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ABSTRACT

Too many students entering colleges or universities find that they lack the essential skills and knowledge required for college. One reason for high school graduates' lack of preparedness for college is a serious lack of communication between the preschool-12 and postsecondary education systems. Like other states, Minnesota has focused considerable time, energy, and resources on understanding this and other challenges facing the state's students, educators, and institutions. These efforts have resulted in a number of innovative and successful initiatives, including the following, to improve students' success after high school: (1) tech prep and school to work programs to meet the needs of students with skills, talents, and interests in pursuing various technical education and career options; (2) postsecondary enrollment options and other "college credit" opportunities for college-bound students; (3) developmental education opportunities complemented by reporting and early assessment; (4) graduation standards/college preparation alignment; (5) improved documentation of student achievement; and (6) charter schools. In view of Minnesota's experience, the following general approaches were recommended to policymakers and educators interested in preparing high school students for success in postsecondary education and work: (1) initiate an information campaign to articulate preparation for post-high school success; (2) identify and support "best practices"; and (3) document student achievement. (Contains 17 references.) (MN)

Improving the Performance of High School Students: Focusing on Connections and Transitions Taking Place in Minnesota

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Improving the Performance of High School Students: Focusing on Connections and Transitions Taking Place in Minnesota

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Introduction

Despite nearly two decades of reform efforts in education, sparked by the 1983 report, "A Nation at Risk," many concerns remain about the academic performance of students in the United States and the impact of that performance on their preparation for and persistence in colleges and universities. Certainly, the goals set have been ambitious, and expectations for almost immediate results have neglected to recognize the complexities of both the educational structure and the teaching/learning dynamic. There have been some glimmers of progress, and recent polls indicate that the public at large now feels more positive about the performance of our schools, with a majority of respondents assigning either an A or a B to the schools in their communities and some 72 percent expressing the belief that reforming the existing system is the best way to improve schools (33rd Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll).

At the same time, policymakers are frustrated by what they see as a lack of progress. Educators at all levels have their own frustrations, feeling in many cases that they lack the resources and support needed to provide the kinds of learning opportunities they know students need and deserve. The business community has responded by engaging in active discussion around educational issues and through active partnerships at local, state, and national levels. The business community has also directly joined the effort to define and deliver better educational opportunities by becoming a major provider of educational opportunities, primarily post-high school, in an effort to provide workers with the skills and knowledge they see lacking in too many employees. The 2001 American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) State of the Industry Report found that employers spent an average of $677 per person in 1999 on employer-provided training expenses. In its 2002 study, ASTD reported that total training expenditures had increased and were projected to increase by an average of 37 percent between the years 2000 and 2001.

Even though these and other major differences exist in the perceptions of key constituencies regarding the reasons for a lack of desired progress and, therefore, in their ideas about how to solve the problems facing the American educational system, there is a growing consensus that one key point of focus needs to be the last two years of high school. It is clear that too many students, especially in communities of color, are dropping out before graduation. Too many students are floating through high school, bypassing courses with the rigor and content needed to prepare them for success in an increasingly complex and technological workplace and for college and university work.

Too many students find, upon enrolling in a college or university, that they lack essential skills and knowledge and, as a result, have to spend time and money taking developmental courses that offer instruction they could have gotten in high school or that provides a level of preparation appropriate to, but sadly not offered in, their school. And too often, there is a serious lack of communication between the education system, preschool through grade 12 (P-12) that produces those students and the postsecondary system that enrolls them following graduation, contributing to the lack of appropriate preparation for collegiate success.

Several recent reports, especially, "Raising Our Sights: No High School Senior Left Behind," the report of the National Commission on the High School Senior Year, have identified promising strategies to refocus and improve the learning opportunities of students nearing the end of their high school careers. In many states, high school students have new opportunities to access high-quality, rigorous academic programs and to move from P-12 into postsecondary systems. These efforts to enhance student learning and to eliminate many of the "disconnects" in the currently separate systems have the potential to improve student learning, transitions, and rates of degree completion.

This paper, after further describing the current context, will offer ideas for potential federal policy and programmatic efforts that might be undertaken to improve the performance of our high school students based in part on efforts currently underway in Minnesota. As is always the case in the educational arena, federal actions alone cannot generate the kinds of improvement in student learning that we all desire. However, efforts could lend both direction and support to local, state, and regional programs designed to connect student learning across the educational spectrum and, as a result, enhance student transitions from high school to postsecondary learning and/or career opportunities.

The Context for Change

An array of national reports makes clear the widespread concern that even as the high school graduation rate and the percentage of the population pursuing at least some postsecondary education remain relatively high, theses rates may not be keeping pace with other nations. Despite projected higher education enrollment growth of 24 percent over the next decade and the fact that some 70 percent of U.S. high school graduates enroll in postsecondary institutions, we have lost the significant edge we used to hold internationally in the percentage of our population holding a postsecondary degree. While differing definitions and measures make comparisons difficult, OECD recently reported that Great Britain, Finland, the Netherlands, and New Zealand have surpassed our college graduation rate. The 24.8 percent of Americans earning an undergraduate degree in the most recent year reported (1997-98) is roughly equal to the 25 percent of young people in 30 other nations, including Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and most European and North American nations, now completing a postsecondary degree ("Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators" and

"Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac 2001"). Closer to home, we need to identify and address the reasons why, although the overall percentage of those 17 and older who are employed and had participated in postsecondary education has increased since 1995, there has been a decline within this overall population of those with annual family incomes at or below $10,000 (Source: "Where We Go From Here"). This seems to indicate a widening participation gap on the basis of family income.

Concern is also great about the fact that too many of those choosing to pursue a postsecondary education are arriving at colleges and universities unprepared to successfully complete collegiate courses. Several reports note that, despite the goals set in the 1980s and 1990s to improve student preparation, less than half of high school students are completing academically rigorous high school programs (sources: "Raising Our Sights," National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) "Digest of Education Statistics," 1997 and 2000). Demand for developmental/remedial courses remains high, and far too many students leave colleges and universities without having completed a degree. Similarly, employers report that too many recent high school graduates lack the skills, knowledge, and habits critical to their effectiveness in an increasingly complex workplace that demands technological skills, a recognition of the need for lifelong learning, and the ability to work in teams and communicate effectively with diverse persons.

Of particular concern is the "lost opportunity" of the senior year of high school, when too many students and their parents view this potentially pivotal year as a "rest stop between the demands of elementary and secondary education and whatever follows [rather than] as a consummation of what already has been accomplished and a launching pad for what lies ahead" ("Raising Our Sights: No High School Senior Left Behind"). What evidence do we have that the current system is not adequately preparing students for their futures after high school? Frankly, there is quite a bit. Data on graduation rates, current high school course-taking patterns and practices, and remedial course-taking help tell the story, as does an environment in which too many educational programs, practices, and policies develop and operate in isolation from each other. The following paragraphs provide a brief snapshot of some of those data.

Graduation Rates. Before we can address concerns about the body of knowledge and the array of skills that students bring to the workplace and/or a college or university, we must address the rates at which they graduate from high school. If education beyond a high school diploma is increasingly critical to an individual's future potential for employment and economic advancement, then clearly we must ensure that higher rates of students graduate from high school. There are many sources of data demonstrating that earning potential increases with advanced education. For example, in "Building a Highway to Higher Education," the Center for an Urban Future in New York reported the range of average expected incomes from only $12,500 per year for a female high school dropout at the low end to $72,000 per year for a male with a graduate degree at the upper end. More generally, it has been estimated that over the last 20 years, the real earnings of those with only a high school diploma have dropped

dramatically while college-educated workers have enjoyed steady or growing wages (Source: "Where We Go From Here").

Given these figures, it is especially disturbing to know that in 1998, the national high school graduation rate was only 74 percent overall and an appalling 56 percent and 54 percent for African-Americans and Latinos, respectively (Source: Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) Study, 2001). In many cases, the figures are even worse when disaggregated at a state level by race and ethnicity. For example, Wisconsin, which has the second highest overall graduation rate at 87 percent, has the lowest graduation rate nationally for African-American students at only 40 percent. Although one might be tempted to chalk up that low percentage to relatively small numbers of students of color in this upper Midwestern state, the data show that much of the problem lies in Milwaukee, a metropolitan area with a relatively high number of students of color. Clearly, we are failing too many of our students, depriving them of a critical credential needed to contribute to society as adults and to benefit from much of what our nation has to offer.

Floating through High School. Despite widespread efforts to set higher and clearer standards for students in all grades, there are still far too many students graduating from high school who have not taken advantage of the courses that will give them the critical skills and knowledge needed for success following graduation. There is clear and compelling evidence that what students take in high school has a tremendous impact on their subsequent academic success. For example, a U.S. Department of Education study completed in 1999 concluded that the odds of a student completing a baccalaureate degree doubled when he or she finished a challenging math course like trigonometry in high school. For African-American and Latino students, it found that coursework of "high academic intensity" was the single greatest pre-college predictor of college completion. Data from Educational Testing Service (ETS) and The College Board consistently show a high correlation between scores earned on the American College Test (ACT) and Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and the body of coursework completed in high school. For example, a recent report by ETS showed that students who took the core classes recommended by the ACT Assessment (including three years each of math and science and four years of English) scored an average of 22 in English, 22.8 in math, and 23.1 in reading on their test compared with scores of 19.4, 19.8, and 20.6, respectively, for students who didn't complete a core curriculum. Similarly, students in the high school graduating class of 1994 who were in the "general" track scored 24 points lower on the reading portion of that assessment than those in the "college prep" track (Source: The Lost Opportunity of Senior Year").

Student course-taking patterns too often demonstrate that students do not know about, understand, are ignoring, or are not being encouraged and supported to act appropriately on this information. According to a recent Minnesota report, for example, only about 70 percent of high school graduates have completed the core academic courses recommended for college, even though some 80 percent pursue a postsecondary education and all four-year institutions in the state have defined

preparation requirements comprising such a core set of courses (Source: 2001 Minnesota Education Yearbook). Again, the problem is even worse for students of color. According to a recent NCES report, African-Americans are less likely than either white or Asian students to take rigorous high school courses (8 percent compared to 20 and 31 percent, respectively) and also more often by-pass higher level courses, completing courses no higher than the core curriculum (42 percent compared to 29 and 27 percent, respectively).

Filling in Academic Gaps. Although the current high rates of enrollment in developmental or remedial courses have changed little over the past several decades, those who have sought to improve student preparation have been disappointed in the lack of progress. Even after separating out from the data those students who appropriately need to brush up their academic skills (primarily adult students who have been out of high school for enough years to have forgotten, for example, much of the algebra and geometry they learned in high school), significant numbers of recent high school graduates are placing into reading, writing, mathematics, and/or study skills courses offering instruction at a high school level. The costs to both the students and the institutions are considerable, with students paying for credits that don't count toward degree completion and that duplicate what they could have learned at no cost in high school and institutions needing to devote staff time and other academic resources to instruction below the collegiate level.

The data paint a picture of lost opportunities across the country. Nationally, it has been reported that all community colleges, 80 percent of public universities, and 60 percent of private universities offer remedial instruction. The percentage of students in those institutions requiring remediation range from 13 percent at private four-year institutions to 41 percent of students enrolled at public two-year institutions. State-by-state data mirror these national figures. In Minnesota, for example, all public colleges and universities offer remedial instruction in mathematics, while most two-year institutions and at least one-fourth of public four-year institutions offer remedial courses in reading and writing. Approximately 34 percent of students in public universities in Minnesota were enrolled in at least one remedial course in the most recent year reported and 46 percent of students in public two-year colleges were enrolled in one or more remedial courses. Since not all students who demonstrate on placement tests that they need developmental work ever enroll in such courses, there are likely even more students needing to build academic skills that are considered to be pre-collegiate in nature.

It is important to consider likely future trends in this area, yet impossible to predict the extent to which the need for developmental education will increase or decrease in the years ahead. On the one hand, despite two decades of attention to this issue, there has been little change in the extent of developmental enrollment. In addition, much of the enrollment growth in higher education in recent years has come from populations historically underrepresented in and underprepared for postsecondary study. On the other hand, it is anticipated that widespread efforts to better define

appropriate high school preparation and to tie that to graduation standards, new forms of assessment, and college/university admission requirements will improve student preparation for college and therefore decrease the need for developmental instruction. As growing numbers of students graduate under higher and more clearly defined standards, enrollment figures and test results will demonstrate whether or not P-12 reform efforts have been successful. Finally, policy decisions in some states and higher education systems to move most or all remedial coursework to two-year institutions may change not only the locus of activity but also student behaviors. It is too soon to know what impact these shifting institutional priorities will have on the extent and nature of developmental education.

Working in Isolation. It is an unfortunate reality that our educational system has long operated largely in isolated pieces. Elementary schools provide the basis for all subsequent learning, yet seldom connect in meaningful ways to the junior and senior high schools to which their students progress. Secondary schools play a critical role in preparing students for the world of work and for postsecondary education, yet too seldom have secondary and postsecondary educators partnered to ensure that students in high schools understand and develop the skills and knowledge needed for success in those "next steps" in their lives. Colleges and universities have too often spent more time complaining about the lack of preparation students bring to their institutions than talking with students, parents, and P-12 educators about what those students need for collegiate success.

Increasingly, policymakers are frustrated by this lack of meaningful and sustained connections and have called for the development of a "seamless system" that helps students of all ages move from one stage in their education to the next. They point to high levels of remediation, for example, as evidence of a costly "disconnect" between P-12 and higher education. Said one state education committee chair, "You can't expect one area to improve without talking about bringing the two together – and that's K-16." (Source: "Where We Go From Here"). Growing numbers of educators at all levels are also frustrated by the lack of meaningful interaction across the education continuum, recognizing the ways in which they could better serve their students if they weren't so isolated from their peers at other institutions and levels. As the awareness of the importance of partnerships spanning the full educational spectrum has grown, so have the number of formal and informal partnerships, some at local levels between two or more institutions, others at a regional, state, and/or multistate level.

One critical area of focus within the partnership context is the initial and ongoing development of teachers with the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary to successfully reach and teach children of all ages, talents, interests, and backgrounds. The challenges to today's teaching force are significant, from rapidly changing and highly mobile student populations to increasing demands for improved student performance, and from a work environment notable for its lack of resources and time for professional development to increasingly uncompetitive salaries coupled with greater accountability. Policymakers worry about how schools can recruit and retain sufficiently

well-prepared teachers; administrators struggle to find enough individuals with even minimal qualifications to fill needed teaching slots; teachers fret over how to be sufficiently well prepared to offer students a growing array of mandated learning opportunities; business and community leaders demand greater preparation in the disciplines while questioning the value of teacher preparation in pedagogy; and Colleges of Education grapple with their own, higher national standards and the expectations of state and federal policymakers for greater accountability.

Lack of Information on Individual Student Achievement. Secondary and postsecondary institutions share a negative feature: the inability as organizations to know what their individual students know and can do. Unless high schools draw upon periodic outside testing, typically they record and can communicate only which courses a student took and how they did according to a grade assigned by the teacher. Any sense of specific areas in which a student may have a special ability is lost in the single measure of a grade point average. At the postsecondary level, the situation is perhaps worse; the documentation is similar (courses/credits/grades), but the expectation of individuation is higher. It should be possible for colleges and universities to clearly know and communicate to others the individual strengths of each student completing a degree, but they have never had this capacity.

This problem of the absence of knowledge about student achievement is not limited to the time of degree completion. The question that is applicable across the course of a student's secondary and postsecondary studies is, "How well prepared is this student for the next learning opportunity?" The inability to answer this question creates problems. Small transitions – whether courses in a sequence or prerequisite courses – and large ones – whether high school to college, college transfer, or readiness for work from either high school or college – become problematic because of this lack of information. When the problem becomes political, it is usually resolved by a declaration, with the force of policy or law, that the completion of a certain set of courses, by definition, constitutes preparedness for the next stage of education. Faculty knows well, however, that in any specific individual situation this may or may not be the case.

There are several underlying issues. One is that our institutions, both secondary and postsecondary, are forced to make a large inference – an educational syllogism, if you will. If a course is intended to develop a certain knowledge or skill, and if a student passes that course, it is inferred that he or she now has that knowledge or skill.

A second issue is that the only measure we have of how well a student has done in a course – the course grade – is nearly always an averaging of achievement evaluations. A course has several instances of student accomplishment, and actual variation in student achievement – for instance, one student doing *task one* better than *task two* and another student doing *task two* better than *task one* – can be lost when both students receive an identical (because averaged) course grade.

A third issue is the need for close attentiveness when attending to student achievement. As adults looking back on their lives, we know that our present distinctive individual strengths were apparent, but only barely so, when we were students. It is valuable for both the student and the institution to notice the beginnings of individual strengths among students, but this requires careful attention and careful documentation, and these do not exist.

A fourth issue is that organizations cannot expect to be "seamless" in their inter-organizational transitions, if they are not already "seamless" inside these organizations. If we can find a way so that students can smoothly cross small, internal transitions, then the large transitions become much easier. Transfer between two organizations that notice and trace the personal, professional, and intellectual development of students could be easily done by a comparison of actual and expected learning outcomes.

This lack of organizational knowledge about individual student preparedness has always been there. The reason that it is now an issue is that employers have raised the bar. They are looking not for generic graduates, but for individuals with a specific set of capabilities. Employers know that each person varies considerably from others, and they spend considerable time and money trying to find the right match between person and assigned work. Secondary and postsecondary institutions have never been able to make these distinctions. The gap between what employers prefer (and what students and their families would prefer if only they knew they could ask for it) and what secondary and postsecondary institutions can provide continues to widen.

The Response

Like other states, Minnesota has focused considerable time, energy, and resources in recent years on understanding and responding to these and other challenges facing the state's students, educators, and institutions. With leadership alternately coming from the Governor and his cabinet; from legislators and their staffs; from education agencies, institutions, and systems; and from teacher and other professional education organizations, a variety of innovative and successful efforts has been put in place to improve student preparation for the careers and educational programs they choose to pursue after high school and to support and enhance transitions from one level or program to another. Although many such innovations could be described here, this paper will focus only on several of those designed specifically to enhance transitions from high school to college and/or the world of work. As such, they do not reflect the full range of approaches that the state and its educational enterprise have taken to enhance and improve learning opportunities but rather a key subset designed to help students move more seamlessly and successfully from one stage of learning to another.

MnSCU Work Plan Goals and Staffing. Prior to his arrival in Minnesota in July 2001, James McCormick, Chancellor of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU), the largest public postsecondary system in the state, conducted a "fast track" planning and listening process that yielded a work plan during the first month of his tenure in the system. Included in this ambitious plan are several goals targeted to improving transitions into and among the 34 colleges and universities comprising the MnSCU system. Of most immediacy for the purposes of this paper is the goal focused on building P-16 partnerships, an effort which may be expanded to P-20 in recognition of the critical role of professional development for teachers in ensuring the quality and effectiveness of our educational system.

A cross-functional team of system administrators has been assigned to realize this critical goal and its many components, tracking progress towards a seamless P-16 system and building and sustaining the relationships critical to such a system. The team has defined its overall goals in the following terms, taken directly from documents developed to operationalize the work plan:

In order to fulfill its mission, MnSCU must work closely with the P-12 system that serves our students before they arrive on our campuses. This requires regular contact between the Chancellor and key P-12 leaders (e.g., the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning [MDCFL] and heads of P-12 organizations), collaborative work between his staff and the staff of MDCFL and education organizations to address key policy and program issues, and collaborations between and among MnSCU institutions and P-12 schools/districts. Intended results include

(1) Greater ease of movement by students throughout the educational continuum;

(2) Improved educational outcomes (e.g., less need for developmental education; better articulation of graduation standards and college/university admissions requirements; and clearer communication with students, their parents, and P-12 schools about college/university expectations); and

(3) The recruitment, preparation, induction, and development of a sufficient supply of fully qualified teachers and administrators for Minnesota classrooms.

Many of the initiatives described below are included in the unit's work plan, with specific projects targeted to achieving the three broad sets of results listed above currently underway and progress being reported quarterly. A critical element of all of this work is close internal collaboration and external collaboration, not only in implementing solutions to respond to existing and emerging problems but also in defining future needs. As new issues and ideas arise, they are evaluated for their "fit" within the work plan goals before any decisions are made to pursue them.

In addition to ongoing efforts to realize the specific partnerships goal, the Academic Resources team is connecting with work being done on other MnSCU work plan goals that may impact student transitions and success and assisting with the preparation of quarterly reports to the board. Connections with key state agencies, the Governor's Office, educational organizations, Colleges of Education within the state universities, the MDCFL, and the University of Minnesota are being strengthened. In addition, the team is reaching out to national organizations focused on the creation of seamless systems of education and on improving the educational outcomes of such a system. Building on an existing foundation of specific partnerships and programs created over the past 15-20 years, the work plan goals are providing new focus, energy, and commitment to collaborative planning and implementation of programs designed to enhance student preparation for and transitions into post-high school activities.

Tech Prep and School to Work. Minnesota has a strong, coordinated system designed to meet the needs of students with skills, talents, and interests in pursuing a variety of technical education and career options. This system has built partnerships between nearly every MnSCU institution and neighboring school districts, some defined clearly within the parameters of the Tech Prep and School to Work programs and others more generally falling within this area. Seamless transition from high school and better preparation for college and/or the workplace has been the dual goal of Tech Prep in Minnesota. For example, strong collaboration by the largest suburban school district of Anoka with Anoka-Hennepin Technical College and the local area business community has resulted in the Secondary Technical Education Program (STEPS) where high school students simultaneously satisfy requirements for a high school diploma and earn up to 36 credits toward a postsecondary diploma, degree, or certificate in design and manufacturing, health, or information technology career fields. Each student develops a student-managed portfolio and works with a student support team to facilitate transition from high school to college to employment. This accelerated program is located on the technical college campus. The Minnesota legislature invested $12.7 million for the college to make facility repairs and improvements to accommodate this exemplary program.

Another example of a largely successful transition effort is the Automotive Technology Program established through the Automotive Youth Education System (AYES), a national program with over 240 participating high schools supported by more than 2,400 dealers, established to encourage and support automotive service careers. Focusing on the last two years of high school, high school juniors are invited to take part in AYES. In addition to taking the required academic courses toward their high school degrees, these students take challenging classroom/laboratory courses in basic automotive technology or collision repair and refinish. Upon high school graduation and AYES certification, participating students are prepared to begin full-time entry-level employment or to advance their technical education (AYES, Inc.). In Minnesota, partnerships for continued education are not only established within our two-year automotive programs, but also extend to four-year university opportunities at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and Minnesota State University, Moorhead. This nationally

certified program is helping both secondary and postsecondary levels restructure the curriculum to meet national industry standards, providing industry support for high school programs, helping faculty and two-year programs secure ASE certification, and facilitating the transfer of credits from high school to postsecondary programs. The AYES model is now being applied to secondary and postsecondary transitions in the program areas of graphic arts and manufacturing.

Post Secondary Enrollment Options and Other "College Credit" Opportunities. Minnesota's Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) program was established in 1985 as a means to "promote rigorous educational pursuits and provide a wider variety of options for students." Through this program, high school juniors and seniors receive high school credit for college or university courses completed and subsequently may apply for postsecondary credit upon entering college. The program currently offers courses in two ways: on a college or university campus, with the high school student travelling to the campus to take courses alongside "regular" college students; and through "College in the Schools" programs that allow students to stay in their high schools while simultaneously pursuing college-level coursework.

Although any postsecondary institution may participate in this program, most opportunities for PSEO or concurrent enrollment are offered by public colleges and universities. MnSCU institutions are the dominant provider of college credits to Minnesota juniors and seniors, awarding 62 percent of the total college credits earned by high school students in 1999-2000 (Source: MnSCU Office of Internal Auditing Post-Secondary Enrollment Options Study). There is no cost to the student and her/his parents to participate in the program, since state dollars follow students to the college or university offering the PSEO courses, but the state makes a considerable investment on behalf of these students. In fiscal year 2000, the State of Minnesota and local school districts spent nearly $27 million dollars for high school students to earn college credits. During the 2000-2001 school year, the total number of juniors and seniors participating in PSEO was 16,927 (MHESO "College Prep Activity").

Student and parent satisfaction with PSEO courses has grown steadily over the years, as has support by postsecondary faculty, staff, and administrators. However, P-12 educators remain divided over this program, worrying about the academic costs of the programs for high schools and those students who do not utilize the PSEO program and about the social and sometimes academic costs to students who leave high schools to pursue collegiate learning opportunities. It has perhaps been in response to these concerns that some districts have sought to expand the number of enriched learning opportunities offered on-site in order to retain the "best and brightest" students on high school campuses without depriving them of advanced academic offerings. These include the use of the PSEO statute to offer "College in the Schools" or concurrent enrollment programs, which allow students to simultaneously earn high school and college credits by completing college courses taught in their high schools, and national programs like Advanced Placement (AP), in which 14,830 Minnesota juniors and seniors were enrolled in 2000-2001 (MHESO "College Prep Activity").

One example of recent efforts to help students take full advantage of enriched learning opportunities is found at Como Park Senior High School in St. Paul. Enrollment figures make evident the fact that Como Park is one of the city's most ethnically and racially diverse high schools; of its total students of color enrollment, 50 percent receive English language support, and 37 percent received free/reduced lunches (St. Paul Public Schools website). A major effort to recruit more students (and especially more students of color) into Advanced Placement (AP) courses, to train more teachers to serve as AP teachers, and to provide review, tutoring, and other additional support to help students succeed has yielded impressive numbers. Since 1992, the number of students taking AP exams has grown from 18 to 204 last year; total AP tests taken similarly increased from 18 to 394 over the same period of time. In total, an estimated 30 percent of Como Park students are enrolled in AP or pre-AP courses. Last fall, 19 Como students received honors from The College Board for their high scores on the spring 2001 AP exams, a real honor in light of the fact that, nationwide, less than 15 percent of students taking AP exams are awarded honors.

A Como Park AP instructor noted, "If you encourage the kids to challenge themselves, many times they'll be surprised at how well they can do. A whole lot of my best success stories are kids who needed that one something to find their way to believe that college was for them. It's helping them find the sense that they can do it." The philosophy of getting high school kids into challenging classes is one of the best ways to ensure they go to college and do well there, it was reported. Yet, the number of students of color and teens from low-income families who end up in AP and other demanding courses is small, fueling an achievement gap that often extends from generation to generation. Como Park has found that kids who test as low as the 65th percentile in reading can make it in AP. Principal Sharon Eichten relayed, "We're pretty well sold right now that what we're doing works. We want kids to feel they can take a chance. It's our job to help them where they're at." (Source: "School's Tougher Courses Pay Off")

A federal grant aimed at recruiting more low-income students into academically challenging high school classes has now made it possible for more low-income students in Minnesota, statewide, to participate in AP courses over the internet through Apex Learning. In addition, Minnesota is participating in an emerging project being advanced by the Midwestern Higher Education Commission to increase the historically low percentage of Minnesota students pursuing AP learning opportunities by identifying barriers to AP enrollment, aligning AP courses with state graduation standards, developing supportive instructional materials, and coordinating professional development for current and prospective AP teachers. An additional focus of this emerging project is to achieve the involvement of a more diverse student population in AP programs in Minnesota and across the upper Midwest.

Overall, it seems clear that, in one way or another, the PSEO program has enabled a growing body of high school students to complete courses previously unavailable to many while simultaneously earning college credits, thereby jumpstarting their college careers.

Developmental Education: Reporting and Early Assessment. The national concern about the extent of remedial or developmental instruction needed by college and university students has been strongly felt in Minnesota as well. In 1999-2000, every public postsecondary institution in the state offered at least one developmental course. While this is consistent with the open admission mission of many public institutions and necessary to ensure that all students have the foundation upon which to build success in postsecondary programs, it is still problematic in terms of the costs to students, institutions, and society. These costs include coursework that doesn't generate credits towards degree completion and duplication of learning opportunities available at no direct student/parent cost in high schools and thus paid for twice, in effect, by the state. Thus, while it will likely always be essential for colleges and universities to offer some developmental coursework, it is generally agreed that better pre-college preparation could significantly reduce the demand for remedial courses.

In the belief that better information for high schools about the extent and nature of developmental coursework taken by their recent graduates could help them improve student preparation and therefore reduce remedial enrollment, the Minnesota Legislature passed legislation in the early 1990s requiring all public colleges and universities to report to school districts on the developmental course-taking of their students within two years of graduation and on their performance on college placement tests or other performances measures used to determine college readiness. They simultaneously amended the state's Government Data Practices Act to allow individually identifiable data to be reported to school districts in order to enhance their ability to make use of the reported data. The team preparing this annual report has periodically met with school district personnel to ensure that the content and design of the report is usable by and useful for districts and to work with them on ways in which to make effective use of the data. Because data incompatibility problems have resulted in the completion of only two reports to date, it is too soon to measure the impact of these

reports. However, there are anecdotal data to indicate that the reports have been useful to high schools, colleges, and universities in better understanding the connection between high school preparation and college readiness and in forging effective partnerships that can help enhance student preparation for, and therefore successful transitions into and completion of, postsecondary programs.

More recently, some institutions and state legislators have begun to experiment with ways in which to assess college readiness at critical points during a student's high school career in order to help students connect high school work with college readiness and to select high school courses accordingly. A handful of colleges and universities have experimented with the use of college placement tests with high school sophomores and juniors for this purpose, subsequently working with those students and their counselors to identify deficiencies and which classes can help fill in identified gaps. Several Tech Prep consortia in rural northwestern Minnesota have provided college placement testing to tenth grade students in their member high schools. As a result of examining the early test outcomes, five schools have increased math requirements from two years to three years. Six districts incorporated more applied, or contextual, teaching methodology into their math courses. One high school is experimenting with using a technical college developmental math textbook in the high school. A Tech Prep coordinator involved with these efforts commented that, "The best thing we've done for kids and parents is to drive home the point that technical colleges require college level math skills."

Some of these experiences have formed the basis for a new Developmental Education Demonstration Project recently mandated by the Minnesota Legislature and now underway through a partnership between two MnSCU institutions and five high schools. Begun in the fall of 2001, this partnership includes Bemidji State University (BSU) and Itasca Community College (ICC), two northern Minnesota institutions with a long history of collaboration with each other and with the broader community they serve. In November and December 2001, all juniors in five area high schools were given the placement exam used by BSU and ICC. Later this winter, counselors, faculty, and administrators from all seven educational institutions will work with each other and with students and their parents to enhance student preparation. Following graduation from high school, participating students will be followed as they enter college to determine how useful the project was in helping them prepare effectively for collegiate work. These and other project findings will be used to assess the effectiveness of this approach to supporting student transitions to college and to shape additional future efforts to improve student success.

Graduation Standards/College Preparation Alignment. Educational reform in Minnesota is being driven largely by the adoption, refinement, and implementation of statewide graduation standards, defined both in terms of "basic" standards which all students are required to meet in order to graduate from high school and "high" standards toward which all students must work and against which they must demonstrate defined levels of performance prior to graduation. Comprehensive in

nature and focused on performance and mastery, the standards have been developed collaboratively by educators throughout the state and at all levels. Postsecondary educators have been afforded frequent opportunities to influence the development of the standards and have more recently been working to align their own preparation requirements or expectations with the graduation standards. Teacher preparation programs have done significant work to incorporate the standards into their preservice programs and to revise programs to meet national teacher preparation standards that have themselves been aligned with national standards in the disciplines. Simultaneously, the state's rules governing the approval of teacher preparation programs and the licensure of teachers have been revised in alignment with both state graduation standards and national teacher preparation/accreditation standards.

This is difficult, complex work that, like the standards themselves, will likely never be "done." However, considerable progress has been made. For example, work is nearly complete to show the alignment of postsecondary courses with the high standards known as the "Profile of Learning," particularly, but not only, to assist students and schools with the selection of PSEO courses that will support student efforts to meet the graduation standards. A project is underway to better define the preparation needed for academic success in two-year institutions including technical colleges, and alignment with the graduation standards is a key component of this project. Historically, college preparation standards were applied within the context of four-year colleges and universities. It is important to communicate that rigorous preparation is equally important to successful experiences within two-year institutions as well. The changing workplace demands increased academic preparation for those pursuing technical careers, especially in the areas of math, science, and communications. Previously developed preparation competencies for the state universities will soon be revisited to ensure or improve their alignment with the current graduation standards, and a process to collaborate with the University of Minnesota in order to have a clear and consistent set of preparation requirements for all public four-year institutions in the state will begin later this spring or summer. Meanwhile, planning is underway to convene dialogues among secondary and postsecondary educators by discipline focused on graduation standards, preparation for college, and the alignment of the two.

Following the adoption in the early 1990s of preparation competencies for the state universities and related course requirements at the University of Minnesota, student performance on the ACT and SAT tests improved, with ETS and The College Board identifying growing numbers of students in the state completing a core preparation curriculum as a key factor leading to the improved test scores. We anticipate that further efforts to clearly define preparation requirements, aligned clearly with graduation standards, will generate similar results.

Documentation of Student Achievement. Minnesota has a special opportunity to address this problem because both the secondary system and the postsecondary system have an interest in and a track record in documentation of performance achievement per individual student. In the high schools, this is the effort to link individual students to their achievement of specific "high standards" or, Profile of Learning. Within MnSCU a different effort – although similar in spirit – is several years underway.

This effort began in 1997 when selected faculty at Inver Hills Community College began the Liberal Studies/Professional Skills (LS/PS) program. Based on the Minnesota Skills Profile (a template developed at the University of Minnesota), the faculty developed a new academic practice – assessing individual students in their courses by skills achievement. Several years of collaborative work have led to well defined and carefully calibrated potential learning outcomes. Individual student achievement in these skills is tracked as the student moves through the curriculum, yielding a Skills Profile of what he or she has demonstrated. Although limited to transferable skills, this is a real accomplishment, proving the concept that it is possible for a college to measure the educational progress of individual students by their demonstrated achievements. A technical system supports this effort and makes it easy to record, track, and communicate student achievements. The LS/PS program at Inver Hills Community College is gaining national recognition for this accomplishment: it is an active member of the 21st Century Learning Outcomes project (sponsored by the Pew Trust and the League of Innovation), and it recently won the 2002 Bellwether Award for Instructional Programs and Services (sponsored by the Community College Futures Assembly and the National Council of Instructional Administrators).

Noting that Inver Hills had proven the concept of tracking student achievement, per student, across the curriculum, the Office of the Chancellor has encouraged the extension of this model to other MnSCU institutions. To facilitate this, several changes have been made. Whereas Inver Hills had initially chosen only to track transferable skills, the model has been revised to include the full range of possible student achievements:

- *Understanding*: What a student knows and understands that is specific to a context (profession or discipline)
- *Performance*: What a student can do that is specific to a context (profession or discipline)
- *Perspective*: What a student knows and understands that extends across contexts
- *Capability*: What a student can do that extends across contexts

Any given faculty member typically is concerned with one or two of these four types of achievement, but programs as a whole, institutions of higher education, and, indeed, students gain by including and equally valuing all four types.

The approach being taken in Minnesota provides a prototype information system with a structure of uniform design intended to be used across the full range of technical, professional, and liberal arts programs in its 34 institutions. The result is an easy-to-use, flexible structure that permits college and program faculty to choose and calibrate expected learning outcomes and to have continuously produced data on actual student achievement by subsequently linking the names of individual students, the achievement, the time, and the curricular setting (at whatever level is appropriate: college/program/ course/section/term) in which that achievement was noted.

A choice of standard or customized queries on these resulting data allow one to hold a given student as a constant (showing his or her achievement to date), to hold a given achievement as a constant (showing where in the curriculum that achievement is being noted), or to hold a given curricular setting as a constant (showing what achievements were demonstrated in that setting). Here then are direct data on student achievement that are able to answer the question, "How well prepared is each of these students," at numerous levels of aggregation, including those high-level educational results specified in institutional missions.

This approach is currently being tested by faculty at six different MnSCU institutions to see whether it can handle learning outcomes from the full range of disciplines and professions. If the pilot is deemed successful, it may be provided to all of the 34 MnSCU institutions for their use. It is expected that many will use it to track Perkins data for core indicator 1P1 (attainment of academic skills) and 1P2 (attainment of technical skills). Others will use it for professional or institutional accreditation. Interest has been expressed by Student Affairs professionals to use this to show what students are demonstrating in co-curricular activities.

This system was designed with conscious attention to assisting the transition from high school to college. It does this by documenting the transition from pre-college achievement to initial college achievement as easily as, and in the same way that, it documents the growth of a student's knowledge and abilities within college. It permits the tracking of a student's learning curve throughout college, and, given the secondary system's development of data on individual student achievement in high school, there is little or no reason why that learning curve cannot fully include the transition from high school to college.

Charter Schools. In 1991, Minnesota became the first state in the nation to authorize charter schools (then called Outcome-Based Schools). The law (M.S. 124D.10-11) permits teachers, parents, and other community members to form and operate independent charter schools. To promote innovation, these schools are exempt from many statutes and rules governing school districts but held accountable for results.

A charter school is a public school, part of the state's public education system. The law requires that a charter school must meet one or more of the following purposes: (1) improve student learning; (2) increase learning opportunities for students; (3) encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods; (4) require the measurement of learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes; (5) establish new forms of accountability for schools; or (6) create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for a learning program at the school site.

There are currently 79 charter schools approved to operate in Minnesota at locations throughout the state; of these, 68 are operational. Both the perceptions of and results achieved by charter schools are mixed to date. While supporters see them as an effective public alternative for students not well served by local school districts, others view them as "competing" for already scarce public resources. The role of sponsors has been somewhat unclear; as a result, a series of changes in state statute have sought to more fully define the responsibilities which the state expects sponsors to meet, and sponsors may now charge a modest amount of funding per pupil to fulfill their duties. In addition, a lack of sufficient financial and management accountability and safeguards has resulted in some significant management difficulties at a handful of charter schools in the state and problems at many more schools securing funds sufficient to cover all operating costs. As a result, increasing attention has been turned to defining means by which the potential for mismanagement can be reduced and to determining what kinds of assistance and resources charter schools need in order to operate effectively.

Katrina Bulkley of Rutgers University has effectively described the difficulty of ensuring adequate accountability for charter schools. She has identified four challenges, all of which are clearly being felt in Minnesota:

(1) Educational performance is not simple to define or measure, nor is how good is "good enough" in educational quality.

(2) Other aspects of a school's program, often more difficult to measure than test scores, are also important to families and authorizers. In their context, authorizers sometimes turn to "proxies" to assess school quality.

(3) Teachers, parents, and students become very invested in particular schools and destroying a community may be more difficult for authorizers than serving a diffuse public interest.

(4) Finally, charter schools have become a highly politicized issue on both sides, and some authorizers are concerned about their decisions reflecting poorly on charter schools as a reform idea. (Bulkley, 2001)

Clearly, all of these challenges are being faced in Minnesota, complicated by a few cases of significant mismanagement. On the bright side, some of the newer charter schools established in the state clearly offer tremendous potential to better prepare students for future work and learning goals, and some early charter schools are being recognized for the real successes they have achieved. For example, Skills for Tomorrow High School (SFTHS), one of Minnesota's oldest charter schools, was established in 1994. SFTHS was the first school-to-work charter school in the nation and is a partnership between business, higher education, Minneapolis and St. Paul public schools, surrounding suburban school districts, Minnesota Teamsters Joint Council 32 and Minnesota Teamsters Service Bureau, and several community-based organizations and agencies. The mission of the school is to assist secondary students in making the transition to postsecondary education and high-skill workplaces by integrating academic instruction and work-based experiences in learning environments that respect cultural diversity. As a public charter school, SFTHS primarily teaches students from the Twin Cities metropolitan area, many of who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds. With its school-to-work programmatic focus, SFTHS provides core classes in math, English, social studies, and science, as well as electives. After an initial orientation period (Phase I), students complete service learning projects (Phase II) and develop problem-solving skills, teamwork, leadership, and personal responsibility in a community-based social service agency. In the high school's employment, training, and readiness program (Phase III), students complete a one-year internship at a local business site. Students gain concrete experiences in self-chosen career fields through individual experience and analysis of the skills necessary in that field. Finally, students are expected to begin Post Secondary Enrollment Options at local technical or community colleges or universities and prepare a portfolio presentation for graduation that is reviewed by a panel of business and education leaders (Phase IV). SFTHS has developed accountability standards beyond the basic graduation requirements. The school strongly supports parental involvement and feedback. Monthly parent meetings are conducted where parents and staff discuss both successes and areas of concern. Quarterly parent- and faculty-led board of directors meetings are also conducted to review school policies, develop the school's operating plan, and review the financial health and long-term financial viability of the school.

The SFTHS has experienced many accomplishments and results over the past five years. Selected examples include:

- Thirty graduates completed 400-hour internships, 180-hour service learning projects, and at least one postsecondary educational option.

- Thirty graduates completed all academic courses with at least a grade of 75 percent or better (a "C" or better), along with at least 90 percent attendance.

- Seventy-five percent of the school's 30 graduates have successfully begun working toward a postsecondary education degree in their chosen career field.

- Twenty current candidates are now enrolled in an internship program and postsecondary education enrollment option program.

- Successful completion of 65 service learning projects providing 11,700 total hours of volunteer services has occurred in the Minneapolis and St. Paul area.

The charter school movement as a whole is likely to continue growing, with educational innovators using this strategy as another means to improve student preparation for their individual educational and work goals and to find effective ways to smooth their transition out of high school into college.

Minnesota Alliance for Education. Building on the model of the "Learning First Alliance," leaders of the Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education joined with Education Minnesota (the first effort to combine the state affiliates of the National Educational Association and American Federation of Teachers into a single, statewide union) and several other key professional education organizations to create the Minnesota Alliance for Education in 1998. The Alliance has now grown to include all of the key state agencies, organizations, and systems responsible for meeting the statewide educational needs of students and communities at all levels. This includes the Minnesota Parent Teacher Student Association; the MDCFL; the Minnesota Board of Teaching; the organizations representing elementary and secondary school principals, school administrators, and school boards; and organizations representing postsecondary educators, sometimes including P-12 educators as well.

To date, the Alliance has chosen to focus on issues of quality and availability of educators for Minnesota's classrooms and has convened several statewide forums, convened monthly membership meetings, and crafted strategic documents to be used with policymakers to address the recruitment, development, and retention of high quality educators in the state. Currently chaired by a member of MnSCU's P-16 Partnership team, the Alliance is serving as the foundation for building other strategic partnerships and for identifying and advancing common issues of concern that can help build a seamless P-20 system in Minnesota.

Opportunities for Federal Policies and Programs

It is always challenging to determine the best and most appropriate level at which to seek educational improvement. A long-standing tradition of local control has led communities to expect that their own elected school boards and the staff they hire will determine local curricula. State-level policymakers couple significant financial support with mandates and programs intended to set a consistent direction for student learning and performance along with standards for the preparation and licensure of teachers and administrators. The federal government, recognizing how critical education is to the nation's economic and social health, has played varying roles over time to identify priorities, set an overall direction for educational improvement, and provide funding

designed to address problems, stimulate change, and support innovation. Within the context of improved student preparation for postsecondary education and post-high school careers and enhanced transitions to college classrooms or the workplace, there are at least three directions the federal government might consider in order to extend the promise of "No Child Left Behind" to students in their last years of high school. While many possible actions for all levels of policymakers and educators are effectively articulated within the report of the National Commission on the High School Senior Year, this paper will advance three general approaches that the Department of Education might consider.

1. Information Campaign to Articulate Preparation for Post-High School Success. Despite many local and state efforts to help high school students recognize the importance of the choices they make in high school to their future success, the message still doesn't seem to be reaching or convincing high school students. One reason may be that messages are sometimes fragmented, put forward by discrete institutions or systems within the broader educational continuum. Another may be that the existence of open admissions institutions gives students the false perception that no particular preparation is needed for academic success in those institutions. Given the large number of students served by those institutions, especially by first-generation college-goers and previously underserved populations, reshaping the perception of what is needed for success in community and technical colleges could reduce the need for remediation and improve student success in college, including persistence to degree completion.

Any effort to more effectively reach students must also recognize

(1) the realities of adolescent behavior and the inevitable difficulties of getting teenagers to realistically assess future options and realities (not to mention accepting the fact that adults know things that they don't and which are relevant to their lives!);

(2) the significant numbers of students who are working while in high school and the impact of the hours spent on the job on their willingness to pursue a set of rigorous high school courses and complete the work needed to complete necessary work for those courses; and

(3) the lack of guidance counselors and other adults in high schools who can help students identify their strengths, talents, and needs; articulate future goals in line with personal and academic abilities and interests; and make a variety of academic decisions appropriate to those goals.

The federal government could play a critical role by targeting its resources to the development of a high-quality informational campaign designed to help students and their parents better understand and take responsibility for their choices in high school and securing support from key leaders in business and industry as well as in

educational institutions and government agencies to broadly communicate that message. Such a campaign would continue to leave decisions at the local level about the curriculum itself and about specific standards for advancement and graduation while helping students better understand the impact of their high school course-taking on future success. It could help make clear the role that high school plays in setting future directions and particularly how decisions in high school can keep open or foreclose future choices.

Such a campaign could reach a wide range of students and be tied directly to goals and expectations recently set for students and schools across the country. Well-known personalities from all walks of life could be engaged in helping get the message out to students in ways designed to reach into every community and appeal to a wide array of student interests, talents, and needs. The power of a national information campaign would be significant and could help shape student preparation in profound and lasting ways. Such a campaign could be modeled after other successful national and state efforts, such as anti-drug or anti-tobacco campaigns, and the successes of and lessons learned from programs already operating with federal support, such as the Tech Prep Program, could provide useful information to inform such a campaign. One theme could build from the "No Child Left Behind" to include leaving no high school students behind when it comes to preparation for success in the workplace and in college classrooms.

2. Identification and Support of "Best Practices." A wide array of efforts is underway across the county to improve student preparation and transitions, but many are operating piecemeal, are underfunded, or are disconnected in ways that limit broader implementation. For many, modest support is all that stands in the way of implementation and dissemination. Some have the research data needed to demonstrate their effectiveness; others need only a little encouragement and support to collect the data that would prove their value or to help them connect with other, similar projects or key experts in order to identify ways in which changes could improve performance and ultimately generate results that could be disseminated to other sites or programs. Federal leadership is needed to accelerate the process of bringing successful practices to scale, as appropriate, nationwide.

Federal support in the form of modest grants designed to encourage the identification, implementation, improvement, and dissemination of new and emerging best practices across the country focused on improved student preparation and transitions could generate results leading to wide-scale reform. This paper has described an array of efforts currently underway in Minnesota, many of which might well be expanded here and replicated in other states; it is likely that the other 49 states could generate similar lists of efforts worth building more broadly and duplicating across the country. There is a long history of federal agencies and programs using similar means to encourage and advance educational improvement efforts upon which this effort could build. A planning group might be convened to more clearly define the kinds of efforts which the federal government would like to explore, encourage, and support and to

collect information on programs like those described above to help define current "best practices" focused on improved student preparation and transitions.

A variety of organizations, including those represented by the members of the National Commission on the High School Senior Year and by those who prepared commissioned papers for the Commission, would likely help articulate and support the development of funding opportunities, including possible categories for grant activity, and might even generate opportunities for matching or follow-up funding for the best ideas. The net could be cast broadly in order to solicit a wide array of potential projects, or more carefully defined opportunities could be advanced targeting improvements identified as being most critical to student preparation and transitions. In any case, relatively modest funding could likely stimulate significant efforts that would help students across the country, with diverse talents, interests, and backgrounds, better prepare for their futures regardless of whether they focus on the workplace first or following some postsecondary education.

3. Documenting Student Achievement. Linking resources to results has been an accountability goal, but the weak link has been that the results were not as well specified as the resources. It is possible to have specific information on the achievement/preparedness of individual students as the best possible record of educational results. It would be valuable if the U.S. Department of Education would set out, as a goal, levels of institutional accomplishment in the documentation of student achievement. This would visualize the progressive raising of the bar, even if it takes institutions a while to get there. It would identify the direction in which institutions should move, and it would set the criteria for making progress. The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1998 has already done this through the establishment of an accountability system with four core indicators. So has the North Central Association (NCA) with its three levels of institutional accomplishment. Something analogous from the U.S. Department of Education – a clear expansion of the range of data that would be desirable from institutions – could focus institutional attention on the kind of data on actual student achievement for which they should be aiming.

A Time to Act

Congress and President Bush have demonstrated the ability to forge essential compromises in order to serve the needs of students nationwide. The provisions in the recent reauthorization of the ESEA are appropriately focused primarily on students in grades three through eight, and both the content of ESEA and the spirit of bipartisanship which led to its enactment can serve as a foundation for an additional focus on the last years of high school. As its authors noted in "Raising Our Sights," "The high school senior year and graduation [can] become not so much a finish line as a relay station." With direction and support from Washington, we can reach high school students with messages designed to help increase the likelihood that their futures will be productive and successful, regardless of their educational and career aspirations. We can help end the "splendid isolation" that has kept higher education at something of

a remove from P-12 schools and forge new, broader partnerships that better serve students and help them move smoothly from one level to the next ("The Learning Connection, "Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land Grant Universities"). We can bring an end to the persistent, though often invisible, practice of tracking students in high school, thereby leaving too many without the knowledge and skills needed to move in many directions after high school, and we can make clear our belief that all students can succeed at high levels, seeking collectively to end what President Bush has called the "soft-bigotry of low expectations." Our students deserve no less, and our nation's strength depends on our ability to ensure that no student, whether a child, a teen-ager, or an adult, is left behind.

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