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ABSTRACT

Three fundamental changes in state focus are needed to improve urban education and prepare many more students to participate in society and the world. First, state boards of education must act upon the belief that all children can learn. Urban students need rigorous, top-quality curricula and instruction delivered by highly trained and competent teachers. When states and schools believe that only a few urban students are capable of mastering a challenging curriculum and employ tracking and ability grouping, many urban students are given a watered-down curriculum in classrooms where the main goal is discipline and order. Second, state boards of education must view students as inseparable from their families and communities. State policies must hold urban schools accountable for forming close working partnerships with families and others in the community. Many urban students will never succeed in even the best schools unless they receive assistance with nonacademic problems such as family conflicts, employment, health and others. It is not surprising that children who are hungary, neglected, or in poor health have trouble learning. More personal support and services, as well as better integration of school and community, are needed to help urban students and families to become better educated and better skilled. Third, state boards of education must aggressively pursue strategies that provide additional resources to urban schools, and many urban districts must spend additional money in order to improve. In many instances, property taxes do not provide adequate funding for improvements. State boards should encourage shifts in resource allocation from property taxes to other state revenue sources to ensure adequate funding. Statistical data are presented in one graph. A list of 42 references is appended. (FMW)

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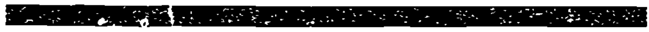

More Than A Vision: Real Improvements in Urban Education

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National Association of State Boards of Education

UD 027 899

More Than A Vision:

Real Improvements in Urban Education

National Association of State Boards of Education

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary 1

Foreword 3

Introduction 5

Recommendation I 13

Recommendation II 25

Recommendation III 32

Policy Options for State Boards 34

Conclusion 41

References 43

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Too many urban students are not receiving the education they will need to successfully negotiate the complex world and job market of the late 20th century. We are failing these young people and placing this country in jeopardy by not giving them a fighting chance to be active, contributing members of society. State leaders are concerned about this problem — and what it means for state economies as well as for the people involved — but solutions have been hard to find. The problems with which urban schools grapple are heartbreakingly complex, and it is difficult to implement state policy actions that can have an impact. This is especially true considering the sheer number and diversity of the students who are involved.

The Urban Education Study Group believes that three fundamental changes in state focus will help many more urban students succeed at school. The first is that state boards of education must act upon the belief that all children can learn. Urban students need rigorous, top-quality curricula and instruction delivered by highly trained and competent teachers. When states and schools believe that only a few urban students are capable of mastering a challenging school program, too many urban students are given a watered down curriculum in classrooms where the main goal is to maintain discipline and order. In effect, urban schools can turn into warehouses for the many pupils whom states and schools define as incapable of learning what the schools should teach. If this situation does not change, the performance of urban students will not improve.

Second, state boards must view students as inseparable from their families and communities. State policies must assist and hold urban schools accountable for forming close, working partnerships with families and others in the community. Many urban students will never succeed in even the best schools without assistance with non-academic problems such as family conflicts, housing, employment, health, drug treatment, and others. It is not surprising that children who are hungry, neglected, or in poor health have trouble learning. Many live in

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families that are struggling hard just to survive. More personal support and services, as well as better integration of the school and its community, will be needed to help urban children and families to become better educated and better skilled.

Third, state boards must aggressively pursue strategies that provide additional resources to urban schools. Improving urban schools is not just a matter of increased funding, but we must face the fact that many urban districts must spend additional dollars to institute the changes described above. In many instances, property taxes do not provide adequate funding for these improvements. State Boards should encourage shifts in resource allocation from property taxes to other state revenue sources to ensure adequate financing.

Together, these three changes — supported by the specific policies and strategies this report recommends — will improve urban education and thus prepare many more students to be an active part of their society and world.

FOREWORD

Before discussing improvements to urban education, it is helpful to become acquainted with an imaginary group of 9-year-old boys in an urban neighborhood. These 9-year-olds are full of energy and wit; they are alert, curious, and they all enjoy school. By and large, their families love them. But one of them is always hungry and often begs for food; two brothers need extensive dental work and have chronic, untreated sinus problems; most have been retained in grade at least once and a few can barely read. On the other hand, several are accomplished readers. Their families all need money, but some worse than others; some of the parents have jobs, but others lack jobs or are addicted to drugs and barely survive from one day to the next. Some children eat well, but others are malnourished as a result of a eating little but potato chips and ice cream.

There are no recreation programs in the neighborhood. The local swimming pool is closed for renovation, but there is no money for the repairs. Throughout the summer, the 9-year-olds hang out on the streets with drug sellers, drug buyers, and out-of-work men of all ages from early in the morning until late at night. They see people who are depressed, demoralized, drugged up, beat up, arrested, and even murdered. They dream about expensive cars, sports and musi ... rs, the latest sneaker, living in a private home, or even having a room of their own. They believe that being smart and doing well at school is more important than being physically tough or strong, but they themselves are tough and strong because their neighborhood conditions demand it.

There are also untapped resources in the neighborhood. There are families and other residents who already give a great deal of support to others — and who are worried about the future of these children, the lack of recreation programs, and the quality of local schools. Teachers and school administrators work hard under very difficult conditions to educate these young boys, but their efforts need more support. The neighborhood has buildings

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that are little used, parks that could be better used, empty lots that could hold basketball courts, and a Saturday sports program that needs to be expanded to serve more young people.

When trying to create improvements in urban education, it helps to consider how any suggested program might really assist these 9-year-olds — or any other small group of urban young people with whom you might be acquainted — to become active, accomplished learners. Such programs must build on the existing strengths in the neighborhood — such as people who care — to create a better network of support for the boys and their families. This report will begin and end with these particular 9-year-olds. If a state policy can create programs to substantially assist them, we will have uncovered policy and program principles that can assist a wide variety of vulnerable young people.

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INTRODUCTION

> If urban America, regardless of its gleaming high rises and impressive skylines, is a place where education is neglected, then the glittering signs of 'progress' remain a shameful facade.
>
> "An Imperiled Generation: Saving Urban Schools"

The problems that haunt urban schools are formidable and all too familiar — a complex web of serious social, health, emotional, and economic disadvantages that prevent many urban students from succeeding at school. Urban schools have a hard time attracting and keeping good teachers, and they often operate in physical facilities that are overcrowded and poorly maintained. Energy in many urban school buildings is aimed at just "keeping the lid on" while the money for textbooks and basic supplies is sometimes woefully lacking. Added to these problems are high rates of drug use and violent crime — not only in city neighborhoods, but inside school buildings themselves. A recent Department of Justice study found that Chicago school childrens' greatest fear is not being able to walk safely to school.

The complexity of urban problems has caused many people to despair and resist putting any more money or effort into urban school improvement. There is a temptation to draw up long lists of critical urban problems that need immediate attention, creating the impression that progress is necessary but impossible given the scope of the problem and the need for a wide array of comprehensive, high-budget solutions. As a recent Rand report notes:

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> [Urban] schools have too many liabilities to attract the help of ambitious politicians, cost too much to interest business and taxpayers, and provide services that are too low in quality to retain the support of the middle class.
>
> Educational Progress: Cities Mobilize to Improve Their Schools

It is particularly difficult to garner the necessary resources in a nation in which 74 percent of voters do not have children in public schools.

But the NASBE Urban Education Study Group believes that improvement in urban education is not only necessary, but attainable. As a beginning, state boards of education must open new channels of communication by convening meetings with urban district leaders. State agencies and urban districts too often operate independently and at cross purposes, an arrangement that is certain to generate feelings of resentment and frustration. The dialogue should center around a state plan to take three fundamental steps that would change the rules of the game for urban students and enable many more of them to succeed. These steps are:

1. State boards of education must act upon the proposition that all children can learn. Urban students, just like their peers in affluent suburban districts, need rich, sophisticated curriculum and instruction. When we give "watered down" content matter and instruction to urban young people, we reflect — and assure the fulfillment of — the belief that urban students cannot attain high levels of academic achievement. At the same time, blatantly harmful practices such as tracking, "ability grouping," and retention must be substantially revised or completely eliminated.

2. State boards of education must view students as active parts of their families and

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their neighborhoods. Schools must be held accountable for forging real working partnerships with families and communities. School officials are deeply aware of and frustrated by the non-academic problems that many urban students bring with them to school. At the same time, schools will not be able to improve the success of many young people without attending to their social, emotional, and health needs. We must assure that new coalitions are built among schools and other community agencies to assure that every young person receives the personal support and services he or she needs to attain the highest possible level of academic achievement.

3. State Boards of education must aggressively pursue strategies that provide additional resources to urban schools. Improving urban schools is not just a matter of increased funding, but we must face the fact that many urban districts must spend additional dollars to achieve high quality results. In many instances, property taxes do not provide adequate funding for urban schools. State Boards should encourage shifts in resource allocation from property taxes to other state revenue sources to ensure adequate financing.

Together, these three steps will force fundamental changes in the way in which urban students are educated. The Study Group is convinced that we need radical change. Educators have been operating with a "project mentality" for too long – tinkering around the edges of reform with small, short-term programs of limited impact. Strategies that have been successful need to be replicated on a large scale, both to improve urban schools and to build the public's confidence that urban achievement can be substantially improved.

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URBAN SCHOOLS CAN IMPROVE

We already know that cities can turn their schools around. The RAND Corporation recently issued a study of six cities that have significantly improved their schools. It found that significant improvement is most likely to occur when an entire community makes school improvement a priority. All six of the cities studied were motivated to change by the fear that poor schools would drive off opportunities for future economic development. In the six cities that improved their schools:

- There was an effort to break down barriers between schools and the broader community;
- The efforts relied on local leadership;
- Education improvement became the number one civic priority;
- The communities developed consensus on broad goals, thus creating a feeling of ownership among community members; and
- There were serious efforts to integrate a number of community efforts on behalf of young people, so that the problem was defined as a problem for young people, not a school problem.

Educational Progress: Cities Mobilize to Improve Their Schools

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THE HIGH COSTS OF INACTION

There is no doubt that it will be expensive to substantially improve urban education, especially considering how many students are involved. In 1987, New York City schools enrolled nearly a million students, or 40 percent of the students in that state. Chicago accounts for 25 percent of the total Illinois student enrollment.

But as report after report points out: The cost of doing nothing is even higher. According to the Committee for Economic Development, every dollar spent on early education can save $4.74 in remedial education, welfare, and crime several years later. Even an advanced education costs far less than years of incarceration for Americans who have no positive stake in society.

THE COST OF URBAN SCHOOL DROPOUT

The IBM Corporation has assessed the economic impact of school dropout in 18 large cities.* It has estimated that if nothing changes, $6.85 billion dollars in new tax revenues will be needed annually to cover costs (welfare, prison, crime) related to the dropouts by the year 2004. On the other hand, if graduation rates in those cities were increased to 90%, the increased taxable income of school graduates would generate $9.99 billion in tax revenues annually by the year 2004. (See graph on page 10.)

The students in the 18 cities studied represent 25% of the student population in their states, but 38% of their states' school dropouts.

* Los Angeles, Oakland, San Diego, the District of Columbia, Denver, Atlanta, Detroit, Newark, Jersey City, Trenton, Paterson, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Rochester, New York City, Dallas, and Houston.

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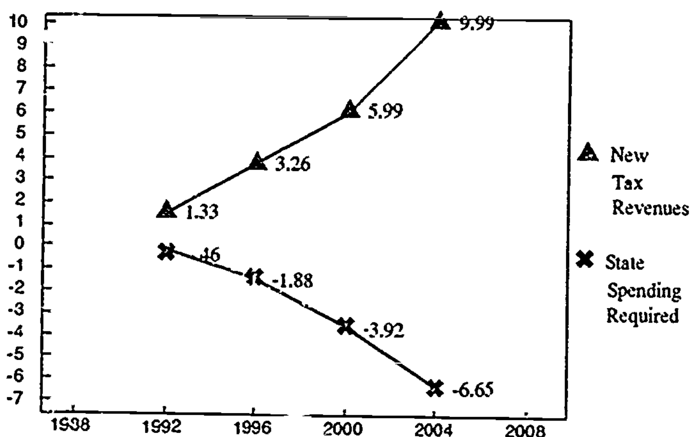
Economic Impact of 90% Graduation Rate on 18 Cities



This graph was generated using preliminary data for selected urban cities and some economic assumptions from the state of Colorado. For more information, contact Bob Gholson of the IBM Corporation, (303) 924-0783.

In addition, the nation is beginning to face a serious labor shortage. In about 5 years, young people of 16 to 24 years of age will constitute only 16 percent of our population. Fewer young people means more unfilled jobs, and poorly educated urban young people are not prepared to fill them. This is particularly true for school dropouts, whose real earnings have declined 41.6 percent over the past 15 years. This precipitous drop in earning power breaks up homes and forestalls marriages. In its wake are fatherless children, neglected women, and despairing men who must be supported — directly or through taxes — by a dwindling number of capable high school and post-secondary graduates.

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These problems do not impact all Americans in the same way. Urban schools are heavily minority, and it is not unusual for them to have dropout rates of 40 or 50 percent. The impact of this on Blacks and Hispanics is especially disturbing, since more than half of all minority adolescents (compared with less than one-quarter of white adolescents) live in central cities More than 90 percent of Hispanics live in urban areas.

At the same time, the minority population is rapidly growing. In Colorado, the proportion of minorities in the state will grow from 11 percent in 1980 to 40 percent in the year 2000. In California — a state that contains more than one out of every nine of the nation's school children — "minority" students are a majority in the elementary grades. This would also be true in secondary schools if a disproportionate number of minority students had not dropped out.

It is painfully clear that race and education equity are linked. As one University of Chicago researcher concluded:

> When the data from the excellence reforms are merged with data on the racial composition of schools - something that is almost never done by state governments - it is possible to show much more clearly than ever before the pattern of deep and persistent racial differences. Although we do not like to talk about it, it is true that if you grow up black or brown in one of the nation's great central cities, you will almost surely attend an inferior school...
>
> Race, Income, and Educational Inequality

And. although we have been trying to desegregate schools for almost forty years, most urban children attend schools that are increasingly segregated.

It is clear that the education system does not yet prepare all students for productive jobs or a higher education, and that this

failure is affecting minorities disproportionately. Jobs in the next century will hold great promise for young people who are prepared to compete in a global economy. But as it now stands, large numbers of urban students will have little chance to be an active, contributing part of this world. All of us will pay a steep price if urban education is not radically improved.

THE STATUS AND FUTURE OF AMERICA'S CHILDREN

One in four American children under the age of 5 live in poverty. Young children are the poorest segment of our population, and our child poverty rate is two to three times higher than in most other industrialized countries.

At the same time, a disproportionate number of poor children are minority. For children under eighteen, 45 percent of all black and 39 percent of all Hispanic children are poor, contrasted with 13 percent of white children. Even more disturbing, the percent of children living in areas of concentrated poverty (where more than 20 percent of the population is poor) is on the rise. and the rate is increasing in most central cities.

Five Million Children,
Children's Well-Being

Education matters more for children of the poor.

Race, Class, and Education

While much of the information we have presented is — and should be — depressing, the good news is that this situation can be turned around. Recognizing this fact, the Urban Education Study Group has spent the last year in thoughtful discussion with experts and program administrators. It has considered many program and policy improvements that might change the rules of the game for urban students and schools. What follows are many concrete ideas for making it happen.

RECOMMENDATION I: WE MUST CREATE CONDITIONS IN URBAN SCHOOLS TO ASSURE THAT ALL CHILDREN ARE SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS

Central to the reform of any urban school district is the idea that schools must promote ambitious notions of teaching and learning for all children. We must act upon the proposition that all children can learn and attain high levels of achievement. While few would dispute this premise philosophically, the actions of many teachers, principals, central office administrators, the public, and policymakers at all levels belie it. If this premise was the basis for school organization, schools would look different than they do today.

For example, children in inner city schools would be exposed to a challenging core curriculum; this curriculum would be "customized" for individual students where necessary. While all students would be expected to cover the same content, the time required to cover it, the setting, and the strategies might vary. Tracking and retention would be eliminated or significantly reduced; students would not be sorted through academic "gates" that prevent them from pursuing high-level courses at successive levels of schooling. More students would excel on tests of authentic achievement. States and local districts would have policies in place to recruit and retain high quality minority teachers, administrators, and board members. Suspension and expulsion rates would not differ by race. In short, we would have severed the connections between race, social class, and academic achievement.

We Know What Works

There is ample evidence that the vast majority of at-risk youngsters are fully capable of succeeding in the academic program of the public schools. Many of these children fail because a quality program is not available to them. When we are able to create schools with challenging curriculum, a variety of instructional strategies, a variety of learning settings and a personal approach to students, then more students will succeed.

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The problem is not our lack of knowledge about what works; it is that we have not created systems that promote it, require it and measure it accurately.

> It is extremely important for educators to realize that live examples exist of what to do. I have found such examples in schools in almost every major city! However, I have seen few examples which are district-wide. One of the most surprising things to me is that in district after district I have visited, local examples of success are not widely known among either the teaching staff of the district or among the administrative staff.
>
> Public Support for Successful Instructional Practices for At-Risk Students

How To Get There

There are several strategies that will improve urban education. As state policymakers, it is our responsibility to set the vision and create the policy environments that support our goals. We must determine whether local districts are successful in meeting these goals, but give them some latitude regarding how and when they meet them.

1. **Urban schools must be restructured to provide high quality curriculum and instruction.**

Urban schools must restructure to provide all students with a high-quality core curriculum and a host of instructional techniques that research has proven effective for disadvantaged and other students.

Examples of instructional strategies include cooperative learning, flexible pacing, peer-and cross-age tutoring, multi-age classrooms (particularly in the early elementary years), and

hands-on, activity-oriented learning activities. Such strategies promote a high level of participation for all students.

Cooperative learning, for example, puts students together in groups instead of competing against one another individually. Cooperative learning changes the basis for rewards in the classroom. Instead of relying on an individual student's success or failure, cooperative learning sets up an environment where students work in teams (as in the real workforce) and success is a team effort. Students learn a variety of lessons with this instructional approach — how to work together, how to appreciate each other's talents and skills, and how to value each team member. Research has shown that many minority children respond more positively to cooperative learning approaches than to the competitive atmosphere that is typical of most classrooms.

The curriculum should be challenging and developmentally appropriate. As Phil Daro of the California Mathematics Project put it:

> The curriculum should not be pre-simplified for students, especially students who are performing below expectations. It is easier to learn a song than to learn a list of notes and a list of rules for organizing them into a song. It is easier to learn a story than a syllable; to learn how the heart pumps blood than the names of all the parts of a diagram. ...In the context of explaining and speculating, the vocabulary becomes useful [to students]; it is learned through usage.

"Accelerated" schools have been designed to speed up the progress of at-risk students by providing more challenging curricula and instruction — rather than through remedial classes. For example, the following table sums up the differences between "accelerated" and conventional instruction:

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Accelerated vs. Conventional Instructional Practices

CONVENTIONAL INSTRUCTION	ACCELERATED INSTRUCTION
Rote learning and drill	Active and Discovery learning
Textbooks	Literature Primary Sources
Worksheets and workbooks	Person, community, and real- world experience and student construction of materials
Lecture-style teaching	Hands-on activities Projects Full range of expressive modes Educational technology
Teacher-centered classrooms	Cooperative learning techniques Peer and cross-age tutoring Student responsibility
Homogeneous grouping	Heterogeneous grouping

<u>Toward Accelerated Middle Schools for At-Risk Youth</u>

Bob Slavin of Johns Hopkins University has developed a "Success for all Students" program for inner-city elementary students. Slavin works to assure that when students finish the primary grades, they are competent readers and ready for the next level of schooling. To accomplish this, piloting schools take advantage of new Chapter I guidelines that allow schools in

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which 75 percent of the student population are eligible for Chapter 1 to use those funds for school-wide programs. These extra resources are used for tutors, smaller classes, and other support.

> Jerry Kaplan, a mathematics educator at Seton Hall University, has developed a plan to change mathematics instruction in grades 6 - 8. The first step is to work with elementary schools to condense content in grades 1 - 5. By eliminating redundancy and repetition, students can gain one full year of instruction. In grade 6, they are ready for pre-algebra, and algebra is taught as a two-year sequence in grades 7 - 8. Thus, all middle school students are ready for more advanced mathematics in high school. The content is heavily integrated with technology — calculators are used routinely in the early elementary grades, and computers (both for practice and simulation) are used at all grade levels.

Districts and states should also consider extending the school day and year. This can be done in a number of creative ways. For example, a class that is graduating from the fourth grade could begin working with their fifth grade teacher during the last weeks of school. Then, the group could meet with their new teacher periodically over the summer on special projects that are of interest to the class. In the fall, the teacher and students would already be well acquainted, avoiding the need for them to spend many weeks and months becoming accustomed to one another.

2. Schools must eliminate tracking and ability grouping.

> School-based and district-wide practices that group students by 'ability' erode the educational experience for all children and put large numbers of [vulnerable students] at a disadvantage that increases with each passing year.
>
> Locked In/Locked Out

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There is no current practice that is so widely used — with as little evidence of success — as tracking and ability grouping in public schools. Yet these practices are firmly entrenched in school structure. As a result, the disadvantages that children bring to school are exacerbated rather than overcome.

The term "ability grouping" refers to a set of practices — common at the elementary level — that separate students into instructional groups according to their preconceived ability. The point is not that teachers should never put students into groups in order to provide more individual instruction. It is rather that students should not remain in ability groups for significant portions of the school day or year. Group assignments should be examined regularly and students reassigned as appropriate.

Tracking is the practice, most common in middle and high schools, of sorting students across the curriculum — for example, into a "general track" or an "honors track." Although most school systems do not insist that students remain in one track for all courses, in reality students tend to stay in their tracks. As one high school student said, "I basically have gone through high school with about fifty kids — the same kids are in all my classes."

Both ability grouping and tracking have been shown to produce extremely harmful effects on students who spend their days in the "lower tracks." Goodlad maintains that ability grouping in the early grades leads to different learning outcomes, and that after the first grade, the likelihood of students moving out of their assigned group drastically diminishes.

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THE HARMFUL EFFECTS OF TRACKING

A teacher writes about the impact of tracking on students who are not labeled as high achievers:

For minority students, the implied label of "ungifted" is especially pernicious. T.C. Williams graduate Karen Carrington has bitter memories of the days in fourth grade when her "gifted" peers would be pulled out of class. "They got to do the interesting things that would stimulate any kid to learn. They had the plays, the fun projects; they cooked Chinese food. The rest of us would sit in the classroom and do 50 of the same problems over and over again. That would make any .e feel inferior. But when you're black and almost all the 'gifted' kids are hite, it makes you feel even worse," says Carrington, who overcame those feelings to become a top student at Northwestern University.

"Fast Track Trap"

We must eliminate comprehensive class ability grouping and tracking in elementary and middle schools. Tracking must be seriously de-emphasized in high schools. All should be replaced with more personal learning plans that are "custom designed" for each student.

3. Schools must eliminate retention.

Retention — the practice of "failing" students by having them repeat a grade — is another harmful but widely used practice. As with ability grouping, there is little evidence that retaining students improves their academic attainment. Rather, it has been conclusively shown that retention is a precursor to a students' decision to drop out of school. Nationally, 2 - 8 percent of the K - 12 school population is retained each year. These rates are far higher than for other industrialized countries, where rates

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are typically less than one percent. Students who are retained rarely receive any special attention. The result is that they only re-experience more of the same courses and materials that led them to fail initially, and the harmful effects tend to increase over time.

States should encourage local districts to eliminate ability grouping and retention policies and to create continuous progress programs, using superior curricula and instruction for low-achieving students. Massachusetts has taken the lead by developing state-level policy documents (Structuring Schools for Student Success) describing the harmful effects of tracking, ability grouping, and retention, and, a variety of alternative strategies schools can use in their place are described. The state department of education intends for these papers to guide local practice.

4. Schools must make better use of technology to educate students and to bridge the gap between schools, families, and communities.

Education is the last large institutional establishment in the United States to take wide-spread advantage of the technology and information revolution of the past 30 years. This is unfortunate. First, it leaves many schools without new and innovative techniques for teaching and learning that are made possible by technology. Second, young people who are competing for future jobs will need to use computers and other information systems. Third, schools should be using computers to forge links with families, libraries, universities, community centers, and others -- a new, direct way of sharing information between diverse locations.

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New technology consists of more than learning to use computers. It has created the possibility of "distance learning." which can enable students to take advanced or other courses that are not offered at their schools. For example, an urban school may not be able to afford (or find it cost effective) to hire a full-time teacher of Russian or Japanese, but it may be able to afford a satellite link-up with a teacher at another site. Distance learning can allow an urban student to take advanced mathematics or science courses and to talk, via computer, to students at other schools or even in other countries. In the future, it will, in many cases, be the only cost effective way to offer courses for which there are few qualified teachers.

As a result, the many urban young people who do not have access to computers and other advanced technology will be at a disadvantage for years to come. Yet urban schools may find it difficult to purchase the equipment and training that they need. State boards of education should encourage school/business partnerships that can obtain funding for computers, distance learning, and other technology. Funding should be sought for not only schools, but for homes and families. Recommendation II in this report focuses on the fact that learning is lifelong, adults in families can learn new skills, often valuable job skills, side by side with their children.

5. **We must recruit and train more minority school board members, administrators and teachers.**

> The decline in black teachers...is reaching crisis proportions. As older black teachers retire and younger blacks eschew teaching, the prospects for a representative teaching faculty diminish...The National Governors' Association projects that by 1995 only 5 percent of all teachers will be from minorities compared with 30 percent of the students.
>
> Race, Class, and Education

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The study quoted above gives many reasons for increasing the number of minority educators. For example, in school districts that have higher percentages of black teachers, black students are less likely to be disproportionately disciplined, to be placed in a "low achievement" class, or to drop out of school. They are more likely to enter gifted classes and to graduate from high school.

The authors also point out that schools with black school administrators are likely to have a higher percentage of black teachers. However, increasing the number of black administrators will not result in more black teachers if those teachers do not exist. It is important to consider how more minorities can be attracted to and prepared for the teaching profession. This may require:

- creating high school programs that will prepare students for a college teacher preparation program;
- providing scholarships and loans that are forgiveable when a student becomes a teacher; and
- colleges and departments of education to forge better links with two-year colleges that have a high minority enrollment.

It is also important to increase the number of minority school board and state board of education members. For more information about policies to attract minority teachers, see the report of the NASBE Study Group on Teaching (1990).

6. **Schools must have significant decision-making authority with respect to curriculum, instruction and organization and have the resources necessary to produce change.**

This report focuses on how schools, families, and com-

munities must work together (with local and state policymakers) to support the education and development of urban children. In order for this to be effective, there must enough resources, capacity, and flexibility at the school level to respond to the unique needs and circumstances of the children in attendance.

Allowing this flexibility can be particularly difficult in urban districts that are large and sometimes virtually impossible to administer. A high pupil population requires a large staff of teachers and support personnel, and the activities of a large staff, in turn, must be coordinated. Urban schools and districts become bureaucracies in which educational leaders are separated from students by many organizational levels. The premium is on management and order, rather than on imparting knowledge and skills to students.

Large education bureaucracies develop concerns and issues of their own that are separate from the fundamental task of teaching. These concerns — the rights and responsibilities of various positions, who has power, advancement up the organizational ladder — absorb much of the time and attention of staff. And when energy is devoted to bureaucratic rather than education concerns, students are robbed of concerted attention to their needs. Thus, the size of urban districts often creates barriers to effective and efficient education.

States must also be willing to relinquish control to local districts and schools. They must give schools the freedom to "customize" programs for individual students, and then hold the schools accountable for the results they achieve.

7 Schools must become more personal environments.

While the exact effects of district, school, and class size on the achievement of students is disputed, most researchers concur that schools with student populations of between 2,000 and 4,000 students are too large.

Asa Hilliard calls for "human-sized environments"; elementary schools should have no more than 250 students and secondary schools no more than 500. Urban restructuring efforts such as the Philadelphia Schools Collaborative call for breaking down schools into smaller units — into "houses" or schools-within-schools. Smaller units create conditions in which practices such as teacher teaming, common planning time, and building-driven staff development become possible. And, while we as yet lack results about decentralization experiments such as the one in Chicago, such approaches are worth watching.

Another way to ensure more personal environments is to create teacher advisory programs. Teacher advisories take the "homeroom" concept, extend its length, and encourage teachers to become the liaison between students, school, and home for the students in their advisory group. Teachers keep track of students' academic progress in all subjects, are the school contact for parents, and in general, "advocate" for their students.

Schools can also make sure that at-risk students are connected to adults or older youth in the community who can provide guidance and support. Many schools, businesses, communities and universities are setting up mentoring programs with excellent results. There is a wealth of information about how to create successful mentoring programs. Project PLUS (Capital Cities/ABC and PBS) and the Campus Compact through its Partners in Learning Program have developed networks, training, and evaluation materials for others interested in setting up similar programs.

Finally, schools can play a significant role in meeting students non-academic needs to minimize the impact of negative environmental or family factors that inhibit a student's ability to learn. Recommendation II, below, explains how this can be done.

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RECOMMENDATION II: WE MUST PROVIDE MORE COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT TO URBAN STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

> In the 1960's I began to speculate that the contrast between a child's experiences at home and those in school deeply affects the child's psychosocial development, and that this in turn shapes academic achievement. The contrast would be particularly sharp for poor minority children from families outside the mainstream. If my hunches were correct, then the failure to bridge the social and cultural gap between home and school may lie at the root of the poor academic performance of many of these children.
>
> "Educating Poor Minority Students"

Many disadvantaged students need more than better curricula and instruction in order to succeed. Teachers, principals, and other staff are acutely aware of the limitations of the schools to assist students who are troubled by personal, home, and community problems. Schools that are isolated from families and neighborhoods have a limited ability to help students who are the most vulnerable to failure.

Schools must actively acknowledge the fact that students are inseparable from their families and neighborhoods. Learning is lifelong, and families may need to work alongside their children and with other community members to improve the life chances for all of them. Education should begin with early intervention programs for disadvantaged pre-schoolers and their parents. Adult literacy programs, education for families in child rearing and child development, better health care, and family counseling may all be part of the plan to improve a child's academic achievement.

Educators have not traditionally considered non-academic concerns as their responsibility. But the Study Group

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believes that without better support for students' social, emotional, and physical problems — and without working with families and neighborhoods as well as students — schools cannot help many students to graduate from high school or leave school adequately prepared for jobs or higher education.

How To Get There

1. **Schools must assure that students and their families receive more personal support in solving non-academic problems that interfere with schooling.**

For many urban students to succeed at school, students and their families will need intensive support — programs that provide one-on-one, personal assistance with problems related to health care, social services, family conflicts, financial assistance, and others. It is not enough to give information to students and families about places to go for help, particularly in communities where a deep distrust exists between service providers and neighborhood residents. This is particularly true when the needs of urban residents are both critical and complex. For example, a teenager who has a baby and wants to graduate from high school may need assistance with child care, medical services, family counseling, after-school employment, financial assistance, and arranging more flexible scheduling for her classes and tests.

The school is the one institution that provides long-term, sustained interaction with the majority of our young people. Schools can help provide more personal attention to urban students and families in some basic ways, such as:

- o Expanding the responsibilities of personnel such as school nurses, counselors, and others. This may require relieving them of other responsibilities so that they have more time to help individual students and their families. It may also require hiring more staff;

- o Agreeing to house personnel from other

agencies or organizations — such as social service or health workers — who would help students and their families to gain access to needed services; and

- Hiring new kinds of school personnel, such as counselor/advocates, who can assist individual students to gain access to services that are outside of school.

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A COUNSELOR/ ADVOCATE AT SCHOOL

In 1986, NASBE began a three-year demonstration project to test the concept of having a counselor/advocate help pregnant and parenting students stay in school. These counselor/advocates worked <u>within</u> schools to provide individual teens with a wide variety of supportive services — such as attendance tracking, personal support, and access to a wide range of health, social, and academic services. For example, they could inform teen mothers about day care options, where to go for mental health counseling, or how to attend school on a partial schedule.

The project had a positive effect on participating teens. less were retained in their grade, and most made progress in moving to the next grade. There are two major advantages to the counselor/ advocate model. First, it is a relatively straightforward and low cost model, especially when compared with the cost of building and administering separate schools for pregnant teens. Second, it encourages changes <u>within</u> the school setting to keep at-risk students from dropping out.

This approach can be used more broadly as a model for helping other at-risk teens stay in school. To establish a similar program in other schools, counselor/advocates will need to:

1. <u>Develop a model</u> for referring teens to needed health and social services in the community;

2. <u>Track the attendance and academic progress of teens who are having problems</u> and provide them with information about academic options and alternatives;

3. <u>Serve as a personal counselor</u> for troubled students by understanding their complex situations and being able to counsel them — and perhaps their families — about sources of help.

NASBE also found that such programs are best supported by a community problem solving group comprised of representatives of different agencies and organizations — such as the school system, health and human services, and community-based organizations.

<u>Counselor/Advocates: Keeping Pregnant and Parenting Teens in School</u>

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2. **Schools must be partners with communities in assuring that adequate non-academic services are available for urban students and their families.**

It is important to assure that health and other services are convenient, available, and affordable. For example, health clinics that are costly, distant from school and home, and are only open during school hours, are of limited use to children and families. Schools can cooperate with other agencies to assure that health and other services are provided to students and families at or near to the school site. Schools can agree to work with outside agencies to house services within the building. They can cooperate with community efforts to establish health centers near the school. They can agree to work with community-based organizations and agencies to house recreation and other after-school programs.

In some communities, the school system may take the lead in creating a multi-agency public/private network to better coordinate and provide services to urban young people and their families. But even if schools do not take a lead role, they can agree to work with multi-agency collaborations – working with public agencies representing health, social services, parks and recreation, juvenile justice, and labor — as well as private organizations such as churches and the business community.

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THE DENVER FAMILY STAR PROGRAM: THE SCHOOL AS A COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTER

The Family STAR program, located in an impoverished section of northeast Denver, is a 2-year-old project to help adults and children make education the heart of their community life. Family STAR's 3-year plan is to convert a 3-block area of abandoned buildings into a complex that houses an elementary school, a secondary school, and a wide range of services including adult education, computer literacy programs, job training, infant and child care, a credit union, home health nurses, and wide range of other city and community services.

The program was initiated by an elementary school principal who was frustrated by the crime, violence, and drug use surrounding her school. She approached local parents, businesses, and others to become involved in improving the community. A member of the IBM Corporation provided training to the group, which eventually obtained grant money from businesses and foundations.

Family STAR is a much-watched attempt to make education the heart of a community's life by helping adults and children to make the connection between education and success. In short, it is using education as a catalyst for a neighborhood's revival.

Source: Bob Gholson, IBM Corporation

3. **Schools must provide experiences to supplement the school day and year.**

Poor urban children have fewer enrichment opportunities than suburban children -- opportunities such as computer camps, overnight camps, special programs in museums and science centers, organized recreational sports and other activities, or music lessons. Schools can help remedy this by creating community service or cross-age tutoring programs in schools. They can allow outside community agencies to run after-school

programs in school buildings. Schools can also link up with other programs, such as latch-key or summer programs, to ensure that more students participate.

Summer learning loss is a well-documented phenomenon among many urban students. As a result, many return to school showing lower achievement levels than when they left the previous spring. Structured experiences coordinated by schools during the summer months can offset much of the loss that occurs. The Summer Training and Education Program (STEP), for example, offers inner city youth opportunities to receive tutoring, career exploration, job skills, and life skills education along with structured employment opportunities. A STEP counselor also checks in with students during the school year. The STEP program is now operating in 73 sites in 14 states, and the results are promising.

4. Schools must adapt to the multi-cultural environments of students and their families.

As noted earlier in this report, discrimination based on race or ethnicity continues to be a problem in this society. Schools can add to this problem when they are insensitive to the families and communities of diverse racial and ethnic groups. The sheer diversity of urban students presents a real challenge; for example, 75 languages are spoken by students who attend the Seattle Public Schools. In this situation, teachers and administrators cannot assume that their pupils share the same world view or that they will react to various situations in the same way. Thus, implicit understandings that are the base of communication and motivation can vary from student to student, as well as between student and teacher.

Working successfully with cultural diversity requires special skills from teachers and administrators, and it has implications for their training, certification, and continuing education. Staff members who are especially skilled at such work need to be recognized and rewarded for their expertise, and they need opportunities to become "master teachers" and mentors for other teachers.

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Students who speak languages other than English need to learn English — but they also need help and encouragement for staying fluent in their original language. Fluency in more than one language is a real asset, and it should not only be respected by schools, but become an integral part of every child's education. In fact, when schools set goals — such as assuring that all fourth graders will be bi-lingual — students who start school with a second language will be at an obvious advantage. Students who speak languages other than English can present interesting opportunities. For example, innovative elementary schools have taught native Spanish and English speakers together – teaching some subjects in English, some in Spanish – thereby helping all students to become fluent in both languages.

RECOMMENDATION III: WE MUST REDRESS THE FISCAL INEQUITIES THAT RESULT IN SUB-STANDARD CONDITIONS IN URBAN SCHOOLS

> In most cities, schools struggle to survive in a climate of neglect. They are cited in headlines for their failure but often are not given positive community support. State financing of urban schools frequently is insufficient, and federal leadership is lacking. It not possible to have an island of excellence in a sea of indifference.
>
> "An Imperiled Generation: Saving Urban Schools"

Education is a state function, but we have left its operation to local school districts. Because historically the bulk of school funding has come from local property taxes, our current system favors wealthier districts. As conditions have worsened in cities, the inequities between impoverished districts and suburban districts has increased. As a result, education dollars do not exist in the places of greatest need, and there is plenty of evidence to show that this situation is getting worse. For example, the education infrastructure in many cities is crumbling. The Council of the Great City Schools estimates that over one-third of urban

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school buildings are over fifty years old. As cities become more heavily populated with minorities, the funding issue takes on overtones of discrimination.

This problem has been addressed through a series of equity finance reforms in the late 1960's and 1970's. States began to "adjust" their funding formulas to local districts, taking into account the district's wealth. However, the bulk of funding still comes from property taxes, and as a result, inequities between districts have continued unabated. After a decade of relative quiet about the finance issue, 21 states are now in the process of reviewing school finance formulas to make them more fair, and there is a shift from equity (all districts should receive an adjusted equalized amount of state aid) to "adequacy" (there's not enough money in the system to provide for quality schools).

In a recent finance case in New Jersey, Abbot v. Burke, the state Supreme Court declared the state's school funding system "unconstitutional as applied to poor urban districts." According to the ruling, the new finance formula must provide enough funding so that per-pupil expenditures in poor urban districts "are substantially equal to those of the more affluent suburban districts" and so the "special disadvantages" of the urban students are addressed. The decision specifically acknowledges the poorer quality of resources and education in cities and "municipal overburden" or the excessive tax levy some municipalities must impose to meet government needs other than education. Many observers feel this landmark decision will affect other finance suits currently underway. Some believe that the Supreme Court may take another look at the finance issue and declare education a constitutional right, which would bring it under the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment.

We need to develop a finance system that moves to a broader base of tax support — which means increased state financing. This will lessen disequalization and help cities. Or, the property tax could be left alone while states expand their percent of the education budget.

INEQUITIES THAT RESULT WHEN PAYING FOR URBAN EDUCATION WITH PROPERTY TAXES

One example of the inequities that can result from paying for urban education with property taxes is illustrated by differences between two cities in Texas: Dallas and El Paso. The taxable value of property in Dallas ($47 billion) is about 7 times higher than in El Paso ($7.3 billion) -- despite the fact that Dallas has only twice the number of people.

As a result, even with its higher property taxes, El Paso cannot raise as much money for its schools as Dallas can. Dallas has a taxable value of $397,151 per pupil, but El Paso has only a taxable value of $129,713 per pupil.

Source: Texas Education Agency

POLICY OPTIONS FOR STATE BOARDS:

State boards have a significant role to play in helping urban schools improve. Their role as key state education policymakers with strong links to the community permits them to become champions for children. They can help create school and community environments that promote "substantial and sustainable change" in the way the systems operate so that the best interests of urban children are served.

Improving Education for All Students

Many of the suggestions mentioned under Recommendation 1 in this report would improve the education for all the students in a state. Thus, one tactic for improving urban education is for states to develop a plan for general education restructuring and improvement. The glue that holds a restructured system together is a common vision of what the result should be. State boards must make it clear that high expectations will be held for

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all children and, while the teaching strategies and time spent may vary, the outcomes for children will not.

State boards can build a common vision for the education system in their states. The kinds of policies that will ensure that the vision gets implemented are those that have been discussed in other NASBE study group reports (See, for example, Rethinking Curriculum, Effective Accountability, and Today's Children, Tomorrow's Survival: A Call to Restructure Schools.) They call for rigorous curriculum for all students, helping schools set their own standards of excellence and equity and holding them accountable for the results, and measuring results with tests of authentic achievement.

In order to build this common vision, state boards must reach out to many others — educators, the business community, other public agencies, parents — so that the results address common themes held by all. Once the vision is established, state boards can establish policies to implement it. These policies can include:

- Requiring and then helping all schools to set their own standards of educational excellence and equity.

- Supporting the development and implementation of curricular frameworks that outline challenging material for all students. Such frameworks set out desired long-range objectives and permit flexibility and creativity at the local level regarding how specific objectives will be achieved. They might, for example, describe the knowledge and skills students need in particular content areas at the end of the fifth, eighth, and twelfth grades. Some states (such as California) have initiated such frameworks, and at the national level, the American Academy for the Advancement of Science and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics are developing prototypes.

- Measuring results with authentic achievement. Although standardized state testing has been in place for many years, some states are beginning to question the validity of norm referenced tests as tools that can create school improvement. Many norm referenced tests are not testing what is taught, and it is difficult to get accurate information on progress toward students' attainment of higher order thinking skills with most current tests.

  Some states are thinking about testing programs differently. Vermont, for example, has developed a performance-based assessment strategy which assesses student portfolios in mathematics and writing. They intend to assess students' performance on a random sample basis throughout the state. California has developed open-ended questions (requiring a written response as opposed to a multiple choice answer) on a test of mathematics achievement. They feel that such tests have the potential to drive the curriculum in positive directions.

- Holding schools accountable for results by:

  - Measuring a school's progress against itself rather than by comparing it to other schools;
  - Setting rates of growth for improvement each year, while ensuring that districts and school don't force students out of school or water down the curriculum to meet their goals;
  - Making annual course corrections; and
  - Developing assessment strategies that will tell schools and the state if the goals are met.

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- Establishing consequences for success or failure. Examples of consequences include increasing or decreasing autonomy in site decisionmaking, job security for staff, financial rewards and public attention.

- Studying other options of promoting excellence for all students —for example, through a choice program or magnet schools.

Specific Efforts To Improve Urban Schools

In order to realize the recommendations set out in this paper, state boards will have to give energetic and creative leadership to the education community, other state agencies, business and parents. All will need to work together to design, enact, and fund the policies proposed here. This is particularly true because funding for programs aimed at preventing bad outcomes for children and families are often politically unpopular. The problems they address are tangled and complex, and results can take a long time.

The following are offered as ideas of the kinds of policies that will help states ensure real progress for urban children and families.

1. State boards can use their existing fiscal authority

   State boards can use their existing fiscal authority to increase local district spending flexibility for the purpose of allowing urban districts and urban schools to work with children and their families in nontraditional ways. For example, when not prevented by law, states could authorize school districts to use up to five percent of certain categorical program funds for purposes such as: contracting with local youth-serving organizations to offer after school programs; paying teachers to conduct before- or after- school home visits; or hiring community workers to counsel families about how to better support their children's education.

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2. <u>State boards can request and obtain expanded fiscal authority</u>

State boards can work with the governor and legislature to obtain authorization and appropriations for:

- Flexible funds for schools (or other public agencies) to use for services related to education, physical and mental health, family support, employment, and other needs. These funds could be obtained by allowing districts to use funds from existing programs more flexibly, or they could be appropriated on a formula based on the number of poor students in the building using current definitions for Chapter I eligibility.

- New funds to support school improvement plans aimed at improved student attendance, achievement, and greater levels of parental involvement.

- New funds to support political jurisdictions (city or county) in developing programs targeted to at-risk children. This money could be used to fund programs that need to be coordinated city-wide rather than at the school building level. For example, these funds could be used for creating cooperative agreements between agencies, city-wide mentoring programs, or alternative schools or settings for students who cannot function in regular classrooms. With such an initiative in place, cities and counties could ensure that if students are pushed out of school, they don't fall between the cracks but have community alternatives that are available to them.

3. State boards can promote differential regulatory flexibility

States need to decide how they will treat districts "differently" based on need as well as how they will treat them the same. A number of states are experimenting with regulatory flexibility. Initial results suggest that this process is complicated by the fact that cities or other jurisdictions seldom request individual waivers, but find that they need to waive multiple rules and regulations.

South Carolina has developed a blanket waiver process. Districts that have not met their goals can apply for the waivers, since unsuccessful districts may need more flexibility — rather than less — to be successful.

4. State boards can enhance the state education agency (SEA)'s capacity to work with urban districts and schools

State boards can create internal policies to increase the SEA's capacity to assist urban schools. They could, for example, out-station SEA staff in urban districts so that there is a state presence at the site and ready to be of assistance. They could create networks for urban teachers and schools to better interact and learn from one another. They could support the hiring of SEA staff members who are highly skilled at providing support to urban districts.

SEAs can also collect data that describes the condition of children generally rather than only documenting educational achievement. The Condition of Children in California, for example, provides data not only on educational achievement, but describes child poverty rates, family structure, and children in the juvenile justice system. This approach permits states to identify programs that overlap and gaps in services. It also

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provides an opportunity to develop coherent childrens' policies.

5. State boards can support certification practices that will support urban schools

State boards can support teacher training programs that provide alternate routes to placing individuals in schools and classrooms. Alternative certification for areas of shortage (mathematics, science and special education, for example) represent one approach. Another option is to support programs such as Teach for America, which places recent liberal arts college graduates in urban classrooms.

State boards can promote teacher and administrator training practices that: (1) encourage and enable minorities to enter teaching profession, and (2) encourage minorities to move into education administration.

State boards could build extra rewards into loan forgiveness programs for teachers that work in urban schools.

6. State boards can advocate for urban schools and students

They can:

- Urge that governors establish inter-agency task forces with the authority to set up and fund programs that will help schools better address the non-academic needs of children and their families. A percentage of each agency's resources could be used to support cross-agency initiatives at the state and local level.

- In press conferences and speeches, stress the importance of revising state policies that are having a negative impact on urban students,

particularly those that are disadvantaged or otherwise at risk of failure.

- Hold public hearings to call attention to the needs of urban districts and the ways that they can be addressed.

- Visit urban schools with the press to call attention to exemplary programs or areas of need.

- Improve communications with urban districts by convening regular meetings to discuss policies, programs, and goals.

CONCLUSION

What would it take for the 9-year-old boys described at the beginning of this report to do better at school? First of all, they need challenging schools with innovative curricula and instruction delivered by highly competent, caring teachers. They need one-on-one attention and assistance because many are coping with complex situations in their homes and communities. Those who are falling behind need intense tutoring, rather than to be simply retained in grade or placed in a "slow" track or special education program.

But it will take more than this. Someone needs to visit their homes and neighborhoods and gain the trust of their families and other caretakers. Someone needs to know those families and the strengths and perspectives they can bring to the child, school, and community. Someone needs to find out which families need counseling, drug treatment, or assistance with housing, jobs, or health care in order to help improve their childrens' chance to succeed. Someone needs to assure that these families actually receive the needed services and keep regular contact to make sure problems are really solved. To accomplish this, certain families will need intense, personal assistance over an extended period of time. And someone needs to work with the city and other

agencies and organizations to make sure that necessary services are available — including recreation programs to keep children off the streets after school and during the summer.

Such changes require manpower, training, and service coordination — they will require money. But we will need more than that. We will need state policy levers that can assure that the activities described above will actually take place. These levers must be flexible enough to allow local schools to invent their own programs and solutions, and they must be firm and clear enough to assure accountability for state money invested. We have suggested a number of state actions in this paper, but there may be no one answer that would fit each state and city, especially considering the variety of state and city sizes, conditions, and traditions. At the same time, it is vitally important that large, ambitious, long-term projects be thoughtfully crafted and tested.

As a first step in any strategy to improve urban schools, communication between urban districts and state policymakers desperately needs to be improved. State boards of education should take the initiative now to convene key state and local leaders, and they should continue the dialogue on a regular basis. Together, they should discuss common concerns, values, and themes to guide future policymaking. Their aim should be the production of effective and enlightened state policies that show real promise in improving the education and future prospects of our urban young people

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The following experts gave presentations before the Urban Education Study Group.

Denise Alston, Children's Defense Fund

Jomills Braddock, Center for Disadvantaged Students, Johns Hopkins University

Susan Fuhrman, Center for Policy Studies in Education

Charles Glenn, Massachusetts Department of Education

Robert Gholson, IBM Corporation

Paul Hill, the RAND Corporation

Samuel Husk, The Council of the Great City Schools

Dale Mann, Teachers College, Columbia University

Jean Miller, Institute for Educational Leadership

Edward Primozic, IBM Corporation

Arthur Wise, the RAND Corporation

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NOTES

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