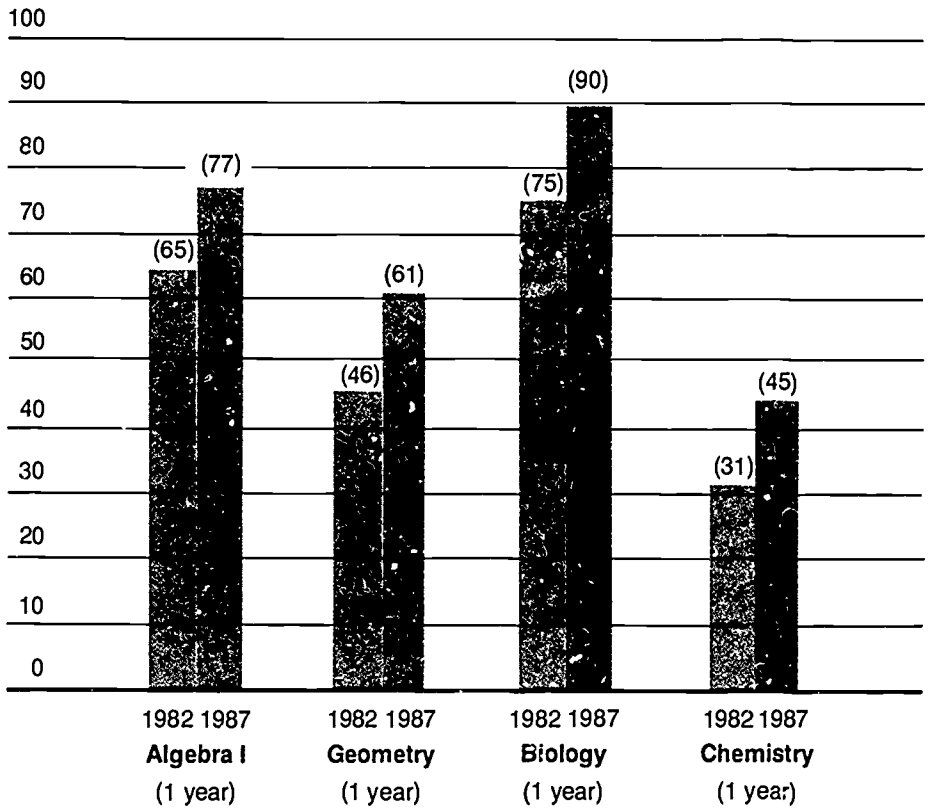
Minimal Academic Program

4 years of English, 3 years of Social Studies, 3 years of Math, and 3 years of Science

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Center for Education Statistics, "1982 High School and Beyond Transcript Study" and "1987 High School Transcript Study," unpublished tabulations.

or below-grade math is down by a third since 1982. Science shows similar improvement. Only 75 percent of all 1982 graduates had taken a class in general biology; 90 percent of 1987 graduates had done so. The number of students taking chemistry is up by half. Trends in math and science course-taking are summarized in Chart 4.

Chart 4
Percentage of High School Graduates Completing Various Mathematics and Science Courses



Source: U.S. Department of Education, Center for Education Statistics, "1982 High School and Beyond Transcript Study" and "1987 High School Transcript Study," unpublished tabulations.

In another sign of improvement, the proportion of American high school graduates who have taken Advanced Placement (AP) exams has more than doubled, from 4.7 percent to 9.7 percent. A few states have registered startling gains in AP participation. South Carolina's rate has more than tripled to 17.3 percent, and Utah now has more than a quarter of its high school graduates take AP exams. Nationwide, more schools had candidates sit for AP exams than ever before—7,776 schools for the 1986-87 school year, compared to just 5,827 in 1982-83.[33]

Yet we still have much room for improvement; curricular foolishness has not been eliminated from American high schools and not all students have shared equally in the national trend toward stronger curricula. Compared with public high schools, private and parochial schools still do a somewhat better job of

ensuring that their students take the "New Basics" recommended in *A Nation At Risk*. At the same task, suburban schools do a better job than either rural or urban schools. More Asian students (26 percent) take all the "New Basics" than do either whites (13 percent) or blacks (9 percent), though racial differences in course-taking have narrowed since 1982. Most discouragingly, students remaining in the vocational track are still taking far too few courses in the core disciplines. Among 1987 graduates, only 20 percent of students in vocational education programs took a geometry course, as against 80 percent of their academic track peers. Only 4 percent of them took a science sequence that included both biology and chemistry, compared to 66 percent of students in an academic program.[34]

Although the high school curriculum is stronger today than it was five years ago, the figures summarized above suggest the need for still greater improvement. Students are spending more time in a solid academic course of study, but we are not yet seeing a corresponding improvement in their knowledge and skills. This suggests that as improvement in our schools continues, we need to pay more sustained attention to the content of courses, in addition to the number and type of courses scheduled. Time on task is not a meaningful yardstick of achievement if our students are not being given a challenging, rich curriculum.

How Our Schools Perform

Even a perfect curriculum will falter in a badly managed school. How a school is organized and managed is almost as important as what it teaches. As preconditions for academic success, our schools must, at minimum, attract students to class every day; make efficient use of time allotted for instruction and, if necessary, create more of it; establish firm programs and policies to prevent drug use, student misbehavior, and other distractions from learning; and ensure that students stay in school, grade by grade, until graduation. In short, schools must strive to create an ethos of order and success. How well are they satisfying these requirements today? Let us look at four indicators of school performance.

Attendance. American schools were challenged by *A Nation At Risk* to do whatever was necessary to reduce the amount of instructional time lost to absenteeism. In 1981, average daily attendance was 93.7 percent. In 1985, the last year for which we have reliable national data, 94.2 percent of students showed up for classes on an average day. This small nationwide gain includes significant improvements in some jurisdictions. During that period, for example, New Mexico boosted its attendance rate from 87.7 percent to 95 percent.[35]

Time for Instruction. *A Nation At Risk* expressed concern that many American schools make inefficient use of the class time at their disposal. School and classroom management varies widely across the country, but the National Commission on Excellence in Education reported that schools were devoting, on average, only 22 hours of a 30-hour week to academic instruction—and some schools were spending as few as 17 hours.

Things may be improving. In a survey of high school principals commissioned for this report, 73 percent noted that their schools currently offer programs to train teachers in efficient use of classroom time. Sixty-five percent said that these programs had been instituted or strengthened since 1983.[36]

Homework is a familiar and effective means of extending instructional time beyond the school day. *A Nation At Risk* expressed alarm at its infrequency and

shallowness—two-thirds of high school seniors surveyed in 1982 reported doing less than one hour of homework a day. A 1984 survey showed significant increases in the number of students reporting homework assigned the previous day, and a slightly higher percentage reporting more than an hour of homework. Still, almost 60 percent of high school juniors reported doing less than one hour of homework the previous day. Interestingly, 43 percent of high school juniors and 64 percent of eighth graders reported watching three or more hours of television a day.[37]

Today, American schools are still much too cavalier about homework. Fifty-three percent of American high schools have no policies requiring homework. Again, however, there is some evidence of recent progress. Among the 47 percent of our high schools that do have homework policies, more than half have implemented or strengthened those policies since 1983.[38]

A Nation At Risk also noted that it is not unusual for high school students in other industrialized countries to spend eight hours a day at school, 220 days each year. In the United States, by contrast, a typical school day lasts six hours, and the school year runs 175 to 180 days. *A Nation At Risk* recommended that school districts and state legislatures consider increasing instructional time by implementing a seven-hour school day and a 200- to 220-day school year, a recommendation that has been largely ignored.

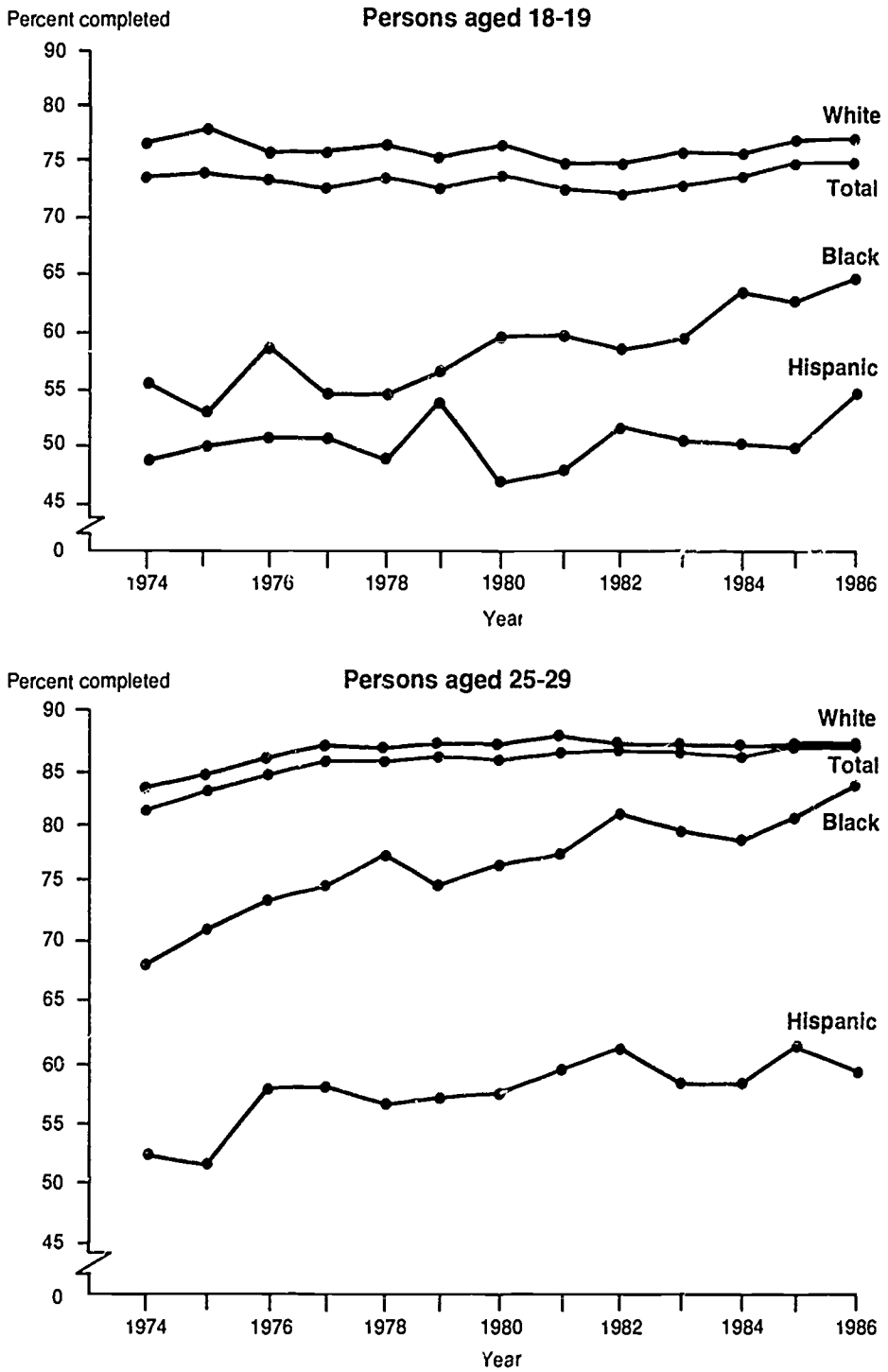
American teachers prefer their current nine- or ten-month contracts,[39] and their union leaders have opposed most legislative efforts to lengthen the school day or year. Since 1983, such proposals have been considered in 37 states. But a longer school year has been adopted in only nine of them—and all of those states merely extended their unusually short calendars to the more common 180-day standard. Only five states have lengthened the school day—none to more than six-and-a-half hours.[40]

Distractions. The most dangerous and crippling distraction from learning—student drug use—remains entirely too prevalent among our youth. Yet there is evidence to suggest that efforts to reduce drug use may be having some success. Between 1980 and 1987, the proportion of high school seniors reporting use of marijuana at any time in the previous 12 months fell from 49 to 36 percent. Although in 1987 there was a significant drop in cocaine use, still one in six high school seniors had tried cocaine and 54 percent said it would be "fairly easy" or "very easy" for them to obtain the drug.[41] Schools alone cannot eliminate drug use, but many must and can do better.

Learning is impossible in an atmosphere of disorder, and poor student discipline is another significant impediment to school success. In the 1987 Gallup Poll on education, disruptive student behavior was named as the second biggest problem facing our schools, after drug use.[42] Nearly all respondents to the Education Department's survey of high school principals said their schools now have strict sanctions against disruptive students, and half of all these policies have been toughened since 1983.

Still, it is unclear whether these policies are working well enough. Almost three-quarters of high school *principals* surveyed in 1985 believed that the incidence of student disorder in their buildings had declined between 1980 and 1985.[43] But just last year 44 percent of elementary and secondary *teachers* told researchers that the frequency of disruptive behavior in their classrooms had increased since 1982. Forty percent of teachers felt that student misbehavior interfered with their work to a "moderate" or "great" extent. Almost 20 percent of them reported

Chart 5
High School Completion Rates, by Race and Hispanic Origin



Source: Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P-20.

having been threatened by students, and eight percent said they had been physically assaulted. Twenty-nine percent of American teachers said they had seriously considered quitting their jobs because of student misbehavior.[44]

Graduation Rates. A high school diploma is a prerequisite for adult success, and graduation rates are a basic measure of school performance. Judging by all available data, the dropout rate is alarmingly high, particularly so among black and Hispanic males. Because different schools and school districts use conflicting measures of dropout rates, a useful way to depict national trends is to determine how many 18- and 19-year-olds have completed high school.[45]

The high school completion rate among blacks ages 18 to 19 is 10 percent lower than the national average of 75 percent; the completion rate for Hispanic youths of the same age is even more disturbing—only 55 percent.[46] Chart 5 displays high school completion rates at two age levels. For many, failure to complete high school results in a lifetime of poverty and dependence. An Education Department analysis reported that "the estimated unemployment rate for dropouts shortly after they leave school is more than twice that of high school graduates of the same age." Those who fail to complete high school have average lifetime earnings $441,000 lower than that of high school graduates.[47]

Of course, many of those who drop out of high school later return to school or pursue an "equivalency" certificate. Of all Americans between the ages of 25 and 29, 86 percent have now completed four years of high school. For minorities, that figure has jumped from 77 percent in 1980 to 84 percent in 1986.[48]

In short, student achievement and school performance earn a mixed grade for progress during the past five years. Despite encouraging improvements in patterns of course-taking, gains in student learning are slight and the average level of student skill and knowledge remains unacceptably low. Overall school performance is up a little bit since 1983, but by almost any standard we are still not where we need to be.

Part II of this report examines five key principles that should guide continued reform of American education.

Part II
What We Need To Do

Strengthen Content

Part I of this report summarized evidence showing that, despite some gains over the past five years, too many American students are not now getting the education they deserve. Most students have a fair grasp of rudimentary skills, but many of them have not learned to build upon those skills—to master tasks requiring more complex reasoning, advanced literacy, and problem solving.

The Core Curriculum Debate

Common sense tells us, and education research confirms, that youngsters rarely learn what they do not study. Since students study what adults teach, it is important for adults to define essential knowledge and resolve to teach it well. In recent years Americans have carried on a lively national conversation about what our children need to know. Teachers, parents, students, and scholars have taken part in this debate, as have proponents of diverse political and philosophical viewpoints.

At times the debate has been heated—even about the basic proposition that there are some things that all children should learn. As historian Paul Gagnon writes: "Of all the recommendations of the several reform reports issued since 1983, the call for a common core—even of the most partial, modest sort—is the most violently attacked."[1] Americans properly cherish local control of schools, and some may fear the imposition of lessons at odds with school or community priorities. Americans also take justifiable pride in our nation's cultural diversity, and some may fear that a common curriculum will arbitrarily exclude particular ideas and traditions. These are concerns that must be addressed by any proposal for a core curriculum; they will be considered in this chapter.

But these concerns must not overshadow the very real and harmful consequences of abandoning altogether a rigorous core curriculum. The effects of such abandonment are not merely a matter of speculation—as anyone familiar with the recent history of American education can attest.

A confusion swept through our schools in the 1960s and 1970s, confusion characterized by adult reluctance to articulate what was academically important and what was not, and by adult indecision about what we expected our schools to do. This confusion weakened the foundations of American education as a whole, but it had particularly destructive effects on school curricula—effects we still feel today. As already noted, *A Nation At Risk* criticized what it called the prevailing "cafeteria-style curriculum"—one lacking substance, coherence, or consistent structure, and filled instead with largely faddish, trivial, or intellectually shallow courses.[2]

Replacing the cafeteria curriculum with a well-balanced academic menu has been an overriding goal of the education reform movement since then. Without the right curriculum, efforts to improve teaching, governance and school accountability will make little difference. The transmission of knowledge and skills is, after all, what we aim to hold schools accountable *for*. If we allow schools to avoid

or be diverted from this task, we cannot legitimately complain if student achievement remains low. School time is limited—it will either be spent on important subjects, or it will be frittered away in what author Maya Angelou has termed "East Indian nose flute courses."[3]

The Need to Improve

Providing a strong curriculum is a requirement even of the earliest school grades; too often our schools delay the introduction of serious academic material for too long. Children should leave elementary school able to read and write, and possessing a solid foundation in history, geography, civics, mathematics, science, and the arts. Elementary education should also support parents in the work of developing their children's character, moral judgment, and sense of personal responsibility. The first eight or nine years of formal education form the foundation in knowledge and skills upon which all further study must rest. Improving elementary and middle school curricula should therefore be a basic reform priority.

But kindergarten through eighth grade curricula are to some extent determined by the secondary schools they seek to prepare children for, and curricular improvement in the upper grades is critical, too. What are the goals of a good program of high school study? Despite varied emphases and possible disagreements over particulars, most Americans agree about the goals. We want our students—whatever their plans for the future—to take from high school a shared body of knowledge and skills, a common language of ideas, and a common moral and intellectual discipline. We want them to know math and science, history and literature. We want them to know how to think for themselves, to respond to important questions, to solve problems, to pursue an argument, to defend a point of view, to understand its opposite, and to weigh alternatives. We want them to develop, through example and experience, those habits of mind and traits of character properly prized by our society. And we want them to be prepared for entry into the community of responsible adults.

Fully accomplishing these goals now requires advancing the national debate about curriculum a step beyond the widely endorsed position established by *A Nation At Risk*. That report performed an invaluable service by sensibly proposing the number and type of courses our high school students should take. Yet it described those courses—the "New Basics"—only in terms of broad subject categories. Part I of the present report provides encouraging evidence of progress in the number of students who are taking most or all of the "New Basics." But as Part I also makes clear, gains in student achievement have not kept pace with improved patterns in course-taking. This suggests that it is important now to concentrate not just on which subjects our students study, but on the *actual content* of the courses they take. "You could require *five* years of math and still not get through second-year algebra," one school superintendent has pointed out. "Sure it's good to set standards, but it's a hollow standard when you just add time instead of *expectation*."[4]

If we require students to take three years of science and mathematics, for example, what are they likely to get? According to a study commissioned by the National Science Foundation, "the content of science and mathematics instruction in school is often inappropriate. . . . Science curricula tend to emphasize encyclopedic coverage of material; mathematics curricula emphasize the repetitive cov-

erage of computational skills and arbitrary assignment of 'advanced' topics (algebra, geometry, calculus) to particular grades."[5]

What are students really offered in the humanities? In their social studies courses, for example, what history do they actually study? The Education for Democracy Project noted a "significant decline over several decades in the amount of time devoted to historical studies in American schools, even in the college preparatory track."[6] A majority of high school students already take four years of English, but does it acquaint them with the important literature of our common culture? Apparently not, as novelist John Barth laments: "In the same way you can't take for granted that a high-school senior or a freshman in college really understands that the Vietnam War came after World War II, you can't take for granted that any one book is common knowledge even among a group of liberal-arts or writing majors at a pretty good university."[7]

So calling for more of the right courses is only a start. The next step is to improve the content of those courses—to focus more clearly on what is to be taught in the core curriculum we want for all our children.

Defining the Curriculum and Improving Its Content

Some argue that our nation's cultural and ethnic diversity makes it impossible to construct a core curriculum appropriate for all students and schools. They may concede that curricular deterioration is a problem, but they resist the obvious solution, believing instead that our sprawling, heterogeneous culture defies any attempt to codify an American "canon" of essential learning.

This view is unduly pessimistic and it is at odds with a basic tradition of American education. Our pluralism has always posed formidable challenges to our schools. But our history demonstrates that for more than two centuries American education has welcomed, accommodated, and celebrated diversity while joining our students in a cooperative undertaking. Today, still, every American child has an equal claim to a common future under common laws, enjoying common rights and charged with common responsibilities. There follows the need for common education, now and in the future. In fact, a general American consensus does exist about the most compelling ideas and books and authors our students should know.

In 1984, when I was chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, I invited a number of distinguished scholars, and the general public, to send me their recommendations for a short list of books any high school graduate should have read. I received hundreds of replies naming many different texts and authors. But on most lists, repeated with remarkable regularity, were a small number of works: Homer's *Odyssey*, the Bible, a few of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and a novel by Charles Dickens. This short list later became the nucleus of the English program described in *James Madison High School*, a model high school curriculum published by the Education Department in late 1987.

That book set out in detail the actual content of a recommended program of basic high school courses. Chart 6 reproduces the course descriptions of its English core requirements. The *James Madison* curriculum was intended as a spur to discussion and as one effort to explain what a curriculum inspired by the "New Basics" might contain. It was not a statement of federal policy; the power to set school curricula for American students does not belong to the federal government,

Chart 6
English Course Descriptions From *James Madison High School: A Curriculum for American Students*

Introduction to Literature (9th grade)

The syllabus is limited to allow close reading and is confined to recognized masterworks of Western literature. A good selection might include a few books of Homer's *Odyssey*, parts of the Bible, sonnets and plays of Shakespeare, *Huckleberry Finn*, and a Dickens novel. These readings serve as models of good writing and as subjects for students' own writing exercises, which are emphasized throughout. Students review grammar and then study sentence and paragraph structure. They learn how to craft a strong thesis; how to write a cogent, coherent, and concise essay to support it; and how to revise and edit their own work, in consultation with their teacher. Also, students are given periodic practice delivering oral reports in class. *One year, required.*

American Literature (10th grade)

Students read a careful selection of American fiction, drama, and poetry. A good syllabus designed to spotlight the distinctive American achievement in literature might include Franklin, Irving, Hawthorne, Poe, Whitman, Twain, Melville, Dickinson, Faulkner, Wharton, Hemingway, O'Neill, Fitzgerald, Frost, Ralph Ellison, and Robert Penn Warren. Regular writing assignments are made and continued emphasis is placed on clarity, precision, and frequent revision. Students are given increasing experience in classroom speaking. *One year, required.*

British Literature (11th grade)

Students examine a broad selection of British fiction, drama, and poetry. A good syllabus might include Chaucer, Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, Swift, Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, Austen, the Brontes, Dickens, George Eliot, Hardy, Conrad, T.S. Eliot, and Shaw. Regular writing assignments are made and continued emphasis is placed on clarity, precision, and frequent revision. Students are given continued experience in classroom speaking. *One year, required.*

Introduction to World Literature (12th grade)

Students read a careful selection of European and non-Western fiction, drama, and poetry in translation. A good syllabus might include a small number of works by authors from classical Greece and Rome (Sophocles and Virgil); a more generous selection from noted authors of Europe and Russia (e.g., Dante, Cervantes, Moliere, Balzac, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Zola, Mann, and Ibsen); and depending on the instructor's knowledge and interest, a small number of works from Japan, China, the Near East, Africa, or Latin America. Regular writing assignments are made throughout, and a senior research paper is required. Students' work in classroom speaking continues, culminating in a substantial prepared talk before their classmates. *One year, required.*

and for good reason. Schools must adapt to local circumstances. Different parents want different things for their children, and they want different schools to provide them. Choices about which particular books students should read are decisions best left to school districts and schools—to teachers, principals, parents, and school boards.

But even given the need for local refinements, a core body of knowledge and ideas remains important for all students. "In our pluralistic society," writes Roger Shattuck of the University of Virginia, "the humanities have a core the way the river has a shape. The very process of discovering and gradually modifying that shape lends meaning and excitement to the intellectual life of a community."[8]

Encouraging efforts to articulate a broad-based core curriculum are already underway. As part of its comprehensive reform package, California is revamping its entire syllabus, subject by subject. California's new kindergarten through twelfth-grade plan for history and social science is rooted firmly in the American tradition, using it both as a source of lessons applicable to today's problems and as a lens through which to focus students' understanding of people and events in the rest of the world. Students are introduced to Columbus, but also to the pueblo culture of the Southwest that predated his voyage; they study the influence of Islam and Buddhism along with Judaism and Christianity. But the central tenets of the Western political tradition remain the curriculum's heart, preparing students for life in a diverse but well-functioning democracy.

The California plan incorporates serious study of geography as well, stressing knowledge of place and topography, the relationship of land and people, and the importance of location to settlements and conflicts. Taught this way, geography builds upon knowledge of names and places and contributes to an understanding of how historical events are shaped.[9]

There is no reason why other parts of the country cannot do for all the basic academic subjects what California is doing for social studies.

Student Differences

The advocacy of a rich and rigorous core curriculum need not ignore the fact that individual students present their schools with distinctive requirements, interests, and problems. Students possess a range of abilities. There are many students who speak English as a second language, and some who speak no English at all. There are students with learning disabilities and handicaps of varying kind and severity. For these students, most school districts provide a variety of particular classes—from advanced placement math to remedial reading, bilingual programs, and special education. There will always be students who require extra attention and it should be provided by the local authorities who are best able to respond to their individual situations.

Recognizing student diversity, many schools "track" students according to ability or future aspirations. Grouping by ability, especially for specific subjects, can be a useful instructional strategy. But tracking as it is actually practiced has been shown to deliver radically different and not always appropriate content to some students.[10]

For example, in place of the basics, vocational education too often drills students in overly specialized and frequently obsolete "job skills." It is not surprising, then, that a recent study of vocational education in California high schools found

that "on the whole, vocational classes as currently offered . . . are not demonstrably effective in helping students find jobs after they graduate, or in retraining would-be dropouts."[11] In too many cases tracking of students has involved serious neglect of fundamental content. No employer wants employees who lack basic knowledge and real skills. The personnel director of a multinational corporation recently begged a group of educators: "Will you please teach these students how to learn and how to live? We will train them."[12]

Whether we address ability differences by means of grouping, by adoption of new approaches to vocational education, or through some other school restructuring, one principle should remain paramount: All children should have access to a rich common curriculum. Most American students can handle it if properly prepared. There are, of course, some children—too many, in fact—whose present preparation for high school is inadequate to the task. That is an argument for further improvements in elementary and intermediate education. It is not, however, an argument for abandoning any high school student in the present. If one student, for whatever reason, cannot learn algebra and geometry in two years, then he should be given the additional time and help he needs. But he should learn algebra and geometry. We may vary our pedagogy to achieve our educational goals, but we must jealously retain and guard those goals: mastery of a common core of worthwhile knowledge, important skills, and sound ideals.

Textbooks

Matching curriculum with the tools needed to teach it is an essential step toward educational improvement. Textbooks are one such tool. Almost all high school reading is done from textbooks; our teachers depend on them to provide the foundation of their lessons and their instruction. No pedagogical innovation or new technology will likely displace the book as an integral part of American education. We need good books and we need them in every subject. But many of our schools use inferior ones. Why?

Excessive state regulation is part of the problem, even when motivated by the best of intentions. In 22 states, textbook selection is a matter of uniform statewide adoption rather than decision by teachers and principals.[13] Under pressure to produce higher test scores, a state adoption committee may mistakenly conclude that textbooks alone can do the job. The result is long and elaborate lists of curricular objectives—specific facts, concepts, or events that a state's textbooks must "mention," down to the smallest fungus in a science book. Too often, publishers have responded to the states' myriad and conflicting demands by producing encyclopedic but lifeless textbooks. In a 1987 study, education researcher Gilbert Sewall found most history textbooks "mere catalogues of factual material about the past, not sagas peopled with heroic and remarkable individuals engaged in exciting and momentous events."[14] A new book by the Council for Basic Education argues that "the current system of textbook adoption has filled our schools with Trojan horses—glossily covered blocks of paper whose words emerge to deaden the minds of our nation's youth."[15]

Textbook adoption committees are concerned about more than just test scores, of course. Women, ethnic minorities, environmentalists, the elderly, the handicapped—even nutritionists—all demand that textbooks present their interests fairly. That's reasonable enough. But again, state and local agencies too often use

crude formulae in an attempt to guarantee appropriate "social content." They count the number of women in a book's photographs or the number of Catholics mentioned in its text. Or they may publish lists of items and ideas meant to be emphasized or downplayed. Until 1986, for example, California took a dim view of books with photographs of luncheon meat or butter because these items have too much fat and too much salt. This approach to textbook selection opens well-meaning efforts and deserving causes to ridicule. And more important, it denigrates and unnecessarily complicates an already difficult task—the provision of high quality books to our schoolchildren.

The reform movement has demanded a higher threshold of quality for textbooks, and there are some encouraging signs of progress. A few publishers have lately shown that it is possible successfully to enter tough textbook markets with good materials. But we need to do better—much better. If they are to be held accountable for the results of their work, teachers and principals all over the country must be given a stronger voice in decisions about what books they will rely upon in their classrooms.

Testing

Tests are another instructional tool that needs to be improved. The problem is not testing *per se*; we want and need accurate assessments of student progress. Rather, the problem is tests that allow for guesswork, provide no measure of ingenuity or thinking skills, and are so one-dimensional that their scores can be improved by coaching in test-taking skills.

Test results must provide honest measures of achievement. One new study by a group called Friends of Education finds what has been termed a "Lake Wobegon Effect." Just as in Garrison Keillor's mythical town, where "all the children are above average," the Friends of Education survey of all fifty states found that "no state is below average at the elementary level on any of the six major nationally normed, commercially available tests."[16] In other words, every state in America reports itself above the national average, an impossible situation that seriously calls into question the validity and scoring of our most commonly used tests.

Models of sophisticated and accurate standardized tests do exist. A recent literacy survey by the National Assessment of Educational Progress is one example; by establishing differential levels of subject and skill competence and then fine-tuning its assessment instruments, NAEP has helped reshape the national debate on literacy by providing us far better information about our real levels of achievement. The challenge now is to develop a new generation of tests for use at the national, state, and local levels, tests that will serve as diagnostic tools for teachers while giving parents and policymakers sound information about student achievement and school performance.

A sound curriculum is basic to educational improvement. In the last five years, significant progress has been made in student course-taking in basic subjects, as recommended by *A Nation At Risk*. But time spent on a subject is no guarantee that students will master it, and recent assessments of achievement make clear that it is time to strengthen the actual *content* of elementary and secondary school classes. Part of this effort must include modifications of textbook selection procedures and improvement of auxiliary instructional tools, such as sound standardized tests.

Ensure Equal Intellectual Opportunity

All American students have a claim to the solid core curriculum proposed and described in the preceding chapter. Better academic content brings improved academic achievement for all children. And so all children deserve it.

A wealth of recent research suggests that what a student studies in high school—regardless of race or family background—is the best predictor of educational success. The High School and Beyond project, a massive study which tracked the educational and social progress of 12,000 American high school students, discovered that among black and white students with similar test scores as sophomores, almost all differences in senior-year achievement could be explained by what courses they took. A separate analysis showed that black and white students who performed equally well in high school went on to college at essentially the same rate. In fact, a slightly higher rate of college attendance was observed among black students, and the researchers concluded that "blacks' enrollment in college would increase dramatically if blacks' academic achievement in elementary and secondary grades increased to a level comparable with the achievement of whites."[17]

Of course, education is important for its own sake, and its intrinsic benefits are color-blind. But Americans have always also believed in education for the social and economic advantages it confers—as the key to success in adult life, and as one of the surest paths out of poverty. This faith has been justified by our experience of more than two centuries of immigration. And it is confirmed by research on the socioeconomic status of disadvantaged and minority Americans. For young blacks and Hispanics, as well as whites, completing the last two years of high school reduces by about 60 percent the likelihood of adult poverty. More than 90 percent of all Americans with high school diplomas have family incomes greater than twice the official poverty rate. A 1986 Rand Corporation study of the economic progress of blacks since 1940 stated the facts succinctly: "The safest and surest route to permanent black economic mobility lies in additional education in a good school."[18]

Opportunity for education has long been a proper goal of the civil rights movement in America. The Supreme Court's 1954 decision in *Brown* v. *Board of Education* finally made equal access to public education the law of the land. And for nearly 35 years since then we have done well by our commitment to keep schoolhouse doors open to all students. Yet what happens inside those doors must command our attention as well. Real educational opportunity means equal intellectual challenge for all students. As the Carnegie Foundation noted in its recent report on urban schools, to expand access without improving school quality "is simply to perpetuate discrimination in a more subtle form."[19]

Too often we have not provided disadvantaged students with the first-class elementary and secondary education they deserve. I believe that quality education is now the central civil rights challenge facing us today. To realize the goal of equal opportunity generally, we must provide our students with equal intellectual opportunity in school.

Access to Quality

Striking evidence exists that the higher educational expectations associated with school reform have especially benefited students from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds. The high school transcript research summarized in Part I shows that these students are taking more classes in basic subjects; ethnic and racial differences in high school course-taking have narrowed in the past five years. Student achievement data show corresponding improvement. Combined average SAT scores for all students increased 16 points between 1980-81 and 1986-87; in the same period, black students' scores rose 34 points.[20] And black and Hispanic 17-year-olds have also scored comparatively greater gains than white students on several of NAEP's writing tasks.[21]

Still, wide ethnic and racial gaps remain on most measures of student achievement, and persistent differences in the academic programs that are offered to our students may help to explain why. Most American students study similar subjects in high school, but they do not yet study these subjects in the same depth. Consider the important case of high school mathematics. Just about all students graduating in 1987 took some math, but not all of them pursued the subject past basic levels. Asian students were almost twice as likely as whites and three times as likely as blacks and Hispanics to have taken a 3-year math program that included geometry and trigonometry. And black and Hispanic students were about twice as likely as whites to be in remedial classes.

Our schools cannot afford to provide an inferior academic program to those of our students who most need improved educational opportunity. And we needn't accept this double standard when there are many American schools that are providing disadvantaged and minority children with first-rate instruction. In 1987, the Department of Education documented and described the success of many of these schools in its book *Schools That Work*. But such schools remain the exception and not the rule. We need more of them, and we need to face squarely and honestly the real obstacles preventing us from getting them.

False Obstacles

Demographic changes are often cited as excuses for instructional failure or as impediments to needed education reform. By the year 2000, we can expect a combined public elementary and secondary school population about 5.6 million students larger than today's.[22] Also by 2000, about one-third of the total student population will come from minority groups.[23] Many of these children will grow up under less than ideal circumstances. Today, one-fifth of all American children live below the Census Bureau's established threshold for poverty; many of them—78 percent of poor black children—are being raised by single mothers. Each year, more than a million children see their parents' marriages end in divorce.[24]

In some quarters these statistics become grounds for a pessimism that says some children can't learn because their color, class, or family background gets in the way. By these lights, efforts to restore high standards and high expectations look foolhardy, even mean-spirited. For example, one state school superintendent opposed curriculum improvements last year by saying: "We will have taken the high jump and raised it from five to six feet for a group of youngsters that couldn't jump it at five feet without extra help."[25]

Such defeatism ultimately harms those whose best interests it claims to serve. The statistical and demographic trends adduced as evidence are incomplete and, in the final analysis, unpersuasive. In most respects, in fact, available data describe a student population different only by degree and detail from that which our schools have long served. For example:

- The increase in public school enrollments expected in the coming decade pales before that produced by the post-war "baby boom" of the 1950s and 1960s. An all-time high of 46.1 million students was registered 17 years ago in 1971, and we will not surpass it at any time in the foreseeable future.[26]
- Minorities already comprise 28 percent of America's school-age population. The slight increase in this figure expected by the year 2000 hardly constitutes a radical change in classroom composition.[27]
- The estimated impact of current and future immigration on our schools is dwarfed by historical precedent. In 1909, according to the U.S. Commission on Immigration, "57.8 percent of the pupils attending schools in thirty-seven of the big cities were either foreign born or were children of immigrants." Yet our schools educated them.[28]

Yes, we face large challenges. Children from troubled families, troubled neighborhoods, and impoverished circumstances have a longer and more arduous road to travel. But in the past, our schools have served classrooms full of the poor, the rich, and the in-between; they have welcomed the children of slaves and immigrants; and they have taught well through war, depressions, and civil unrest. They can teach well today and in the years ahead despite the demographic changes we expect. Apocalyptic analyses and Chicken Little stories about an onrushing wave of "unteachable" students should be rejected. In fact, the analyses and stories themselves—and the attitudes they reveal—belong at the top of any short list of *real* problems now facing American education.

What's To Be Done

Mastering a solid curriculum isn't easy for any student, and for disadvantaged youngsters it may take more learning time and creative teaching strategies. The essential point is that all must have a chance at rich and fulfilling learning. According to Patricia A. Graham, dean of Harvard's Graduate School of Education: "Historically, when we felt obligated to teach children to whom academic learning did not come easily, we modified the curriculum to make it easier for them to learn. . . . That tactic needs to be changed. . . . The curriculum, filled with the subjects that do endure and do enlighten a child, needs to remain. The means of teaching it to all children will vary."[29]

And since decisions about what coursework students take—and how hard they study—rest to a great extent with students themselves, we need to pay attention to factors that may encourage them to make unwise decisions. In her study of an inner-city high school, anthropologist Signithia Fordham made several troubling discoveries about why some black students avoided Advanced Placement and Gifted and Talented courses: "[The courses] were perceived to be beyond their career and job expectations; they were 'protected' by the school administrators and counselors from the detrimental effects of failure and consequently the

rewards of success; and they lack the support of a peer group to buffer them from the accusations of 'acting white.'"[30]

These findings present parents and educators with a serious challenge. Nothing influences learning so much as attitudes and beliefs about what produces it. Educational achievement by students comes of clear purpose, high expectations, strong and persistent teaching, and hard work. But achievement can be torpedoed by the idea that it is mostly a matter of luck, wealth, or native ability—an idea altogether too prevalent in American education today. "We expect too little of our children, are too easily satisfied, and don't really believe in the power of hard work," one leading researcher recently concluded.[31]

The problem can begin at home. A forthcoming comparative study by Harold Stevenson and his colleagues at the University of Michigan makes some interesting points about cultural attitudes associated with learning. American mothers, they found, tend to believe more than Japanese and Chinese mothers that school success is the result of innate ability. They also tend to be relatively complacent about disappointing academic performance. It is no accident, then, that Japanese and Chinese students outperform their American counterparts on a wide range of skill and subject matter assessments. "The importance of hard work is diminished to the degree that parents believe that native ability is a basis for accomplishment," Stevenson writes.

When such hands-in-the-air resignation about achievement is reinforced by school administrators—who ought to know better—our national effort to provide equal intellectual opportunity to all our students is undermined. "Holding this belief," Stevenson continues, "provides an excuse for offering some children less challenging curricula and making fewer demands for their mastery of the material."[32] The instinctive reaction of too many school leaders to criticism of their students' performance is to point at the students themselves—at their color or class or family background—on the unstated assumption that such factors by themselves explain educational failure.

It cannot be said too many times: Though there are now too many schools that fail to teach well, there is rarely anything "unteachable" about their students. As Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, has argued: "If we adjust class content up or down to the differences students come to us with, we will perpetuate those differences. If we expect all students to master a rich common core curriculum, there will still be differences, but they will be far narrower."[33]

Today many able and eager American children are not learning enough, and too often it's because of an unwarranted pessimism that leads to lower expectations for disadvantaged children. Of course many disadvantaged students face serious obstacles to achievement, obstacles outside the control of schools. But this makes it all the more important that schools do everything they can to provide all their students with the best education possible. Poor and disadvantaged children deserve an equal chance at a solid education. Providing it for them mainly takes hard work and a healthy respect for achievement an ethos that needs to be restored to American education at every level.

Establish an Ethos of Achievement

In a new book, *The World We Created at Hamilton High*, Gerald Grant, professor of education and sociology at Syracuse University, traces the 35-year history of a rather typical public high school in a medium-sized northeastern city. "Hamilton High"—Professor Grant has disguised the school's real name—began its life in 1953, in a middle-class residential neighborhood. For years the school was well-run and its students were high-achieving. But by the early 1970s—as a consequence, Grant concludes, of well-intentioned yet badly implemented social reforms—Hamilton High was a mess: violent, purposeless, educationally bankrupt.

Today, like thousands of similar schools around the country, Hamilton is engaged in a slow but steady comeback. Violence has abated, the academic program has been toughened up a bit, and test scores have begun to rise.

Still, despite this progress, Grant is unhappy with the way things are at Hamilton High—and, by extension, at countless other American secondary schools similar to it. And one fact disappoints him more than any other: the school's failure to restore a "positive ethos." Students routinely skip school assemblies. Cheating is pervasive. Hamilton's drug counselor doesn't think it's right to tell kids what not to do. Teachers don't bother much with discipline. In other words, Hamilton High School is adrift, without moral order or ethical compass—a machine of utilitarian bureaucracy. Its students absorb from it what skills and knowledge they will—and then move on.[34]

It doesn't have to be this way. There are many elementary and secondary schools throughout America where a spirit of achievement and success thrives, apparent even to casual visitors. These schools' hallways may not be new, but they are clean. Their teachers lead classrooms with vigor and easy confidence. Their students' work hangs proudly on bulletin boards. In the past five years, the Department of Education has recognized more than 1,000 such schools for their excellence. Close study of these schools makes clear that there is nothing mysterious about their shared ethos of achievement.

It turns out that these schools succeed for simple and obvious reasons. They have strong principals who express clear educational goals and who hold both teachers and students to high standards of achievement. They have teaching staffs of competent professionals who believe it important to shape students' character as well as intellect. They enforce discipline consistently and fairly. They have, in other words, the "hidden curriculum" of success. And, consequently, they have students who learn and grow.

These are good schools, solid places conveying sound, straightforward messages about hard work and citizenship. But today, even after five years of national attention to education reform, they remain the exception rather than the norm in American education. Too many American schools are merely plodding ahead without clear purpose or firm grasp of the broader values and principles central to real achievement. Too many American schools, in short, are like Hamilton High.

In three particular areas—the teaching of basic moral principles, the establishment of order and discipline, and the encouragement of solid work habits—our schools need marked improvement if they are to develop a true ethos of achievement.

Moral Lessons

Thomas Jefferson, listing for citizens of his day the essential elements of a sound education, wrote of writing, calculation, and geography—but also of "the improvement of one's morals and faculties." This same blending of character and ethics with knowledge and skills still has a place in American education today—or ought to. Responding to a 1984 Gallup Poll, the American people said they wanted two things above all others from their schools: first, that schools teach our children how to speak and write correctly; and second, that they help students develop reliable standards of right and wrong.[35]

Some educators may fret over the American people's insistence that our schools impart virtue along with facts, raising inevitable and time-worn doubts about "Whose values will be taught?" and "How?" The important thing to remember, however, is that both of these questions have answers. A large majority of Americans with school-age children believe it possible for schools to develop a sound basis for character education.[36] And there is also wide agreement about the kinds of character we want to encourage.

Surely no one would deny that honesty is a trait our schools should reinforce. No one would argue that courage is less than admirable. These two virtues do not belong exclusively to any one subgroup in American life; they are consensus ideals that we all honor. And there are others—including integrity, generosity, independence, fidelity, kindness, respect for law, patriotism, diligence, fairness, and self-discipline.

How should such elements of good character be imparted by schools? Most powerful moral lessons come from actual example—from exposing children to high character and from encouraging its imitation. Our teachers and principals must be men and women willing to articulate ideals and convictions to students, and, of course, to conduct themselves accordingly. "You cannot teach morality without being committed to morality yourself," Oxford University's Mary Warnock has written, "and you cannot be committed to morality without holding that some things are right and others wrong."[37]

Neutrality before important ideas is in many respects an educator's worst sin; it is an evasion of his central responsibility. As the theologian Martin Buber has suggested, the teacher is distinguished from other influences on a child's development precisely "by his will to take part in the stamping of character and by his *consciousness* that he represents in the eyes of the growing person a certain *selection* of what is, the selection of what is 'right,' of what *should* be." In this will and consciousness, Buber says, the "vocation as an educator finds its fundamental expression."[38]

Does this mean browbeating or indoctrinating students into particular points of view? Must it involve classroom attempts to resolve the most controversial and difficult public questions of our day—like abortion, affirmative action, or United States policies toward Central America? Is it necessary for our schools to develop entirely new theories and curricula for character education?

Not at all. A school satisfies its responsibility for moral education through its practice of an ethical candor and honesty that violates no student's rights; through its concentration on questions of right and wrong that are basic and appropriate to the ages of its students; through its refusal to muddy those questions with unnecessary complexity; and through its understanding that no educational wheel must be reinvented before children's moral faculties can be exercised and improved.

Subtle help comes from the curriculum that a good school should already be pursuing. Many of the clearest moral lessons can be found in classic stories from literature and history. Teachers needn't preach about honesty. They might simply recount the tale of Abraham Lincoln walking three miles to return six cents—and, conversely, the fable of Aesop's shepherd boy who cried wolf. Do we want our children to know what kindness and its opposites involve? Then we might have them read *A Christmas Carol* or *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and later on *King Lear*. We want our children to respect the rights of others, so we should have them read the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address, and Reverend King's "Letter from Birmingham City Jail." There are, of course, hundreds—thousands—of other examples and possibilities.

Order and Discipline

By themselves, committed school professionals and strong curricula are insufficient means of communicating character and inspiring achievement. Students must first understand that they are in school to learn and that a structure of school authority and order is necessary for them to do it. Articulating and securing that structure should be the first priority for schools seeking real improvement.

"Get order," a classic 1917 textbook on classroom management advised teachers and principals. "Remember that your success in your life work depends upon your success in this one feature of that work more thoroughly than it depends on anything else. You have the law back of you, you have intelligent public sentiment back of you."[39] Those words still ring true today. In national surveys, Americans have named disorder and indiscipline as the biggest problem facing our schools for 16 of the past 18 years. And there is wide public support for sensible methods of restoring order.

A large part of any school's ethos derives simply from its physical tone. A school with broken window panes, graffiti on its walls, and littered floors is, strictly speaking, a school without order. The character of an environment can sink deep into the souls of those whom it surrounds, and a disorderly school environment is bound to affect student character and attitudes toward learning.

Even more basic to the establishment of a positive school ethos is student discipline. Regular and prompt attendance, respect for teachers, and good conduct go hand in hand with academic success. In one recent survey, high school sophomores who got "mostly A's" had two-thirds fewer absences or incidents of tardiness per semester than those who got "mostly D's." The same students were far more likely to have their homework done and much less likely to have been in trouble with the law. Good behavior as a sophomore predicted better grades and higher achievement as a senior.[40]

Behavior is learned, of course, a habit that comes of rules and the routines that reinforce them. Students must be given clear standards of conduct; they must know what is expected of them. They should also know the consequences of

wrongdoing. Effective discipline is fair, predictable, consistently enforced, and appropriate to the offense.

Some forms of misconduct—the use or sale of drugs during school hours or on school grounds, for example—should not be tolerated. Lesser violations of a school code, like class disruptions or attendance problems, should incur carefully articulated and logical penalties. Punishment that inadvertently rewards misbehavior—responding to student absenteeism with suspension from school for instance—ought to be avoided. And all disciplinary actions should seek to involve the parents. Parents need to know when their children are breaking rules. For some students, the knowledge that their parents may be brought into school will itself help to deter misbehavior.

Parents can and should help in more active ways as well. Students bring to school habits and attitudes they learn at home. Not all teachers are parents, but every parent is a teacher—the child's first and all-but-indispensable teacher. Many parents can do more than they are accustomed to doing today. According to one recent survey, majorities of both parents and teachers think that "most parents fail to motivate their children so that they want to learn in school." Half of teachers and nearly 60 percent of parents believe that "many or most parents fail to discipline their children."[41] Parents have a responsibility to contribute to a good school ethos by sending to school children who are respectful, self-disciplined, and prepared to work hard and to learn.

Hard Work

To be sure, student discipline is not the end of education. It is only a means. Schools must insist on order in and near their buildings, not pay for it by abandoning what ought to be their ultimate goals: good teaching and effective learning. Yet too often a quiet but insidious "deal" is struck in American classrooms—minimal demand from teachers in exchange for minimal disruption by students.

In his book *Horace's Compromise*, Theodore Sizer described this pact—the "agreement between teacher and students to exhibit a facade of orderly purposefulness"—as a "Conspiracy for the Least, the least hassle for anyone."[42] And a team of researchers at Michigan State University has recently described that conspiracy's essential features. Where the conspiracy is in place, they report, teachers allow "the 'negotiation' of class content, assignments, and standards" and they show "relatively little concern for academic content" and "a willingness to tolerate, if not encourage . . . the substitution of genial banter and conversation for concentrated academic exercises."[43] Almost nothing of lasting value comes easy or free—especially in education—and the continued pretense in too many American schools that learning is possible without persistent effort has had devastating consequences.

There is a simple explanation for the fact that virtually all international studies show American students being outperformed by their foreign counterparts: children in many other countries spend more time in class and their teachers use that time more efficiently. In other words, both teachers and students in other countries *do more work.*[44]

The work ethic has a large part in American tradition. It needs to be strengthened—or revived—in American education. Of course, moral purpose,

school discipline, and a commitment to hard work cannot simply be bought or legislated for our schools. These are qualities that come from people—teachers and principals with vision and talent. We need to find more such people and bring them into our schools. And we need to recognize and reward the many we already have.

Recruit and Reward Good Teachers and Principals

The most important determinant of a school's ethos is its staff. In any enterprise, whether manufacturing automobiles or teaching children, success depends upon competent personnel and able management. In education, as in business, the way to build a staff of outstanding professionals is to search broadly for talent, hire those who are best able to do the job, and then offer rewards and advancement to individuals who perform well. Those who fail to measure up should be given the opportunity to improve; those who don't should be shown the door. Teachers and principals should be given wide latitude and responsibility to do the best job they possibly can, and should then be held accountable for their students' performance.

Though all this may seem like common sense, it is far from common practice in most school systems. We cannot expect our schools to improve, nor our children to achieve, so long as we adhere to a hiring and promotion system that rewards longevity over performance; that puts more stock in paper credentials than in knowledge, energy, and enthusiasm; and that pretends good teachers and good principals are to be found only among graduates of schools of education.

Getting Good Teachers

A Nation At Risk was sharply critical of how American teachers were trained, recruited, and rewarded. That report called for major changes: higher standards for teacher education; higher salaries, based on performance; 11-month contracts; career ladders to distinguish among beginning, experienced, and master teachers; and the use of nontraditional personnel, especially those holding math and science degrees, to solve pressing shortages in certain fields.

Subsequent reports recommended additional reforms. The Holmes Group, an alliance of education-college deans, advocated replacing the four-year undergraduate education degree for prospective teachers with a liberal arts degree in the teacher's chosen subject, followed by a year of graduate work in education. The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy recommended giving teachers a more active role in running schools and proposed a national board to establish professional licensing standards.

All of this attention has begun to produce change. The most obvious change is in salaries: average salaries for elementary and secondary teachers rose to an estimated $28,300 in the current school year—an increase, after adjusting for inflation, of 20 percent since 1980-1981. Better salaries help to explain the marked increase since 1982 in the number of college freshmen who express an interest in becoming teachers.[45]

There are legislative changes as well. Since 1980, over 1,000 pieces of new teacher-related legislation have been proposed in the states. Not all this change is progress, of course, but much of it is. Twenty-seven states have passed tougher requirements for admission to teacher preparation programs, and many states are demanding more courses in the liberal arts and fewer "methods" courses within such programs.[46]

These are steps in the right direction. But we must do more if we are to see real, lasting improvement in the quality of our teachers. We need to act upon three basic principles: wider recruitment, demonstrated competence, and pay for performance.

Opening the Profession. What are the attributes of a good teacher? First, a thorough knowledge of the subject he or she proposes to teach. Second, the ability and desire to communicate that knowledge to students. And third, sound character. These attributes are to be found in individuals from many walks of life—they include, but are by no means limited to, graduates of education schools. It makes no sense to erect artificial barriers to the teaching profession when we need all the talented, energetic individuals we can find. Richard Lamm, the former governor of Colorado, captured the irony of our current situation when he noted that thousands of American parents are pulling their children out of public schools, where education is free and teachers are nearly all certified, and putting them into private schools, where they pay tuition and many teachers are uncertified.

Many states have begun to react to this anomalous situation. Thirty-one states—up from eight in 1984—have instituted teacher recruitment programs designed to attract individuals with expertise and experience who may lack formal education school course credits.[47] Six states (California, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Texas) provide internships or apprenticeships for these new teachers.[48]

These new alternative certification programs are proving their effectiveness. Under New Jersey's Provisional Teacher Program, for example, individuals holding degrees in given subject areas can be certified to teach after passing a rigorous knowledge test. Candidates undergo a year-long internship. Then, upon recommendation by their school principals, successful candidates receive standard teaching certificates. By the start of the program's third year, it was producing 18 percent of New Jersey's new teachers. Their scores on the National Teacher Examination exceeded those of conventionally prepared teachers, and their job-attrition rates were significantly lower than average.[49]

Demonstrated Competence. Parents must have confidence in the knowledge and abilities of their children's teachers. We should test current teachers as well as new teachers for competency, and the tests must be demanding enough to screen out those who have no business in our classrooms. Forty-six states now require tests of minimum competency for new teachers—up from 12 in 1980. Three states (Arkansas, Georgia, and Texas) have applied such tests to teachers already in the classroom as well.[50]

Tests are meaningless, however, if virtually anyone can pass. And that seems to be the case with many current teacher exams. According to a recent study by the Department of Education, on most teacher exams only a minimal level of literacy is required to earn a passing score.[51] When Texas tested current teachers, for example, nearly 99 percent passed—but the reading proficiency required for the test was so low that one fourth grade teacher was prompted to remark that "a lot of my students could have answered those questions."[52]

Paper-and-pencil tests for teachers are necessary, but they are not sufficient guarantors of instructional competence. Regular evaluations of actual teaching performance, carried out in the classroom by peers and administrators, need to

become part of the management routine of every school. Done well, they not only identify teachers in need of improvement, but also provide part of the basis for well-functioning career ladders, merit pay, and other rewards for teaching well.

Pay for Performance. It has been true for too long that the best and brightest of America's college graduates look askance at teaching as a possible career. In surveys of college freshmen, most of those declaring an intention to teach have been students with below-average test scores. Our schoolchildren deserve better.

If we want to attract the best people to teaching, and keep the good teachers we already have, we must begin paying not simply for seniority or paper credentials, but for actual performance—for how well our teachers teach and for how much their students learn. Until good teachers are paid more than bad ones, our efforts to improve teaching and learning will be frustrated.

Some states and localities already reward merit. Twelve states have established teacher incentive or career ladder programs, while eight other states are funding pilot programs and six have statewide programs under development. Eight states either have implemented or are experimenting with teacher incentive programs linked to student performance.[53]

Getting Good Principals

Over the past three and a half years I have visited many outstanding schools. Without exception, each had an outstanding principal. Good schools have good principals—leaders who articulate clear goals, leaders who show the ability and authority necessary to get teachers and students working toward those goals.

At present, good principals are far too rare. Too many of our principals are ill-trained as leaders; too few are given the full administrative authority they need; and too many avoid initiative and risk-taking. Many also seem estranged from the concerns of the parents they are supposed to serve. A recent survey found that 75 percent of public school principals believe the schools in their communities have improved over the last five years; another survey shows that only 25 percent of the public agrees.[54]

We need more good principals, and to get them we must look beyond customary sources of recruitment. We must provide our principals with better training, we must give them far greater authority—and then we must hold them accountable for our children's success.

Recruiting Talent. Nearly 40 percent of current public school principals say they will leave their jobs over the next five years—a golden opportunity for American education to open the profession to all those who have the necessary interest and ability. *First Lessons,* the Department's 1986 report on elementary education, suggested such a "deregulation" of the principalship, and proposed that we consider for top school jobs not only exceptionally able working educators but also men and women who have demonstrated leadership in other fields. Not unexpectedly, that suggestion was scorned by principals' organizations. Yet some months later, New York City's Commission on the Year 2000 essentially reiterated the proposal, saying that "the pool from which principals are chosen should be opened up to managers from other fields, including business, higher education, and government."[55]

That idea is now being embraced across the Hudson River. New Jersey's Commissioner of Education has proposed an alternative entry program for principals that matches in some respects the state's plan for teachers. Under its provisions,

principal candidates without public school teaching experience would be eligible for jobs if they had a master's degree in management, passed a formal assessment (including a written exam), and then completed an internship in a public school district.

New Jersey's plan is only one example. Other states and localities may have different ideas about how to expand the potential pool of first-rate principals. But the rule remains the same: if we are to produce a new and better generation of school leaders, we must break the grip of convention and welcome talented leaders into our schools.

Better Training. Whether they come from teaching or other professions, principals need better training than most now get. The California Commission on the Teaching Profession properly criticized the manner in which teachers amass credits toward a principal's job: "Current training for an administrative credential is hopelessly inadequate, depending on a collection of courses spread over several years on the margin of the teacher's work day."[56] According to the National Governors' Association, principals themselves have testified to the shortcomings of their training, and a recent survey has documented the problem further: while 25 percent of public school principals rate their own training as "excellent," fully 74 percent believe it to have been only "pretty good" or "fair."[57]

More Authority. Today, the principalship of an ordinary school in a sizable school system is not so much a leadership position as a middle-management job attained through increments of seniority and credentialism. Most principals have little power to hire and fire teachers, to manage their own budgets, or to solicit school grants from foundations or other government agencies. A Department of Education survey reveals that virtually no public secondary school principals have genuine authority over teacher salaries, bonuses, or supplements. Only 8 percent report control over teacher performance standards, and a mere 11 percent control teacher assignment to their schools. Only 13 percent can make independent decisions about how to spend their schools' budgets.[58] Unless given some specific dispensation from the school district, the principal enjoys little real management latitude.

Yet despite their lack of authority, principals are not, as a group, demanding more of it. Fifty-five percent think that insufficient authority to manage their school is "not a problem or obstacle." Asked if they would want greater decision-making autonomy combined with accountability for results, more than one-third said no.[59]

Those aren't the right answers. Someone needs to be responsible for the performance of our schools, and principals—as their chief executive officers—are the logical choice. Real educational responsibility demands the authority to make decisions about school budgets and personnel. Good principals want that authority. Principals who don't may be in the wrong line of work.

We cannot, in conscience, demand more of our students than we do of those who teach in and administer our schools. Every day of their working lives, many American teachers and principals perform acts of selflessness and dedication. They need to be rewarded commensurately. At the same time, we urgently need to improve our methods for locating able and talented teachers and administrators, for encouraging and promoting them, and for penalizing those who consistently fail to do their job.

Institute Accountability

Of American education as it currently operates, we can say this: In general, if you do well educating a group of students, nothing good happens to you or for you. Similarly, if you do badly educating a group of students—again, nothing happens to you or for you. There are greater, more certain, and more immediate penalties in this country for serving up a single rotten hamburger in a restaurant than for repeatedly furnishing a thousand children with a rotten education. This must change.

We must establish a more direct link between acts and consequences in our nation's schools. Schools and educators need good, tangible reasons to avoid failure and they need good, tangible reasons to strive for success. If we are to improve our schools, we must have ways of identifying and rewarding schools that work, methods that work, and principals and teachers who work. We must also have ways of identifying those who fail to do their jobs satisfactorily and, if necessary, ways of removing them. We naturally want to encourage people who do a good job. As for those who do not, we want them either to improve or to stay clear of our children. As the nation's governors put it in their report *Results in Education: 1987*, "Someone has to pay a penalty for continued failure, but it should not be the students."[60]

Accountability—holding educators responsible for the results of their work—is not an abstract principle. It has four concrete and imperative elements: spending wisely, providing choice, monitoring productivity, and rewarding success.

Spending Wisely

This year, the United States will spend about $309 billion on education. Of that, $185 billion—about 4.1 percent of our Gross National Product—will go to elementary and secondary schooling.[61] This figure represents an increase of $56 billion since 1982. "The nation," education finance expert Allan Odden confirms, "has followed reform rhetoric with substantial new funding resources."[62] In constant 1986-1987 dollars, we spent $4,200 per pupil in 1987—up a healthy $626 since 1983; up a remarkable $3,083 since 1950.[63]

Of course, these are aggregate figures. They do not show whether every school district is adequately financed; they certainly do not reveal whether school funds are wisely and efficiently allocated within districts. But the numbers clearly show that the American people as a whole are extraordinarily generous when it comes to education. In truth, we are spending enough on education to do the job well. The trouble is not our level of investment; rather, it is the low rate of return we get for it.

Numerous studies confirm the commonsense proposition that money alone cannot buy quality education. Overall education spending correlates only weakly with student achievement.[64] But spending, if on items only tangentially related to the instructional mission of our schools, can and does affect educational quality—negatively.

Learning happens primarily in the classroom, so it stands to reason that money spent for improvements in learning should be directed first to teachers, books, and necessary technology. Ironically, however, as the United States has in recent years raised and spent unprecedented revenues for education, the proportion of education spending actually devoted to classroom instruction has declined. While total instructional expenditures per pupil went up 64 percent between 1960 and 1980, spending on administration and other non-instructional matters rose 107 percent. The number of non-classroom instructional personnel in our school systems grew by 400 percent between 1960 and 1984. And during those years, money spent on teacher salaries dropped from over 56 percent to under 41 percent of total elementary and secondary school spending. Too much money has been diverted from the classroom; a smaller share of the school dollar is now being spent on student classroom instruction than at any time in recent history.[65]

It should be a basic goal of the education reform movement to reverse this trend toward administrative bloat and to reduce the scale of the bureaucratic "blob" draining our school resources. Future education reform will require better spending of our education dollars. Some public leaders are recognizing the need for fiscal accountability. Chicago's mayor, for example, recently called for a 5 percent cut in that city's central school administration, noting that "for years the Chicago school system bureaucracy has gone up while student enrollment and achievement scores have gone down."[66]

But problems with inefficient educational allocations are not limited to any one city or just a few states. The federal government also has a responsibility to ensure that the billions it spends on education include reasonable guarantees of accountability. For example, under programs funded by Chapter 1, the nation's $4 billion compensatory education program, the Department of Education has proposed rewarding effective efforts and requiring ineffective ones to improve. In drug education, the Department has proposed legislation whereby schools would not receive money year after year if their programs did not succeed in reducing student drug use. Similarly, Americans should not be expected to pay for vocational education programs whose students fail to learn basic skills or are left unprepared to work in fields for which they have been trained.

Today, budget increases urged in the name of education reform are commonplace. In some cases they may be necessary. But we must not allow the easy satisfaction of spending money for a good cause to divert us from our equally important obligation to ensure that it is spent well. At all levels of American education, we must target and channel our generosity to make schools more accountable for results.

Providing Choice

In a free market economy, those who produce goods and services are ultimately answerable to the consumer; if quality is shoddy, the consumer will buy someone else's product. It doesn't work that way in public education, however. Even when armed with adequate information about school quality, parents in most places around the country cannot choose to shift their child from a bad school to a good one.

Still, the idea of choice—allowing parents greater flexibility to determine which schools their children will attend—has lately been gaining public favor,

despite opposition from much of the organized education establishment. The latest Gallup Poll shows that 71 percent of the American people back choice. The National Governors' Association report on education, *Time for Results*, also strongly endorsed parental choice.

And choice advocates have a collection of remarkably convincing success stories to point to. One of the best known examples is District 4 in New York's East Harlem. In the early 1970's, District 4 was an educational basket case. Among all the city's 32 school districts, it ranked last in reading scores. Then, under the leadership of superintendent Anthony Alvarado, the district allowed parents to choose for their children from among a wide variety of newly-restructured schools, each offering a particular instructional focus: science, the arts, and so on. In some instances, several mini-schools were created within the same building.

Today, East Harlem's teachers are energized and motivated. Lynne Kearney, director of District 4's Manhattan East School, says why: "People are here because they want to be. . . . The last time [my teachers] referred to the contract was a long time ago. . . . There's a camaraderie, because this place doesn't have to exist. We can go out of business tomorrow. If it didn't meet needs, it would fold."[67]

And District 4 *is* meeting needs. Today, 63 percent of its students read at or above grade level. The district now ranks 16th in the city in reading. Critics said choice could not work in inner-city schools because parents lacked the necessary education to make informed choices. They were wrong. Says Seymour Fliegel, deputy superintendent of District 4: "In New York City, they print the reading and math scores in the paper. But the kids *know* and the parents *know* who the best teachers are, and which are the best schools. They make selections based on experience and word of mouth."[68]

Another success story is Cambridge, Massachusetts. Since the inauguration of a "controlled choice" program in that city in 1981, the percentage of students passing Cambridge's basic skills test has climbed from 74 to 87 percent, and there has been a significant movement of children from private schools back into the public schools.[69]

Magnet schools are another major form of public school choice. Originally developed as a voluntary and effective alternative to mandatory busing for desegregation, these schools with specialized curricula or pedagogical styles have succeeded in upgrading the quality of entire school systems—especially those serving low income and minority children. For example, students at Davis Alternative Elementary, one of Jackson, Mississippi's two magnet schools, are admitted on a first-come, first-served basis. The student population reflects the socioeconomic makeup of the city, but achievement is way above the citywide norm. Last year, 49 percent of Davis fourth graders scored above the 71st percentile in the California Achievement Test, and in 1983, mean scores at Davis were the highest in all of Jackson's 37 elementary schools.[70]

Los Angeles has magnet programs at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels. For the past several years, students in these programs have been at or above district and national levels on tests of reading and math achievement. The longer students stay in these magnet schools, the higher their achievement relative to children in the city's other schools.[71]

In 1984-85, New York State conducted a thorough study of 41 magnet schools in eight districts receiving state aid. Researchers found that schools joining the magnet program showed markedly improved performance. Daily attendance rates

were higher than average in 98 percent of the schools, and 65 percent of the schools exceeded the average in student mathematics scores. New York's study also provided evidence that the establishment of magnet programs is associated with improvements in non-magnet schools in the same districts.[72]

Magnet schools and other programs that promote parental choice inject into public school districts some of the vigor of the free market—and create one of the most effective accountability systems possible. If all parents were given greater choice, it is likely that a few irredeemably awful schools might temporarily close their doors—but for the most part, bad schools would improve and good schools would become yet better. In the words of Michigan Governor James Blanchard, who recently proposed a choice system for large school districts in his state, "the result should be an explosion of creativity and innovation, with significant increases in quality for the entire system."[73]

Monitoring Productivity

There can be no accountability without accurate information for evaluation. Principals have to know whether a teacher is teaching well. Superintendents need reliable information on district attendance, dropout rates, and student achievement. Governors and state legislators need to know where and how well their education budgets are being spent. Parents need ready access to student performance data when trying to determine which school has the best program for their children.

For a system of accountability to work well, we need to monitor the *productivity* of our schools. But a recent survey shows that in many states, it is virtually impossible for ordinary citizens to get good information on how well their schools are performing. Of the 44 states that have provisions for student achievement testing, 17 do not report school-level results to parents, the general public, or the media.[74]

Some states are beginning to recognize the public's right to know. California has developed a "state report card" that provides performance assessments from the state education department to each of the state's schools. This information—available to the public as well—enables schools to compare their own performance with that of similar schools. Illinois has instituted a comparable system of accountability based on performance reporting, issuing annual school "report cards" on every one of its nearly 4,000 public schools. South Carolina has one of the nation's most comprehensive and explicit state accountability programs, with test results compared both to state goals and to prior performance. The program is helping to produce real success: South Carolina leads the nation in cumulative points gained on SAT scores since 1983.[75]

Perhaps the most decisive measure a state can take to ensure accountability is to intervene directly in the management of a failed school district. In 1985, for example, South Carolina designated six districts "impaired." All were instructed to formulate improvement plans; all did so, and the designation was lifted from all six districts the following school year.[76] Six states are legally empowered to declare failed school districts "bankrupt" (New Jersey's 1988 legislation is the first to use the term) and run them directly.[77] In most cases, intervention includes investigating the conditions that led to failure and possibly removing school administrators responsible for chronically poor performance. While actual state

takeovers of schools will occur only infrequently, the fact that someone is watching—and the implied threat of action—will undoubtedly serve as a spur to improvement.

Rewarding Success

Rewarding excellence is a commonsense management principle too often ignored in our schools and communities. Recognizing and rewarding extraordinary school employees is one of the most important and direct ways of instituting increased accountability. American schools are blessed with many dedicated men and women who share their great talent and affection with our children. For these people, fair salaries, merit pay, or some form of career ladder are not special rewards, but simply what is reasonable and what is due.

American education should make special efforts to recognize success—to celebrate exemplary schools and educators. The Department of Education has in recent years honored more than 1,000 outstanding public and private schools in its annual School Recognition Program. Local efforts to reward inspired principals and teachers can provide an important boost to the teaching profession, give constructive focus to civic pride, and encourage private sector generosity. For example, this year school officials and business and community leaders in Lee County, Florida held a televised awards banquet for six public school teachers, winners in the first round of the Lee County annual Golden Apple Teacher Recognition Awards.

But while we are rewarding success, we must at the same time hold incompetent teachers and unsuccessful administrators fully accountable. They should be given opportunities to improve, but if they do not improve they should be dismissed. Until schools are free to hire the best and fire the worst, other important reforms will be stymied.

In sum, accountability means responsibility for results. At every level, someone must be responsible, responsible for ensuring that our schools are doing the job they are supposed to do, and for improving those schools whose students are not learning. Accountability is the linchpin of education reform. Without it, all the enriched curricula in the world will not produce the results we hope for. With it, many other seemingly intractable dilemmas facing our education system will suddenly reveal themselves to be susceptible of resolution.

Conclusion

We have all heard the arguments of those who believe education reform will fail—that it will take much more steadfastness than the American people possess; much more money than we are willing to pay; or a more fundamental transformation of society than we are willing to bring about.

I reject these arguments. American education *can* be made to work better, and it can be made to work better now. Every reform measure recommended in this report is already in place and working today in various schools, communities, and states. Each can be replicated in most, quite possibly all, of our 50 states, 16,000 school districts, and more than 100,000 schools. And this work can be done soon.

Education reform is a two-step process. The first step is to identify where we stand and what needs to be done. That step has largely been finished. We know what needs to be done. But there is a second step: We must exert the will and demonstrate the resolve to overcome the obstacles that block reform. We must make education reform a reality. If we now act forthrightly and decisively, American education tomorrow will work much better than it does today. And we will provide our children with the schools they deserve.

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David A. Bennett
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Education of the Disadvantaged (November 9, 1987)

Evelyn Beasley
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UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION NEWS

FOR RELEASE at 2 p.m. (EDT)
Tuesday, April 26, 1988

Jane Glickman (202) 732-4307

SECRETARY BENNETT SAYS SCHOOLS HAVE MADE PROGRESS, BUT NOT ENOUGH

Education Secretary William J. Bennett today told President Ronald Reagan that American education is improving, but the nation's schools and children "remain at risk."

"We are certainly not doing well enough, and we are not doing well enough fast enough," Bennett wrote in American Education: Making It Work, a new report that he presented to President Reagan today in a White House ceremony.

The assessment, carried out at the President's request, comes on the fifth anniversary of A Nation At Risk, the landmark 1983 study by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. In the new report Bennett evaluates the progress of education reform during the last five years and sets forth the critical tasks that remain to improve American education.

"Our students know too little," Bennett wrote, "and their command of essential skills is too slight. Our schools still teach curricula of widely varying quality. Good schools for disadvantaged and minority children are much too rare, and the dropout rate among black and Hispanic youth in many of our inner cities is perilously high. Our teachers and principals are too often hired and promoted in ways that make excellence a matter of chance, not design.

-MORE-

"The entire project of American education -- at every level -- remains insufficiently accountable for the result that matters most: student learning."

The new report presents five key imperatives that, Bennett asserted, "should guide continued reform of American education":

--strengthen content throughout the curriculum,

--ensure equal intellectual opportunity for every student,

--establish an ethos of achievement in every school,

--recruit and reward good teachers and principals, and

--institute accountability throughout the education system.

While noting that promising changes already underway may take time to show results, Bennett warned of "bureaucratic inertia" and "those with a vested interest in the status quo who use political muscle to block worthwhile reforms."

"If our schools are to improve, that power must be overcome," Bennett said. "We know what works in education reform and we can improve our schools, even dramatically. But to do so, governors, legislators, educators and parents must have the knowledge and tenacity to get the job done. Our children's future depends on making American education work."

American Education: Making it Work completes a "homework assignment" from President Reagan to assess education reform five years after A Nation At Risk found "a rising tide of mediocrity" afflicting American education. On March 26, 1987, the President asked Bennett to report on "what still needs to be done, what reforms have worked and what principles should guide us as we move ahead."

The report draws on advice from hundreds of individuals, a series of Education Department seminars with experts on key topics of education reform, and on much research measuring what students study and what they learn.

A transcript study, comparing the courses taken by a representative sample of 15,000 high school graduates in 1987 with a similar group in 1982, reveals significant improvement. Nearly 30 percent of students completed the English, math, science and social studies portions of the "New Basics" curriculum recommended in A Nation At Risk, compared with 13.4 percent in 1982.

The report also contains new student performance data in math and science from forthcoming National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports, as well as high school completion rates and expenditures per pupil from a forthcoming edition of an annual Education Department statistical report, The Condition of Education.

The NAEP data indicate that math and science performance by American students is generally improving, but it remains weak compared to students in other countries.

Bennett concluded, "If we now act forthrightly and decisively, American education tomorrow will work much better than it does today. And we will provide our children with the schools they deserve."

Copies of American Education: Making It Work may be ordered by writing the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, or by calling (202) 783-3238.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE SECRETARY

FOR RELEASE: 2:00 P.M (EDT)
Tuesday, April 26, 1988

Contact: John Bertak
(202) 732-4576

WILLIAM J. BENNETT

U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

Remarks at

Press Conference for

American Education: Making It Work

The Horace Mann Learning Center
Washington, D.C.

April 26, 1988

400 MARYLAND AVE., S.W. WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

This afternoon at the White House I shall present to President Reagan the first copy of a new Department report entitled American Education: Making It Work.

On March 26th of last year, at an education symposium in Columbia, Missouri, the President gave me a homework assignment: the preparation of a report assessing America's educational progress since 1983, when the National Commission on Excellence in Education -- five years ago today -- declared us "a nation at risk." President Reagan asked that this report tell the American people "how far we've come and what still needs to be done, what reforms have worked and what principles should guide us as we move ahead."

We went to work immediately. Our work involved, among other things, a series of formal consultations here at the Department. It included collecting and synthesizing the available, up-to-date education research. And it led us to undertake a significant body of new research on our own. We commissioned a landmark study of 15,000 representative high school transcripts in an effort to determine just what the graduates of 1987 had studied. And we initiated a major national survey of high school principals, asking them how their schools are run, what changes have been made in the last five years, and how they feel about those changes.

So where are we? I am pleased to report that American education has made some progress in the last few years. The precipitous downward slide of previous decades has been arrested, and we have begun the long climb back to reasonable standards. Our students have made modest gains in achievement. They are taking more classes in basic subjects. And the performance of our schools is slightly improved. All this is encouraging. We are doing better than we were in 1983.

But we are not doing well enough, and we are not doing well enough fast enough. We are still at risk. The absolute level at which our improvements are taking place is unacceptably low. Too many students do not graduate from our high schools, and too many of those who do graduate have been poorly educated. Our students know too little, and their command of essential skills is too slight. Our schools still teach curricula of widely varying quality. Good schools for disadvantaged children are much too rare. An ethos of success is missing from too many American schools. Our teachers and principals are too often hired and promoted in ways that make excellence a matter of chance, not design. And the entire project of American education -- at every level -- remains insufficiently accountable for the one school result that matters most: student learning.

Widespread and fundamental reforms remain necessary. What they are is not mysterious. Indeed, identifying what works -- establishing the ideas and practices that make for effective

schools -- has been a signal accomplishment of the reform movement to date.

Scattered across the landscape of American education are hundreds -- even thousands -- of good examples: fine schools, outstanding teachers, courageous principals, committed governors and legislators, and eager and accomplished students of every color, class, and background. Visiting 97 elementary and secondary schools -- meeting students and educators, seeing them learn and work -- has been the most gratifying experience of my three and a half years as Secretary of Education.

The success of many American schools is reason for hope and optimism. Their success should be a model and foundation for the future of education reform in America. Extending and applying the lessons of what works -- to every school in every community and state in the nation -- is the task that lies ahead.

To do this, we need to pursue five basic avenues of reform: First, we need to strengthen the content of our elementary and high school classes, and provide our students with a solid core curriculum of basic studies. Second, we need to do a better job of extending equal intellectual opportunity to all our students by dramatically improving the education that is provided to minority and disadvantaged children. Third, we need to revive and restore a healthy ethos of achievement, discipline, and hard work in all our schools. Fourth, we need more effective and sensible methods

of recruiting and rewarding good teachers and principals for our schools. And finally, we need to make American education accountable for results; we need to hold our school system responsible for doing its job and we need to hold our schools responsible for ensuring that their students are learning.

We know how to achieve these goals -- necessary reforms are described and explained in this report. We know there is wide public support for these goals and reforms -- the American people endorse by overwhelming margins almost every significant proposal made in this report. And we know that if we fail to act on such proposals our schools cannot meaningfully improve.

But let's face facts. Needed further reforms -- however obvious or popular -- will not take place overnight. Even those changes already underway will take time to show results. And future reforms face serious obstacles.

Sound education reform continues to struggle against a narrow, self-interested, and determined opposition. Almost without fail, wherever a worthwhile school proposal or legislative initiative is under consideration, those with a vested interest in the educational status quo will use political muscle to block reform. Too often the anti-reformers succeed.

If our schools are to improve, the powerful resistance to reform must be overcome. It can be. The nation's modest success

over the past five years is both proof of reform's possibilities and a summons to renewed effort. All Americans concerned for the quality of our children's education -- governors, legislators, educators, and parents -- must become knowledgeable. aggressive, and courageous proponents of education reform. I offer this report as a guide to our future work together. It is work for our children and our country. There are very few things more important.

A Report to
the President and the American People

April 1988