

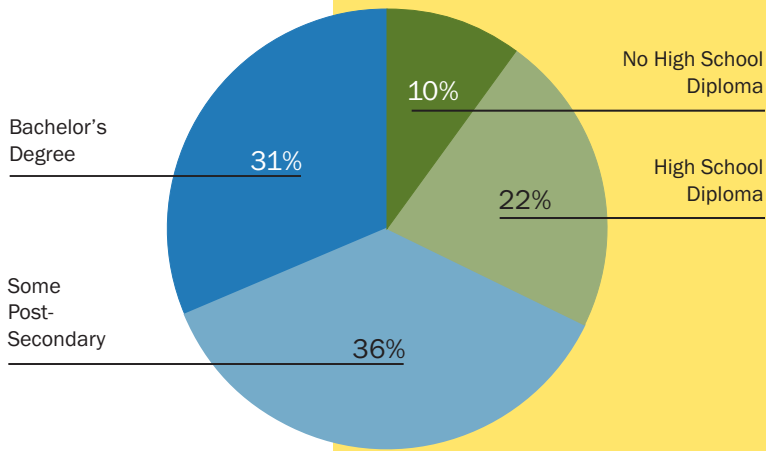
Louisiana's High Schools: Being Redesigned with the Future in Mind

HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN COMMISSION REPORT • SUMMER 2006



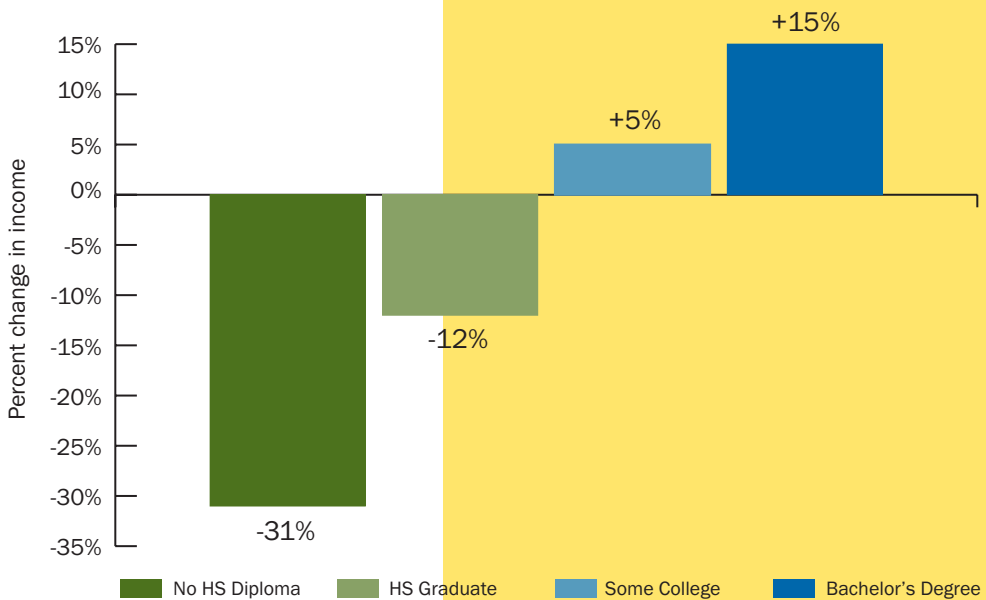
More Than Two-Thirds of New Jobs Require Some Postsecondary Education

Share of new jobs, 2000-2010



Source: Carnevale, Anthony P., and Donna M. Desrochers, *Standards for What? The Economic Roots of k-12 Reform*, Educational Testing Service, 2003.

Change in Median Family Income Over 30 Years (1974-2004)



Source: Postsecondary Education OPPORTUNITY, www.postsecondary.org. Figures take inflation into account.



A Need for Change

The world has changed. And Louisiana needs to change with it.


Nearly ***all*** jobs now require higher-level skills than in the past. Almost half of Louisiana’s employers say the skill needs of entry-level employees are rising, and even without the added demands of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, 38% say that finding qualified workers is harder now than it was five years ago. The same is true even in “blue collar” jobs. Unlike thirty years ago, many manufacturing and maintenance jobs now require as much brains as brawn.

Left unchecked, this growing skills gap is likely to lead to an “opportunity crisis” for the next generation of high school students. In fact, two out of every three new jobs created this decade will require some post-high school education.

Not surprisingly, young adults are finding it more and more difficult to earn a decent living with only a high school diploma and almost impossible to do so without one. In 1979, a 30-year-old male college graduate earned about 17% more than a 30-year-old high school graduate. Today, he earns 50% more, and the gap among women is even larger.ⁱ

The same is true in Louisiana, where the typical high school graduate today earns 45% more than a high school dropout. Adults with an associate’s degree earn 37% more than high school graduates, while those with a bachelor’s degree earn a whopping 58% more than those with only a high school diploma.

More to the point, Louisiana’s typical high school graduate earns under \$20,000—barely enough to support a small



family—while most high school dropouts earn below the poverty line. As Governor Blanco said of the dropout problem last April, “Every child who leaves school ill prepared is sentenced to a life of poverty.”

The skills gap will eventually hurt our entire economy as well. If too many of Louisiana’s adults lack education and in-demand skills, jobs will migrate elsewhere, making it even harder to find work that pays a living wage. Technology has helped create a “global economy.” Companies can now search the globe for the skills they need, and where they find them, good jobs and economic opportunity will follow.

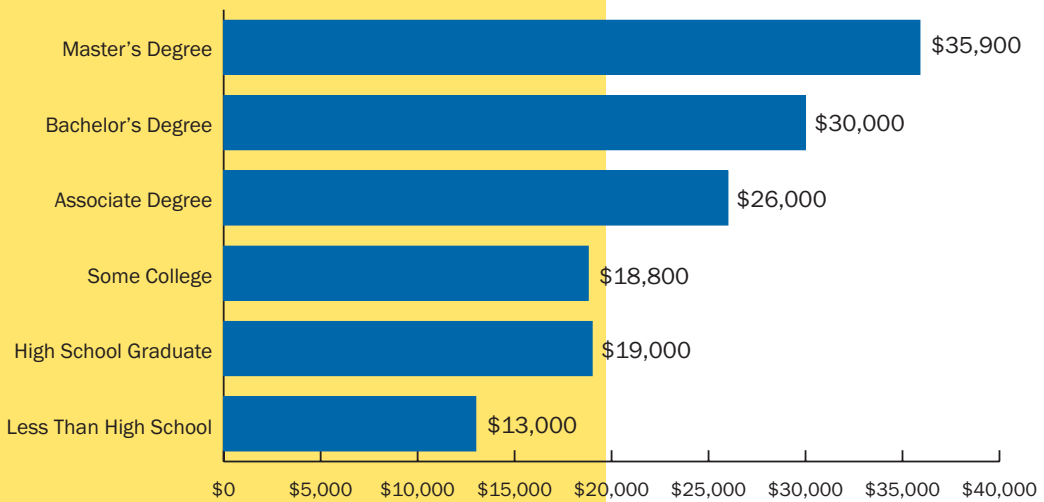
And it’s not just good jobs and decent wages at stake. High school dropouts are

- More likely to be unemployed;
- Less likely to have health insurance and a good pension plan;
- More likely to receive welfare, food stamps, and public housing assistance;
- Less likely to be healthy and to live as long;
- More likely commit crimes and become incarcerated (in fact, a Columbia University professor recently estimated that increasing graduation rates by 10% would decrease murder and assault arrests by 20% and automobile thefts by 13%); and
- Less likely to vote and make other kinds of civic contributions.ⁱⁱ

Simply put, keeping all students in high school and graduating more young people with better skills will save millions of taxpayer dollars, greatly expand the state’s tax revenues, attract more good-paying jobs, reduce crime, and improve citizenship. If we want a future where most of our citizens have the opportunity to be healthy, productive, and prosperous, we **MUST** redesign our high schools to meet the challenges of today’s world and we must start now.

The next generation of young Louisianans deserves nothing less.

Median Earnings of Louisiana's 18- to 64-Year-Olds (1999)



Source: The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Based on analysis of data from 2000 U.S. Census.



Louisiana's dropout rate is appalling. Every child who leaves school ill-prepared is sentenced to a life of poverty. Losing our students is not acceptable. Enough is enough.

Governor Kathleen Blanco



A Call to Action

Louisiana's high schools work well for many students, but by no means for enough of them. More than one in three don't graduate and of the two who do, at least one is neither ready for college nor ready for work.

Leaving high school without a diploma is a one-way ticket to nowhere. But poor preparation hurts our graduates too:

- One out of every three public high school graduates who go on to enroll in a Louisiana college or university has to take remedial classes his/her first semester—courses that cost money but don't earn credits toward a diploma.
- Only 71% of freshmen in Louisiana's 4-year colleges and 53% of those in 2-year colleges return for a sophomore year.
- Only 39% of freshmen in Louisiana's 4-year colleges earn a college degree within six years—one of the lowest college completion rates in the nation.

That lack of preparation doesn't just hurt the graduates we traditionally have thought of as “college bound.” In fact, Louisiana high school students who complete a career and technical training program are far **more** likely to go on to college than those who do not. Why? They know that good jobs in Louisiana, like good jobs nationwide, increasingly require some postsecondary training and that includes many jobs we used to think of as “blue collar.”

What do all these numbers mean for future high school students? If these trends continue, young people entering ninth grade next fall will face grim odds. Of the 60,000 9th grad-

ers who will enroll in our high schools in 2006, only about 35,000 will leave with a diploma in the spring of 2010, and well under 10,000 will have earned an associate's degree by 2012 or a bachelor's degree by 2014. In fact, far fewer 9th graders will earn an on-time high school diploma than the number planning to earn a college degree.

Louisiana's low-income and minority students fare even worse. Half of the nearly 6,000 African American public high school graduates who entered Louisiana's colleges and universities in 2004 had to enroll in remedial courses, and only 28% of African American freshmen in Louisiana's 4-year colleges and universities earn a degree within six years.

The need for statewide action is clear. Our high schools need help, and the challenges they face will not simply disappear on their own. In fact, the number of students dropping out of Louisiana's high schools increased during both the 2002-3 and 2003-4 school years.



Can We Do It?

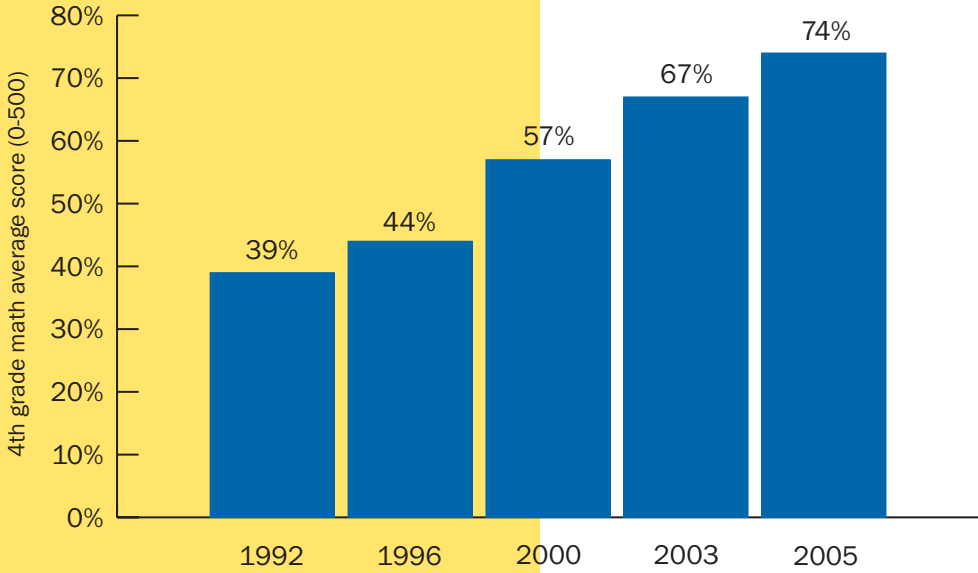
Louisiana has worked hard to improve its public education system, and that effort is clearly paying off.

Ten years ago, a report issued by the newspaper *Education Week* ranked Louisiana among the bottom half of the states for its academic standards and accountability and its efforts to improve teacher quality. The newspaper summed up, "Public education has never been a priority in Louisiana, and educators will have to struggle to change that."

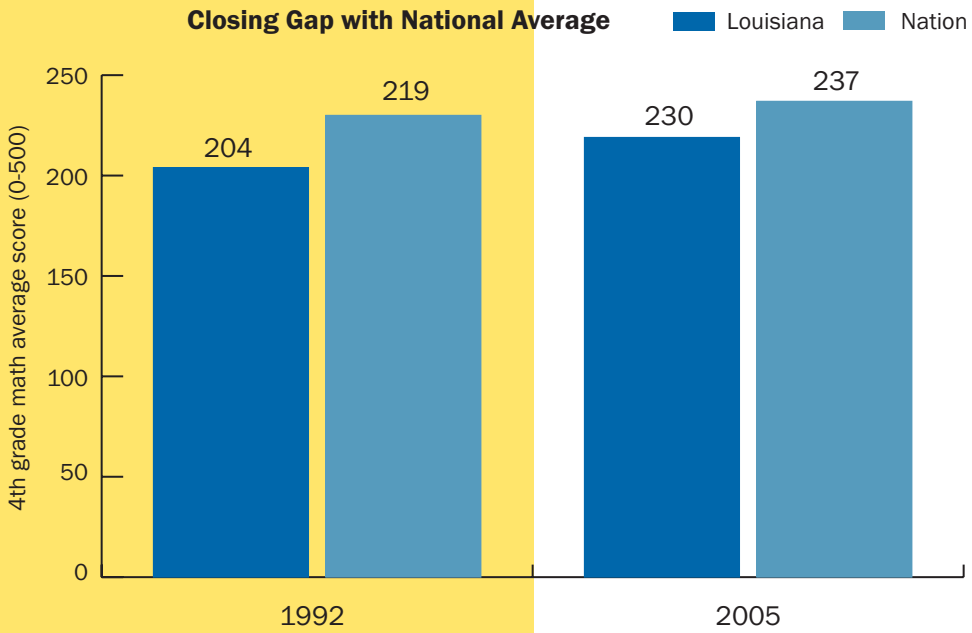
This past January, the tenth anniversary issue of that same report gave Louisiana straight A's in both categories. What's more, ***Education Week* ranked Louisiana higher than any other state in the nation when it comes to educational standards and accountability and efforts to improve teacher quality.**

Making Great Strides in Elementary Math

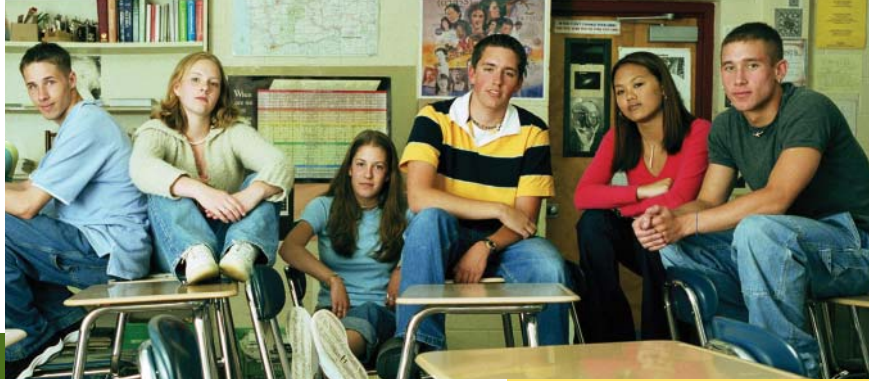
Many More Students Mastering Basic Skills



Closing Gap with National Average



Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, National Assessment of Educational Progress.



Others have praised our efforts as well: In September 2004, the Southern Regional Education Board rated Louisiana as the only state in the south to have made “promising progress” in five of six areas related to improving the preparation of school principals and other leaders.

Students are beginning to reap the benefits. ***Louisiana had the second-highest improvement in 4th grade math scores on national tests between 1992 and 2005*** and the fifth-largest gain in 8th grade math. Although we started far behind, our elementary school students are beginning to close the gap with the national average.

Parents have noticed the changes too. Louisiana’s elementary and middle schools are becoming places where children are more challenged, more supported, and leave better prepared than ever before.

Our high schools have begun to improve too, but the challenges they face are different, and they are not changing fast enough to keep up with the demands of the modern world.

Thirty years ago, improving elementary and middle schools might have been enough to ensure most young Louisianans a secure future. But that’s simply no longer true. We cannot afford to celebrate our progress in grades K-8 while turning a blind eye to problems in our high schools.

By “problems,” we do not mean lazy or ineffective teachers and administrators. Louisiana’s high school educators work hard and achieve a lot with a little, but they work hard in institutions that are obsolete. Our high schools were de-



Our current high school structure is 50 years old and unable to deliver what students need in today's competitive, global, highly sophisticated workplace. The choices facing our state are clear: Either we increasingly import trained workers to fill the demanding jobs of today and tomorrow (as we have imported unskilled workers to fill low-skill jobs), or we do a better job of educating our workforce to meet the challenges of the modern world of work. The first choice should not be an option if our young people are to have a decent standard of living. There's no time to waste.

Dan Juneau, LABI President

signed for another time, a time when students who dropped out could find good jobs and when many graduates did not need high-level skills.

In today's world, all of our young people need to complete a high school diploma, and most—if not all—will need college education or training beyond high school. Whether they're headed directly for the shipbuilding, construction, or chemical industries, or the freshman year at their local technical college or four-year university, young adults need stronger skills than ever before.

Louisiana's businesses are sending that message loud and clear. Nearly three quarters of Louisiana's employers are having difficulty finding applicants with adequate problem-solving skills, and 42% are having a hard time finding applicants with good enough basic reading skills.

Simply put, a willingness to work hard on the job is no longer enough to earn a living wage or climb the economic ladder. In the emerging knowledge economy, all adults need solid reading, writing, mathematics and problem-solving skills. Without a rigorous high school education and some postsecondary education or training, our young people will neither be able to gain a secure foothold in the labor market nor contribute to our state's future.

Our current system of high school education was never designed to accomplish these goals. We must design a new system that keeps all students in school and on track to a high school diploma, one that guarantees adequate preparation for the world they will face after graduating.

Sometimes the smartest way to improve something is to move cautiously, build momentum gradually, and make small changes year by year. ***This isn't one of those times.*** We must fundamentally ***redesign*** our entire system of high school education—what Louisiana's high schools are for, how they work, what they ask of teachers and students, and what they provide to our young people. We cannot afford to be timid about it, and we cannot afford to wait.



If there's one thing the last decade has taught us, it's that Louisianans can accomplish great things when we dream big, set ambitious goals, work together, and refuse to give up. After all, a decade ago, no one would have predicted Louisiana would become a national leader in education reform.

Now, among all of our other challenges, we must gather the will to tackle high school redesign with the same courage, energy, and resolve. Our children's futures—and our future as a state—depend on it.

What Do Redesigned High Schools Do Differently?

The short answer to this question is that they do for all of their students what our best high schools have always done for their top students—and more, because in tomorrow's world, even top students will have to be able to do more, too.

We don't use the term “redesigned” by accident. We're talking here about engaging full high school communities in the deliberate rethinking of virtually everything—from how time is used, to how adults are deployed, even to the “places” where learning occurs. The goal is simple. Rather than another quick fix or adopting yet another program, the core notion is that what schools do every day be intentionally designed to maximize student success.

And let us be clear. This is a journey, not a destination. In effect, redesigned schools—like the best businesses and most respected community organizations—are always engaged in re-tooling or redesigning something in an effort to get ever better at what they do.

In essence, though, redesigned high schools:

1. Have high expectations for all students and are crystal clear about what that means. It's about preparing all students for work, citizenship and postsecondary education, rather than simply meeting the requirements of



a high school diploma. It's about substituting coherence for unfettered student "choice" and foregoing continued separation of students into college- and work-bound tracks.

2. Work hard to build close and deep relationships within the school, connecting adults and students, students with students, and adults with adults—for example, assuring that every student is known well by at least one adult, organizing students into study groups or learning communities and enabling teachers to form teams.
3. Leave almost nothing about teaching and learning to chance. That means:
 - Engaging all, rather than just some, students in the rigorous study of a clear, explicit and common core curriculum infused with "real world" content and learning activities that are deliberately designed to prepare them for life after high school.
 - Having consistent and widely understood expectations—from teacher to teacher and student to student—of what good enough student work looks like and what good enough teacher work looks like.
 - Frequently and closely monitoring student progress and teacher impact, providing regular feedback on performance.
 - Acting immediately to provide assistance when students experience problems.
4. Deploy time and other resources equitably and in accordance with student needs rather than only adult preferences. That means:
 - Arranging the schedule to provide extra instructional time in the core academic subjects for students who arrive behind, instead of the lower amounts such students often get.
 - Assuring that low-achieving students get the expert teachers they need to catch up, instead of just having those teachers teach only the honors students.
 - Recognizing the importance of getting things right in the 9th grade, including different staffing ratios and/or learning structures.

5. Work hard to build the skills and habits (like persistence and hard work) that will lead to satisfying lives, constantly challenging both students and adults to work harder and get better, no matter how low- or high-performing they are at the start, providing generous assistance as they struggle to improve.
6. Deliberately build bridges between in-school learning and the resources, opportunities and expertise available outside the school walls to assure that students are prepared not only academically, but with a rich set of experiences to enable them to see the relationship between school learning and future opportunities. That means:
 - Creating internships with local businesses and community-based organizations;
 - Reaching out to parents to help them become partners in their children's learning; and
 - Partnering with local 2- and 4-year colleges to make college-level learning opportunities a regular part of the high school experience.

If This is What Redesigned High Schools Do, Where Do We Begin?

Redesigning high schools to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st Century is fundamentally a responsibility of those who lead and teach in Louisiana's high schools. Those who haven't yet begun this journey need to get started...and soon.

The good news is that some Louisiana high schools are already well along this path. Indeed, there is a good example of virtually every one of these characteristics and practices somewhere in the state, but most of these leading edge schools still face the challenge of putting all the pieces together into a powerful whole, while other schools have yet to even get started.

However, there are many things that the state can do to support and accelerate the transition from old to new.



First, we must re-examine whether our current graduation requirements reflect the skills that all students need for higher education and today's workforce. Last year, as members of the High School Redesign Commission looked at the data, it became clear that our current high school diploma doesn't mean enough.

Therefore, we have launched a project to closely examine the issue. Teams of experts from education and business will work together to clearly identify the skills young adults need to be successful in Louisiana's colleges and universities and in our state's good-paying, entry-level jobs. Then we will know whether our current requirements for earning a high school diploma guarantee those skills.

Based on those findings, the Commission will frame a series of recommendations for strengthening the diploma so that students who follow all the rules won't continue to fall through the cracks between the requirements for graduating from high school and the demands of college and work. Let us be crystal clear: because the requirements in the outside world have increased exponentially, it is likely that the recommendations will include tougher course requirements and tougher tests.

The Commission will circulate those recommendations for public comment in about six months.

Second, there are six large impediments to better high school outcomes that we need to tackle right now:

1. Many schools lack the expertise and support necessary to move forward with high school redesign.
2. Far too many students enter high school substantially behind in literacy or math.



Statistics show that even the non-college bound student must take Core Curriculum subjects in order to be able to function in the 21st Century. 65% of the jobs of the future are going to require more than a high school degree, so rigor is as important to a non-college bound student as it is to a college-bound student.

Cecil J. Picard, State Superintendent

3. Large numbers of students do not take the high school courses they need to prepare them for postsecondary success.
4. In many of our schools and parishes, high school courses are often neither rigorous nor relevant.
5. There are too many barriers for students to easily access postsecondary academic or advanced workplace training while in high school.
6. Though support for high school redesign is growing, the base is not yet broad or deep enough.

In each of these six critical areas, there are things that the State—and we include the Commission here—can do to support and leverage the efforts of front-line high school educators. To not delay action even one more month, our detailed recommendations on next steps in each of these areas are laid out in the remainder of this report.



Redesigning High Schools: Getting Started

Last summer, the governor and legislature made the Louisiana High School Redesign Commission a permanent body that is not limited to simply issuing a single report and then closing up shop. That means this is only the first of several reports we will issue over the next few years. What follows is only the first round of recommendations we will make for improving Louisiana’s high schools.

However, that does not make them less critical. The actions we list below, if taken, will move us a long way toward the goal of guaranteeing every teenager access to an effective high school education.

PROBLEM ONE: Many high schools lack the expertise and support necessary to move forward with high school redesign.

1

Our high school leaders need to begin moving their schools forward, but they need some help. Successful high school redesign requires at least three things:

- That participating educators understand the need for change, rather than approach redesign as a compliance activity;
- That school redesign teams have access to the best research on practices that work, as well as to educators who have used those practices; and,
- That school redesign teams have time to digest information, think and plan together—and ongoing support as they move ahead.

As we look around the state, we find some important supports in place. In southwest Louisiana, for example, the Rapides Foundation is providing generous support for high school redesign. Certainly, some parishes are supporting high school improvement efforts, but what we lack is an organized system of supports and dedicated resources to assure that assistance is ongoing.



High school educators throughout the state need to begin rethinking the ways their schools are organized, asking not whether they can add a new program or two, but rather whether there are better ways to organize instruction and to deploy time, people and other resources.



Recommendation I-1 *Encourage and Support Local Redesign Efforts:* To encourage and support school- and parish-level high school redesign, the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) should take immediate steps to gather the best available research on effective elements of redesigned high schools in order to identify schools within the state that exemplify those elements and create venues and vehicles to share these with high school educators throughout the state.

This effort should focus first on getting things right in the ninth grade—especially putting into place strategies and structures that will create more personalization as well as provide more and better instruction for students who are behind.

While Louisiana’s high schools are engaging places for many students, others find them isolating and alienating. Too many students tell us they find it hard to make connections—between one subject and another, between what they are doing in class and their future plans, with caring adults, and with their peers. Too many tell us that no one much cares whether or not they stay in school or push themselves academically to prepare for the future.

Addressing this problem isn’t just about making students happier. Students who become alienated and less engaged in high school can develop discipline problems which can mushroom until students begin failing classes or eventually drop out.

Of course, this isn’t just a problem here in Louisiana. One in four high school sophomores nationally says that school spirit is low and that teachers do not take an interest in the students. Three in four say they do not like high school very much.ⁱⁱⁱ



A Place of Their Own

To ease the transition to high school, ninth graders at Destrehan High School have their own space, their own team of teachers, and even their own lunch period. According to Lorel Gonzales, the school's principal, separating ninth graders from upperclassmen creates camaraderie within the class, increases students' social connectivity to the school, and generally builds students' confidence about their ability to succeed in high school.

Those problems can be particularly troublesome in large high schools, so we need to take a close look at what’s happening with the 50% of Louisiana’s teenagers who attend large high schools with more than 1,000 students. The good news is that many communities are finding that they can make headway fixing these problems by changing how high schools are organized, often by carving up large schools into “small learning communities.” A recent study of small learning communities found that students feel less invisible and more supported, and teachers say they have closer relationships with students and with each other.^{iv}

Small environments are just a means to an end, though our primary goal must be to help teachers and other adults find ways to be much more supportive of students. Research has found that, everything else being equal, high schools where adults were highly supportive of students cut the probability of dropping out in half, and the benefits are especially great for low-achieving and low-income teenagers.^v

Researchers have also discovered that young teens can have a particularly hard time making the transition to 9th grade, so we also need to pay special attention to how well our high schools support incoming freshmen. Several studies have found that putting freshmen into small learning communities (often called “ninth grade academies”), providing each student with an adult mentor, allowing teachers to work in cross-subject teams, and giving other kinds of extra support and personal attention to students during their freshman year can improve 10th grade promotion rates, high school graduation rates, and student achievement.^{vi}

In short, Louisiana’s high schools need to become places where adults can actively establish a culture that values individual students, supports them personally and academically, and challenges them to achieve their full potential. Our schools will need plenty of support themselves to make that happen.



Recommendation 1-2 Focus Redesign on Increasing School Personalization: Initially, both school and statewide high school redesign efforts should focus on identifying structures and strategies that increase per-



sonalization for students and teachers, including small learning communities, assuring that each student is part of an adult “advisor” or otherwise has an adult mentor, and 9th grade “seminars.” LDOE should begin to roll out training and support for high school administrators, counselors and teachers, including research on the effectiveness of these strategies and training on how to implement them.

While all high schools in the state should consider and implement redesign elements, schools identified as needing improvement in our school accountability system should have priority attention and support to undertake redesign. The School Improvement (SI) program is a facet of our School and District Accountability System and is intended to help our low performing and stagnant schools improve by providing six (6) levels of increasing technical assistance and, ultimately, intervention:

Level	Remedy
SI-1	District Assistance Team Revised School Improvement Plan
SI-2	School Choice Scholastic Audit (Year 1)
SI-3	Supplemental Educational Services Distinguished Educator Placed at School Scholastic Audit (Year 2)
SI-4	Develop Reconstitution Plan
SI-5	Implement Reconstitution Plan Develop Alternate Governance Plan Develop Reconstitution “Light” Plan – substantial school reform aimed at increasing the academic performance of low-performing subgroups
SI-6	Alternate Governance Implement Reconstitution “Light”

The types of remedies required for a given level of School Improvement depend on the Title I status of the school and are additive in nature. Schools remain in School Improvement until they achieve a satisfactory School Performance Score (SPS).



The Recovery School District Law (Act 1293), passed in 2003, provides for the takeover of schools that are determined to have “failed” under the School and District Accountability System. A failed school is defined as one that has been identified as “Academically Unacceptable” for four consecutive years. The law allows for a school to be taken away from governance by the local school district and placed in a Recovery School District administered by the Louisiana Department of Education and subject to the authority of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE). An approved provider is contracted to operate the school as a Type 5 Charter School.



Recommendation I-3 *Link Redesign with School Accountability:* BESE should link high school redesign to School Accountability by requiring that:

- Schools in SI-2, SI-3 and SI-4 consider implementation of LDOE-recommended redesign elements in the School Improvement planning process. A school may choose not to implement all of these, but should consider and utilize those that address the areas of greatest weakness in the school.
- For schools in SI-4, districts should be required to include all LDOE-recommended redesign elements in the development of Reconstitution Plans or provide research justification for selecting other elements or strategies. Any Reconstitution Plan implemented at SI-5 will then include the recommended elements or a plan for implementing other comparable research-based elements.
- For schools placed in the Recovery School District, Type 5 Charter applicants must include LDOE-recommended redesign elements in the application proposal or provide research justification if other elements or strategies are selected.

2

PROBLEM TWO: Far too many students enter high school totally unprepared for high school level work. Once they are in high school, students who fail courses or the Graduation Exit Exam (GEE) have too few ways to get back on track and graduate with their class. Often, they just give up and drop out.

For many students, the path to dropping out begins well before high school. One recent study found that about half of eventual high school dropouts could be identified as early as sixth grade based on whether students are failing math and English, have low attendance, or exhibit very poor classroom behavior.^{vii} In truth, the seeds are often sown even earlier, such as in poor reading performance in elementary school.

Yet even students who leave middle school in relatively decent academic shape also find high school difficult—they stumble and often fail when confronted with a whole new social environment, less support from teachers, and more challenging classes.

The bottom line is too many of our young people fall behind and never get a chance to catch up. They drop out when they fall so far behind in credits—and in learning—that they realize school has become a dead end without a final payoff.

We must find ways to keep students in school by assuring that students master critical reading and math skills in the early grades and by keeping them on track to graduate. We must also provide more opportunities and support for students who do fall off track during high school—for whatever reason—to meet the requirements for earning a diploma.

Fortunately, over the past ten years, we have learned a lot more about what it takes to keep all students on track to graduate. The most effective strategies identify students who are at risk as early as possible and act quickly to give these students lots of extra help and support.

We also have learned that the absolute worst thing we can do is what we've always done—put such students into watered-down “remedial” courses that don't challenge them, or teach them very much, and don't give them the skills they will need for college or good-paying jobs, as well as bore them right out the door.



Strategic Reading: Significant Results

All ninth and tenth grade students at East St. John High School are required to take Strategic Reading I and Strategic Reading II. These full-credit courses, components of the Talent Development Model developed by Johns Hopkins University that the school has adopted, are producing phenomenal results. Many students achieve 2-3 year gains in reading level within a single year. The school makes time in the students' schedules for the courses by deferring required physical education classes to the 11th and 12th grades.



Instead, we should piggyback on the work of researchers and educators who have created strategies that engage students and accelerate their learning so they can jump right back into rigorous courses as soon as possible. To be effective, this extra help has to be mandatory rather than voluntary, and schools have to find ways to carve out time for it during the regular school day.



Recommendation II-1 Provide Extra Help for Students:

Students who fall behind in literacy or math in the middle or early high school grades should be identified as early as possible and provided with extra instruction and supports to help them accelerate their learning and “catch-up” to grade level.

- The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) should implement an Early Warning System to identify students who are behind. Beginning in middle school, students should be identified by 6th grade *i*LEAP test results and provided with extra instruction in literacy and/or math in grades 7 and 8. At the high school level, 8th grade LEAP and 9th grade *i*LEAP test results should be used to identify students; these students should receive extra instruction in literacy and/or math in grades 9 and 10.
- LDOE should include in the state K-12 literacy plan, *Literacy for All*, provisions for a research-based intervention program to enable students identified by the Early Warning System to accelerate their learning and catch-up to grade level. The plan should include a requirement that all students who are two or more years behind in reading take a reading course specifically designed to accelerate the achievement of struggling adolescent readers.
- LDOE should pilot the literacy plan, as well as the accelerated reading course and supports for students that are behind, in a small number of schools in 2006-07. Implementation training and on going support should be provided for administrators and teachers in pilot schools. Formative evaluation data should be collected in order to revise the literacy plan and targeted intervention catch-up program, as needed, prior to statewide implementation.



- In addition, students identified by the Early Warning System as behind in mathematics should be provided with a special research-based curriculum and strategies, including “double-doses” of instructional time in math, that have been proven effective in accelerating the development of math skills and preparing students for success in Algebra I. A pilot math intervention program should be conducted in a small number of schools in 2006-07.
- The LDOE should develop mechanisms to support statewide implementation of the Early Warning System and of the literacy and math intervention strategies in middle and high schools, beginning in 2007-08, with priority to schools needing improvement. Middle and high schools with large numbers of students who are behind should receive assistance in revising master schedules to provide these students with the necessary extra instructional time in reading and/or math and to release teachers to serve as coaches of other teachers. All teachers and administrators in these schools should receive literacy training. Special additional training should be provided to teachers of “catch-up” reading and math programs.

Ensuring that all students enter high school better prepared is an important part of the overall effort to reduce dropout rates. However, the experience of educational leaders in Louisiana and nationally suggests that there are other important early indicators that young people are experiencing problems that often lead to falling behind or dropping out—such as low grades, poor attendance, discipline problems or sharp declines in performance. If we are to create a safety net to catch and provide necessary supports for students before it is too late, we must identify and include these indicators as triggers in the Early Warning System.



Recommendation II-2 *Develop an Early Warning System to Identify Potential Dropouts:* LDOE, in partnership with districts, should conduct a study to identify student behaviors and other factors that are early signs that a student is at risk of falling behind or dropping out, and should develop recommendations

for how these can be incorporated as triggers in the Early Warning System. LDOE should report its findings and recommendations to the High School Redesign Commission in the Fall of 2006.

We also need to remember that, despite early intervention efforts, some students will still fall behind in credits or learning after they get to high school—either for educational reasons or personal reasons, or both. We must provide those young people with a broader, more flexible set of “second chance” options and better support to complete the requirements for earning a high school diploma.



Recommendation II-3 *Revise Current Credit Recovery*

Policy: BESE should revise its current credit recovery policy—which requires students who fail a course in high school to retake the full course—to permit alternative mechanisms for recovery of credit that hold the standard constant but require less seat time. Among other things, BESE should consider

- Providing options that would allow students to make up failed courses at their own pace, using online resources, tutoring, and other methods;
- Allowing the use of end-of-course exams when available or other proficiency exams for students who fail courses; and
- Providing options for students who are failing because of excessive absences to make up missed time in order to get credit for work done.



Recommendation II-4 *Strengthen GEE Remediation:*

BESE should strengthen the current GEE remediation policy by requiring that students failing the GEE on the first attempt participate in remedial instruction during the summer and following school year prior to the spring GEE retest opportunity. In strengthening the requirement, BESE should inquire about current and past district/school remediation practices and their effectiveness.

3

PROBLEM THREE: Large numbers of students do not take the high school courses they need to prepare them for postsecondary success.

Regardless of what adults might expect of them, Louisiana’s young people have very high ambitions for themselves and great expectations for the future. About 70% of our middle-school and high-school students plan to earn a college degree—and students in career and technical programs are no different. Unfortunately, too many of our young people are planning on more education without preparing.

- While 67% of 8th graders say they plan to go to college, only 31% plan to take a full college prep program in high school.
- Although 76% of 10th graders say they want to go to college, only 48% of them are on target for being college-ready, and only 41% say they have completed or are taking Algebra I and Geometry.

The reason students take the wrong classes isn’t because they are lazy, but because they are poorly informed about what they need to do in high school to prepare for life after graduation. Parents often cannot help them make good decisions because they, too, are misinformed about what courses students will need—not just to graduate from high school, but also to enter college without having to take remedial classes there.

Most people would be surprised to hear that students who are not planning to go to college are equally misinformed about what it takes to be successful after high school. Few students and parents—and even teachers—realize how much jobs have changed over the past twenty years and how rapidly they continue to change.

In today’s economy, the skills you need to obtain a good job and advance in the workplace are very similar to the skills you need to do well in college English and math courses. That is true in ever more “blue collar” jobs.



Far more high school students might be willing—even eager—to take tougher classes if only we helped them connect their course-taking with their ambitions early enough to make a difference. Many states have begun to increase their graduation requirements to meet the expectations of today’s colleges and workplaces. When we complete our Louisiana college- and work-readiness study, we may consider similar proposals; however, we cannot wait to improve information and advising for our students.

Even before they begin high school, we should provide students with the opportunity and resources to explore career areas that match their interests and aptitudes, to identify the educational requirements for pursuing particular careers, and to develop clear and specific educational plans related to their career interests. Our students also need an organized mechanism to regularly monitor their progress and modify their educational plans as needed to stay on track and achieve their goals.



Recommendation III-1 *Develop on Educational and Career Planning Website:* The Louisiana Board of Regents (LBOR) and the LDOE should develop and launch a “one-stop” educational and career planning website (E-Portal) for 8-12+ graders and their parents.

- The E-portal should contain information on
 - Jobs and job requirements, salaries, future expectations;
 - How the job market is changing due to technology and globalization;
 - High school courses, diplomas, the Graduation Exit Exam (GEE), Tuition Opportunity for Students (TOPS) scholarships, etc.;
 - Tech prep, career options, virtual high schools, early college apprenticeships, dual enrollment and all types of choices of programs, pathways, and opportunities; and
 - Admission requirements, enrollment costs, and course offerings at technical schools, community colleges, state colleges and universities, and the military.



- It should also provide
 - Resources and tools for students, through password-protected access, to create and maintain an electronic personal portfolio, including their Five Year Education and Career Plans, course grades, standardized test scores, resumes, and other pertinent and personal education- and career-related information; and
 - Electronic access to applications for admission to postsecondary institutions, financial aid applications, and other useful forms.
- To maximize the use and usefulness of the E-Portal:
 - The site should be engaging to students, motivational, EASY to navigate and heavily marketed to parents, students, and the public.
 - There should be broad access via computers in libraries, schools, community centers, etc.
 - Technical assistance should be readily available to both organizational and individual users.
 - A plan should be developed and implemented for evaluating the usefulness and user-friendliness of the E-Portal and its impact on student behavior and achievement.
- An E-Portal Oversight Committee, comprised of representatives from each contributing agency/ institutional system as well as representatives of user audiences, should be appointed to oversee and make recommendations relative to the design, content, implementation, evaluation and continued operation of the E-portal.



Recommendation III-2 Support the Use of the E-Portal Website: LBOR and LDOE should jointly design and begin to provide statewide E-Portal training for counselors, teachers, youth leaders, community organizations, librarians and district personnel. This training should include strategies for incorporating the use of the E-Portal into required high school coursework and other school activities, thereby assuring that all students are introduced to and make periodic use of E-Portal resources. The training should also show school counselors/advisors how to use the capabilities of the

E-Portal to revitalize and help students maximize the use of Five Year Plans to chart, revise, and monitor progress toward accomplishment of educational and career goals. By the end of the 2007-08 school year, at least one faculty member from every public middle and high school in the state—ideally a school counselor or instructional leader—should have received E-Portal training.

PROBLEM FOUR: Much of the coursework students take during high school is neither rigorous nor relevant.

4

As is true in many states, our high school coursework is of uneven quality. Even in courses with the same titles, expectations vary from teacher to teacher, from school to school and from parish to parish.

We need to take steps to assure greater course consistency and quality. At the same time, we need to redesign high school courses themselves to be more engaging and to seem more immediately relevant to students—even as we take steps to make sure the skills they are teaching are the ones students need.

At the moment, many students can't see the connection between the content of these courses and their futures. This is a serious problem, because student motivation is especially important at the high school level, and teenagers are far more motivated in the classroom when they can see the relevance of what they are studying—how it relates to the world beyond the schoolhouse doors and to their own career goals.

However, no single, simple strategy will work to create the kinds of courses we need.



National surveys have revealed that the two most common reasons students consider dropping out of high school are boredom and lack of learning.^{viii} On the one hand, many high school courses seem too dry, academic, and irrelevant to students, leaving them bored and unengaged. On the other hand, too many courses are so watered down that they aren't academically challenging enough for students to build the skills they will need after high school. Students tell us the worst classes are those that suffer from both problems—ones that are boring enough to put them to sleep but not challenging enough to teach them anything. We need to deal with both of those problems simultaneously.



Recommendation IV-1 Increase Relevance of Courses: High school courses should be made more relevant to the real-world interests and future needs of students. Existing high school courses should be revised and new courses designed so that students clearly see what they are learning in high school is connected to, and necessary for achieving, their future aspirations.

- LDOE should develop a process to infuse more rich and robust work-related learning activities into ELA, mathematics and science courses in the Comprehensive Curriculum. To inform this effort, samples of the kinds of reading, writing, and mathematics that employees must do on the job should be collected from Louisiana employers.
- LDOE and LBOR should collaboratively assemble teams of educators as well as representatives from business/industry to design alternatives for certain core college prep courses, preserving and even enhancing their academic rigor while increasing relevance or connection to student interest (e.g., a forensic science sequence in which students learn core concepts of biology, chemistry and physics).



Getting a Leg Up

Students at St. James High School can get a head start on college, earning as many as 28 college credits before graduating from high school—and without even having to leave their high school campus. The school has negotiated agreements with Nicholls State University and with River Parishes Community College, allowing students to earn dual credit in courses such as chemistry and calculus. The classes are taught by teachers at the high school who qualify for Adjunct Faculty status at the cooperating institutions of higher education.



Recommendation IV-2 Implement End of Course

Exams: BESE should adopt a policy for statewide use of end-of-course assessments to help increase the quality, consistency and rigor of key high school courses. LDOE should implement end-of-course assessments for certain key academic courses (such as Algebra I, English I and II, and Biology), beginning with the administration of a pilot assessment for at least one course in the spring of 2007. The end-of-course assessments could be developed in collaboration with other states or national bodies. Initially, these would be informational only; soon thereafter, they should be figured as a part of the final student grade, but not included in the accountability system. Over time, these exams could replace existing assessment requirements in the accountability system rather than be added as an additional burden on schools and students.

5

PROBLEM FIVE: It is too hard for high school students who are ready to begin college level work to access offerings in the state's colleges and universities, both technical and traditional. Precious time gets wasted, especially in the senior year.

If there's one theme the Commission heard over and over, it's how often the senior year becomes a boring waste of time for many students. In fact, many Louisiana high schools still engage in the old practice of offering "early afternoon release" to seniors who do not need to take a full course-load to earn enough credits for a diploma. While that might have seemed like a nice treat for some students thirty years ago, today's teenagers simply cannot afford to squander time they could be using to better prepare for the tough demands of life after high school.

Instead of early release, high schools should offer an early start on college or advanced workplace training. Louisiana must find ways to decrease the number of college students who have to take remedial, high school-level courses while increasing the number of high school students who take advantage of college-level courses and advanced work-

place training. We should provide a “head start” on success for all who desire it, including both high potential/lower performing students as well as students who are not yet seniors.

Fortunately, our state already has begun to work on this problem. Last year the governor and legislature established a TOPS Tech Early Start program, providing funds for qualified 11th and 12th graders to take courses at community or technical colleges leading to “industry-based certifications” in top-demand occupations. The Board of Regents approved a set of statewide guidelines that should make it much easier to craft agreements between high schools and colleges that allow students to take college-level coursework while still in high school.

Parishes and colleges in some communities are pushing the envelope as well. Last year the East Baton Rouge Parish and the Baton Rouge Community College created an innovative “early college” pilot program that eventually will allow high school students to begin taking college courses as early as ninth grade. The program will enable especially ambitious teenagers to accrue enough college credits to earn a two-year associate’s degree by the time they graduate from high school.

These first steps are greatly encouraging; we need to build on that progress and begin offering early opportunities for college and workplace training to as many of our teenagers as possible.



Recommendation V-1 *Pilot a Statewide Dual Enrollment Program:*

In 2006-07, BESE and LBOR should conduct a pilot dual enrollment program for a small number of high demand academic and technical courses to be offered in a limited number of communities. The pilot should be designed to yield better information about barriers and opportunities for the expansion of dual enrollment.



Recommendation V-2 Increase Post Secondary Learning Opportunities:

BESE and LBOR should jointly appoint an oversight committee to design a statewide plan to dramatically expand the number of students completing postsecondary-level work during high school, including dual enrollment, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and other options. The plan should include a standard way of funding student participation in these courses, assured articulation and transfer of credit, attention to needed professional development, equity of access, and quality assurance.

6

PROBLEM SIX: Though support for redesign is growing, the base is not yet broad or deep enough. Many of the critically important stakeholders—including parents, teachers, administrators, policymakers and students themselves—don't always know why big change is essential.

Around the state, there are schools where change is already underway, and there are others anxious to get started. In this report, we have laid out a series of efforts to help accelerate their work.

But educators cannot accomplish all of these things—redesign high schools, reduce the dropout rate, and prepare all students for college and work—entirely on their own, even if we give them training and support. Parents, citizens, policymakers, business leaders, and young people themselves will have to pitch in and help, too.

Simply put, the demand for change must be much broader. There must be sustained support among policymakers and business leaders. There must be understanding and support from parents. Perhaps most important, students themselves must understand that the world around them is changing and that, if they're to have a fighting chance, they must work harder, too.



These groups, however, cannot be expected to support a mission they do not know about or understand. Accordingly, we intend to mount a vigorous communications effort to engage a wide variety of stakeholders in every corner of the state.



Recommendation VI-1 *Build Public Awareness to Support Redesign:* Begin now to plan and implement a carefully orchestrated and multi-faceted communications campaign to create awareness and build widespread public support for High School Redesign.

- Create a Communications Advisory Team to oversee all aspects of the communications campaign, from conception through implementation. This team should be comprised of representatives of K-12, postsecondary and workforce agencies, broadband/technology councils, and other key stakeholder groups. It should ensure that all efforts are done in concert; messages and images are consistent, accurate and appropriate; and data is collected and shared.
- LDOE should contract with a professional agency to help design and implement a formal information/communications plan. The agency should possess experience with multi-media as well as creative and strategic approaches on large-scale public issues. The agency should meet with the Communications Advisory Team to craft a plan that
 - Encompasses all aspects, from “making-the-case” to “selling” the changes or opportunities and motivating students and parents.
 - Creates expectations and demand.
 - Utilizes public messages/opinion research where appropriate and taps into student-driven ideas.
 - Includes near-term (1-2 year), implementation (2-3 year) and sustaining strategies/tactics.

Not only must we make a compelling case for the bold redesign of our high schools, but once change is underway, we must convince stakeholders of the need to stay the course. Currently, the people of Louisiana have too little easy-to-understand data on how high school students are



performing, how many students complete school, and their postsecondary success. They also have too little data on the implications of those results for the future—either for the students themselves or for the state as a whole. If they are going to be part of the solution, that has to change



Recommendation VI-2 Issue an Annual Report on Louisiana's High Schools: The Commission should issue an annual report on Louisiana's high schools. The first of these reports should include baseline data and goals for progress. Each subsequent report should detail progress. These should be widely shared.



Recommendation VI-3 Communicate Redesign Progress: The Governor, the State Superintendent and the Commission should all take lead roles in regularly communicating to the public and to the legislature about the progress of high schools in Louisiana, including a description of how high schools are doing and how they should be performing. The message should also clearly convey educational and economic opportunities that are being missed.

This report has set forth a series of recommendations that our state can undertake as a first step toward dramatically improving high school outcomes for all of our students. It is a call to action for educators, citizens and policymakers.

For More Information

For more information on the work of the High School Redesign Commission, please visit www.louisianaschools.net.

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ⁱ Witte, G. (2004, September 20). As income gap widens, uncertainty spreads: More U.S. families struggle to stay on track. *Washington Post*, p. A01.

ⁱⁱ This information is summarized from data presented in several papers at the Campaign for Educational Equity's *Fall 2005 Symposium on the "Social Costs of Inadequate Education"* at Columbia University on October 24 and 25, 2005. Papers presented at the Symposium are available at <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/EquityCampaign/symposium/symposium.asp>.

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