

Washington Partners, LLC

Issue Brief High School Reform August 12, 2005

The high school reform movement has gained substantial momentum over the last several years. The President, Congress, Governors around the country and many national policy organizations, foundations, and the media have all begun to focus on dropout rates, adolescent literacy and the urgent need to update our secondary schools for the 21st century. The first half of 2005 saw considerable attention to high school issues in the nation's capital. This special edition of *The Education Report* will summarize the following topics as they relate to high school reform:

1. Governors Commit to State Level High School Reform
2. The Department of Education – High School Research and Evaluations
3. The Business and Higher Education Communities Take a Stand
4. President Bush's Second Term Education Agenda
5. Congressional Interest – Appropriations, Hearings, and Legislation
6. Looking Forward

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Please note this document does not mention the numerous reports issued, conferences held, and other efforts taken by many national, state and local policy organizations and foundations; state legislative accomplishments; or specific local school high reform efforts.

1. Governors Commit to High School Reform

As education is traditionally and primarily a state function, not a federal responsibility, it is not surprising that National Governors Association (NGA) Chairman Governor Mark Warner (D-VA) focused on high school reform during his tenure which came to a close last month. During this time, he launched a year-long initiative - *Redesigning the American High School* – to address the urgent need to improve high schools.

Early in the year, Warner and the NGA accomplished a number of tasks.

- The NGA provided governors with a number of tools for reform: A 5-point, short-term action agenda for high school redesign; a list of “10 Steps” for getting started on this agenda; a compilation of promising state and local practices to implement these 10 recommendations; and a written brief offering three strategies for streamlining education governance and improving the alignment of state policies across education systems.

- The NGA began a series of town hall meetings across the country to gather feedback and released the “Rate Your Future” survey. More than 10,000 surveys completed by high school students nationwide were collected.
- The NGA engaged the nation’s governors on the topic of graduation rates. A Task Force on State High School Graduation Data was convened and recommendations were made on how states can develop a high-quality, comparable high school graduation measure.
- In February, most of the nation’s governors participated in a National Education Summit on High Schools in Washington, DC to discuss NGA’s short-term action agenda. At the close of the summit, 13 governors announced they had joined the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network. Through this initiative, these governors committed their states - which together educate more than a third of all U.S. students – to create a plan to: raise high school standards to the level of what is actually required to succeed in college or in the workforce; require all students to take rigorous college and work-ready curriculum; develop tests of college and work readiness that all students will take in high school; and hold high schools accountable for graduating all students ready for college and work; and hold colleges accountable for the success of the students they admit.

First Step, Graduation Rates

During the week of July 13, the two entities that have arguably the most leverage in implementing real change to ensure an accurate, consistent calculation of graduation rates across states - the Department of Education and the NGA – took separate, but parallel, actions regarding graduation rates.

- In response to the NGA’s graduation data recommendations, 46 governors and 12 national organizations signed “A Compact on State High School Graduation Data,” agreeing to (among other things) take steps to implement a standard, four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate and to lead efforts to improve state data collection, reporting and analysis, as well as linking data systems across the entire education pipeline from preschool through postsecondary education.

The graduation rate will be calculating by dividing the number of on-time graduates in a given year by the number of first-time entering ninth graders four years earlier. Graduates are those receiving a high school diploma. The denominator can be adjusted for transfers in and out of the system and data systems will ideally track individual students with a longitudinal student unit record data system. Special education students and recent immigrants with limited English proficiency can be assigned to different cohorts to allow them more time to graduate.

- Deputy Secretary of Education Ray Simon announced, before the Education Commission of the States, that the U.S. Department of Education will publish a common graduation rate - the Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) - for every state.

The AFGR calculation is the number of high school graduates receiving a regular diploma in a given year divided by the average of the number of students enrolled in eighth grade five years earlier, ninth grade four years earlier, and tenth grade three years earlier.

Simon said the Department understands that while there is a need for more accurate graduation rates, many states don't have the data collection capacity to provide that information. Therefore, while states work "toward the ultimate goal of gaining such capacity," the Department will calculate the AFGR for all states and report it alongside state-reported graduation rates in state NCLB report cards. Simon recognized the NGA's work, releasing a statement saying, "The Governors have acknowledged the need for a consistent graduation rate across the states, and we support their efforts and value their input. This additional information we will report simply complements the long-term recommendation they have put forth."

Although Warner's chairmanship ended at the end of July, NGA will continue its high school work through its Center for Best practices. On July 14, the NGA (with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) announced it will award Phase One Honor States High School Grants to Arkansas, Delaware, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Rhode Island, and Virginia. These states will receive up to \$2 million in two-year grants (which they are required to match) to implement a blueprint to identify those Action Agenda items likely to be most effective in their states. This includes one or more of the seven strategies: 1) Increase Course Rigor; 2) Expand Advanced Placement Participation; 3) Use Virtual Learning to Advance High School Improvement; 4) Turn Around Low-Performing High Schools; 5) Improve Teacher Knowledge and Skills and/or Recruitment and Retention; 6) Develop a Statewide Longitudinal K-16 Data System; and 7) Streamline Education Governance. On July 16, an RFP was announced for Phase 2, which will award approximately 25 grants in the range of \$50,000 to \$500,000 in November.

2. The Department of Education – Grants, High School Research and Evaluations

Striving Readers Grants

Throughout the year, the Department of Education has worked with the field to develop the application for the first round of Striving Readers grants. After being delayed several times, this much anticipated application is to be released Monday, August 15. According to officials at the Department of Education, program officers are expecting to make approximately eight grant awards ranging from one to five million dollars. The Department will prioritize applications from either Title I eligible local education agencies (LEAs) or partnerships between these LEAs and other eligible entities. Applications will be required to include an 1) experimental evaluation that contains a randomized control trial; 2) school level strategies designed to increase reading achievement; and 3) targeted intervention for struggling readers.

Applications will be posted on the Department's website at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders/applicant.html>.

IES Launches High School Research Initiative

On May 5, the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) assembled approximately 50 researchers and thinkers well known for their work in high school reform, graduation rates, and workforce development to discuss, "Research on Improving High Schools: A Forum for Advancing the Research Agenda." After a review of existing high school research, panelists discussed the research needs in each of the following four areas: 1) structural reforms; 2) high school completion and college readiness rates; 3) programmatic reforms; and 4) transitions to and from high school. The conversation, and the papers submitted by each

presenter, which highlight gaps in existing research about high schools, informed IES's new High School Reform Research Initiative.

IES's Mark Schneider reported that there was a "high degree of correspondence" between the questions posed by the researchers during the forum and the conversations IES has been having in developing this initiative. He identified the five themes IES will be looking for when they review applications:

- **Interventions** - What kinds of interventions are possible? Which pieces of multi-approach interventions create the "tipping point"? What matters in terms of teaching, learning, curriculum and structure?
- **Outcomes** - What are the outcomes of interventions, in terms of test scores and graduation rates? What other kinds of outcomes exist (like engagement, attendance, soft skills) and how are they tied to test scores and graduation rates?
- **Data** - What are the data and data capacity problems? What level of detail is needed?
- **Methods and Evidence**
- **Cost-benefit Analyses**

The application for the High School Reform initiative was posted on the Department of Education's website on June 27. The Institute intends to support research that will identify ways to improve high school education, measured by such objective indicators as higher test scores, higher graduation rates, and more successful transitions from high school into the world of work and postsecondary education.

<http://www.ed.gov/programs/hsresearch/applicant.html>

Smaller Learning Communities Enhanced Reading Opportunities

In addition to its regular Smaller Learning Communities (SLC) competition, the Department has funded a "special competition," titled "Enhanced Reading Opportunities" in which SLC grants will be awarded with additional funds to participate in a national research evaluation of supplemental reading programs. A distinctive aspect of this research and demonstration project is that the schools implementing the selected literacy programs (see below) will be ones that already operate "small learning communities," but do not have any efforts currently underway to intervene with struggling adolescent readers.

To implement this program, the U.S. Department of Education awarded a joint contract in 2004 to two nonprofit research organizations, American Institutes for Research (AIR) and MDRC, to establish and evaluate the effects of two supplemental literacy programs for students who enter ninth grade with reading skills well below grade level. In April 2005, MDRC and AIR named the two selected programs -- Reading Apprenticeship for Academic Literacy, developed and supported by WestEd; and the Strategic Instruction Model, developed and supported by the Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas. In July, the Department awarded grants to the 10 selected school districts.

3. The Business and Higher Education Communities Take a Stand

The higher education and business communities have also joined the conversation on high school reform, as the quality, capacity and competency of high school graduates has significant consequences for both. Specifically businesses report spending significant time and resources to increase the basic skills of employees; difficulty finding qualified candidates; and outsourcing

jobs to other countries, not because of lower wages, but because of the quality of the workforce. The business community's voice has really helped to initiate Congressional interest in efforts to increase science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education to ensure the nation's economic competitiveness. There is still a significant disconnect between the K-12 and postsecondary sectors, making the transition between high school and college anything but seamless. There is great variation in course requirements, content and rigor, and little consensus between secondary and postsecondary education on the courses students should take in high school. Research has documented that rigorous coursework in high school is essential for success in college. At the same time, we know that far too few students are taking the challenging courses they need to be prepared for college-level work.

Two recently released reports underscore this message and include specific recommendations for education reform. The Business Roundtable and 14 other prominent U.S. business organizations have issued a report to express their "deep concern about the United States' ability to sustain its scientific and technological superiority through this decade and beyond." The report describes warning signs of decline, challenges that must be overcome, and states a goal of doubling graduates with STEM degrees by 2015. The report, *Tapping America's Potential: The Education for Innovation Initiative*, identifies a set of five core recommendations that the authors say "we can begin to initiate, even in this tight budget year." These recommendations for education reform build on the foundation of the No Child Left Behind Act and current state efforts to redesign high schools. Within each core recommendation, there are specific actions with primary responsibility assigned to the federal government, business, higher education, districts, and/or states.

As a first step, the report recommends that all the federal Cabinet secretaries with "a stake in this issue" - Defense, Education, Homeland Security, Commerce, Labor and Energy - convene to map out a strategic approach to addressing this problem that includes "the reauthorizations of relevant federal programs, a government-wide focus across federal and state agencies, dynamic public-private partnerships, the frequent use of the bully pulpit, and vigorous private sector leadership and investment..." In response to the report, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings commended the group, and called the goals "worthy and...realistic...if we make the right choices. The key to achieving this goal is to increase our K-12 pipeline by improving our high schools."

A second notable report from The Committee for Economic Development says that the key to maintaining current competitiveness and increasing the skilled workforce that business needs requires system change in the higher education system. "We can no longer afford to use higher education as a filter into which many students enter, but from which only the best emerge." *Cracks in the Education Pipeline: A Business Leader's Guide to Higher Education Reform* focuses on the business community - as vested stakeholders - to "launch change" and provides business leaders with a starting point for establishing a dialogue on higher education reform, because, "as in K-12 education, reforms in higher education will most likely occur at the urging of outside constituents."

Both reports include recommendations for high school reform.

4. President Bush's Second Term Education Agenda

Throughout his campaign, in the first weeks of his second term and again in his Fiscal Year 2006 budget request, President Bush pledged his commitment to high school reform by proposing a new High School Initiative (HSI) to “ensure that every student graduates from high school with the skills to succeed in either higher education or our globally competitive workforce.” In his Fiscal Year 2006 budget request, President Bush proposed \$1.5 billion for interventions and assessments and an additional \$329 million for related proposals for high-quality high school programs. Simultaneously, he proposed eliminating existing programs that distribute funds to high schools, including the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education programs, the GEAR-UP program, Smaller Learning Communities, Dropout Prevention, TRIO Talent Search and Upward Bound, and Comprehensive School Reform.

Elements of the President's High School Initiative included:

- **High School Intervention - \$1.24 billion:** This would provide formula grants to states to fund competitive grants to districts for implementing interventions in secondary schools to increase student achievement; eliminate racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps; and to graduate all students prepared for postsecondary education and the 21st century workforce.
- **High School Assessments - \$250 million:** This initiative would require states to administer valid and reliable testing in language arts and mathematics in at least three grades during high school, by the year 2009-2010. Funding would be provided in formula grants to states. [This funding is in addition to the \$411.7 million requested for states to meet current assessment requirement in grades 3-8 as currently required by NCLB.]
- **Striving Readers - \$200 million:** This would increase funding for the new program by \$175.2 million to test a variety of adolescent literacy interventions through experimental studies to assess their effectiveness, and disseminate the results widely to school districts and schools.
- **State Scholars: Capacity Building - \$12 million/Enhanced Pell Grants - \$33 million:** Through the State Scholars Program, state-level business and education partnerships encourage high school students to complete a rigorous curriculum in the core academic subjects, including four years of English, three years each of mathematics and science, three and a half years of social studies, and two years of a foreign language. Under this request, the Center for State Scholars could expand from supporting 12 states to approximately 26 states. This program would provide up to an additional \$1,000 to Pell Grant-eligible students completing the rigorous State Scholar curriculum in high school. Funding would be capped at \$33 million for Fiscal Year 2006.

5. Congressional Interest – Appropriations, Hearings, and Legislation

Appropriations

While the education community and Members of Congress agree that high school reform is needed, support for the President's proposed solution, in the form of his High School Initiative was tepid at best, as it would have come at the cost of eliminating many other widely supported

programs. As was stated by one education advocate at the Department of Education’s budget briefing in February, the Administration chose to “rob Peter to pay Paul” by eliminating a total of 48 programs from the Department of Education, particularly noting vocational education and teacher quality enhancement grants.

Members of Congress made it clear that they were not going to merely follow the President’s plan. The House and Senate have passed their own bills reauthorizing the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act; and both the House passed bill and Senate proposals to reauthorize the Higher Education Act include teacher quality enhancement grants. Despite working in a tight budget situation, appropriators have demonstrated a commitment to several programs for high schools – some the President eliminated, and some he funded, but not the new High School Initiative.

Report language accompanying the Fiscal Year 2006 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriation Act which the House of Representatives passed in June, reads: *“The Committee supports the Administration’s goals in this program which are to increase the achievement of high school students, particularly students at risk of failing to meet challenging State academic content standards; eliminate gaps in achievement between students from different ethnic and racial groups and between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers; and enable all high school students to graduate with education, skills, and knowledge necessary to succeed in postsecondary education and in a demanding, high-technology, economy. However, the Committee notes that this program has not been authorized.”*

Program	FY 2005 (in millions)	FY 2006 Request (in millions)	House (in millions)	Senate Approps Committee (in millions)
21 st century	\$991.10	\$991.10	\$991.10	\$991.10
Advanced Placement	\$29.80	\$51.50	\$30.00	\$33.00
Comprehensive School Reform	\$205.30	\$0.00	\$10.00	\$0.00
Dropout Prevention	\$5.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
GEAR UP	\$306.50	\$0.00	\$306.50	\$306.50
High School Assessments	N/A	\$250.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
High School Initiative	N/A	\$1,240.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Mathematics and Science Partnerships (ED)	\$178.60	\$269.00	\$190.00	\$178.60
Mathematics and Science Partnerships (NSF)	\$79.40	\$60.00	\$60.00	\$64.00
Smaller Learning Communities	\$94.50	\$0.00	\$94.50	\$0.00
State Scholars	\$2.50	\$45.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Striving Readers:	\$24.8	\$200	\$30	\$35
TRIO (Total)	\$836.50	\$369.40	\$836.50	\$836.50
Vocational Education (Total)	\$1,326.10	\$0.00	\$1,312.00	\$1,309.50

Hearings

In recognition of Congressional interest in high school reform, the House Education and the Workforce Committee held a series of hearings to explore current efforts underway “outside the beltway” to improve high schools. Education Reform Subcommittee Chairman Mike Castle (R-DE) reflected the sentiments made by full Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-OH) and other Members of both sides of aisle when he said; “I commend the President, the National Governors

Association, local school districts, and non-profit organizations for recognizing we now need to address our nation's high schools. I am not yet sure if there is a federal role, or what that role would be, but I continue to be committed to learning more and doing whatever I can to make this part of the education reform dialogue.” The hearings were well-attended by Members, staff and observers. In addition, Members exhibited interest in a variety of subtopics within high school reform.

On May 17, the Committee held a hearing, “High School Reform: Examining State and Local Efforts,” to hear testimony from W. Mitt Romney, Governor of Massachusetts, and Thomas Vilsack, Governor of Iowa. Committee members and the witnesses agreed that high school reform is necessary and has implications for the economy and national security and President Bush was appropriate in calling national attention to the issue. There was also agreement that states and districts, not the federal government, should take the lead on high school reform and that expanding testing under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as the President proposed, is neither appropriate nor practical at this point in time.

On June 9, House Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Education Reform held a hearing, “The Role of Non-Profit Organizations in State and Local High School Reform Efforts,” to hear testimony from prominent foundations currently active in high school reform efforts at the state and local level. The witnesses were Tom Vander Ark, Executive Director, Education, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; Deborah Howard, Program Director, School Improvement, KnowledgeWorks Foundation; and Andres Henriquez, Program Officer, Education Division, Carnegie Corporation of New York. Rep. George Miller (D-CA) said he was excited about the partnership between governors and foundations in supporting “laboratories for experiment” in efforts to reform high schools around the country. He said he hoped to encourage Congress, sometime in the future, to contribute matching funds to these efforts and that the future federal role in high school reform would be based on the best evidence available for what works. Panelists and Members seemed to agree that while the support of foundations is beneficial, the long-term stability of high school reform will depend on public will and a “tipping point” of high quality schools that will drive change to all schools.

On June 28, the House Education and the Workforce Subcommittee on Education Reform heard testimony from business representatives on private sector efforts to help states and local communities improve high schools. The witnesses were Sarah Revi Sterling, Program Manager, University Relations, Microsoft Corporation; Mike Watson, Vice Chairman, BellSouth Foundation; Dr. Phyllis Hudecki, Executive Director, Oklahoma Business and Education Coalition; and Bill A. Shore, Director of U.S. Community Partnerships, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK). Members of Congress and witnesses acknowledged that the workforce is changing, and that students graduating from high school today are expected to be much more competent in a wide range of skills, including technology, literacy, communication and analytical thinking. Currently, many companies and colleges across the nation need to provide remedial training to high school graduates because they are not sufficiently prepared for postsecondary education or a job. There was also agreement that, in order to remain globally competitive, it is imperative to reverse the troubling trend of sub par education statistics and provide a good education for all students.

Legislation

The two pieces of comprehensive high school legislation introduced last session were reintroduced in the 109th Congress. The Pathways for All Students to Succeed (PASS) Act was expanded and reintroduced as S. 921 on April 27. The PASS Act includes \$1 billion for the establishment of effective, research-based reading and writing programs; \$1 billion for the establishment of mathematics programs to improve the overall mathematics performance of

students in middle school and secondary school; \$500 million for districts to identify, develop, and implement, reforms that turn around low-performing schools and improve student achievement; and \$50 million in competitive grants to states to develop or increase the capacity of data systems for assessment and accountability purposes, including the collection of graduation rates. Currently three Senators have joined on as co-sponsors – Senators Ted Kennedy (D-MA), Hillary Clinton (D-NY) and Richard Durbin (D-IL).

The Graduation for All Act was reintroduced as H.R. 547 by Reps. Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX) and Susan Davis (D-CA) on February 2. The bill enjoys bipartisan support from 83 cosponsors. It would provide \$1 billion in federal funding for schools to place literacy coaches in high schools and implement individualized graduation plans for students most at-risk of dropping out of high school. The bill also requires that graduation rates be reported disaggregated by race, ethnicity, income, disability status, and limited English proficiency status as found under the No Child Left Behind Act; states and school districts would also set annual measurable objectives for improving graduation rates. The bill also requires school districts to report the number of high school-age youth who have left school, but are enrolled in adult education or other GED programs.

6. Looking Forward

Interestingly, the national discussion about high schools has taken center stage as Congress wades through the reauthorization of several significant pieces of legislation that impact high schools – the Higher Education Act, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act (Perkins), and the Workforce Investment Act. The debates that have taken place and will continue to take place during the reauthorization of each of these laws will have consequences for the future of the high school reform movement. In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) remains an ongoing issue of discussion, as the arduous and contentious process of reauthorization is just around the corner as the law expires in 2007. Issues such as expanding application of accountability provisions to high schools and funding programs for high school reform are sure to be debated.

The pressure of the business community and the recent publication of Thomas Friedman’s new book, *The World is Flat*, have instigated a widespread Congressional interest in the economic imperative of education reform. This “competitiveness fever” has led to several legislative proposals and initiatives not discussed here. Washington Partners, LLC will dedicate its next issue brief more specifically to the attention paid to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and the economic imperative of school reform.