



# Straight A's:

## A Citizen's Update on Education

**ALLIANCE FOR  
EXCELLENT EDUCATION**

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### **NEW POLL FINDS EDUCATION IS A CRUCIAL ELEMENT OF NATIONAL SECURITY**

According to a national poll released last month, an overwhelming majority of Americans see education as an essential component in our efforts to strengthen our nation's security. Among respondents, 85 percent indicated our country's need for stronger national security as a "good reason" to increase federal education spending. The poll, conducted by Ipsos-Reid U.S. Public Affairs on behalf of the Committee for Education Funding (CEF), surveyed a representative sample of 1,000 adults in early March.

Pollsters are finding similar results across the country. A poll conducted in Florida for the Miami Herald and St. Petersburg Times in late March, indicated that 58 percent of voters favor raising taxes to improve public education. Given nine choices, including health care and tax cuts, Florida voters overwhelmingly chose improving public education as the most important issue facing the country today.

#### **More CEF National Poll Results:**

	Total Good Reason	Very Good Reason	Fairly Good Reason	Not a Good Reason	Not Sure
Schools in low-income areas must receive more federal funding to ensure that all students have the same access to the opportunities that education provides as students in well-funded school districts	84%	55%	29%	15%	1%
Federal spending on education must be increased to minimize disparities in the quality of education across the nation	82%	42%	40%	18%	1%
The success or failure of our schools depends in large part on the quality of our teachers. We must increase federal spending on education to improve the recruitment and retention of quality teachers	86%	65%	22%	13%	1%

--More information on the CEF poll:

[http://www.ipsos-reid.com/us/media/content/pre\\_rel.cfm](http://www.ipsos-reid.com/us/media/content/pre_rel.cfm)

--More information on the Florida poll:

<http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/sptimes/main/document.html?QDesc=&FMTS=FT&QVPID=&FrameName=&QCPP=&QIID=000000112531381&FMT=FT>



## EDUCATION POLICY EXPERTS MAKE THE CASE FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: U.S. Department of Education Launches New Initiative

*“High school is the stepping-stone to the future for most young people. Yet many students leave high school unprepared, perhaps even lacking the basic skills needed to get a good job or to continue with their education. It is our challenge as a nation to ensure that every student who completes high school is prepared for a career and/or further education.” --U.S. Department of Education*

Last week the U.S. Department of Education officially launched its initiative to prepare the nation’s high school students for success in postsecondary education and a productive role in society. The new initiative, **Preparing America’s Future**, was unveiled at a high school symposium featuring **Secretary of Education Rod Paige** and leading high school policymakers who prepared papers on key high school issues. The following are excerpts from selected papers presented at the symposium that focused on the challenge of preparing all students for postsecondary education.

One of the best-known models for high school improvement is *High Schools that Work*, headed by **Gene Bottoms** at the Southern Regional Education Board. The model is currently operating in eleven hundred high schools in thirty-six states. In a paper written for the symposium, Bottoms stated:

**“The demands for workers with higher levels of literacy, numeracy, higher-order thinking skills, the ability to use technology and other high-level skills are dramatically affecting all levels of education. Nowhere is this more evident than in American high schools, where policies and imbedded practices have anointed some students for great success and others for smaller roles in our society. In many cases, students have been ‘written off’ and allowed to wander through school with little or no direction, minimal effort and few expectations.”**

Another high school model, *Talent Development*, was initiated in 1994 through a partnership with The Johns Hopkins University Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR). Addressing the need for extra help for high school students in a high standards era, Johns Hopkins University researchers, **Belfanz, McPartland** and **Shaw**, made the following case:

**“Hopefully someday improvements in elementary and middle schooling combined with strong incentives for student learning will obviate the need for much of the extra help high school students currently need in reading and mathematics. In the transition to a high-standards era, however, the level of performance desired for and increasingly required of all students is rising faster than our ability to provide everyone with high quality K-8 schooling. As a result, there is a considerable need to develop effective extra help strategies, approaches, and organizational structures for high school students. Extra help needs in reading and mathematics are greatest in high poverty high schools but, as this paper has shown, if the goal is to have all high school students engage in an intellectually rigorous sequence of high school courses, most high schools in the United States will need to develop extra help programs and supports for significant numbers of their students.”**

As an internationally recognized authority on education, training and employment, **Anthony Carnevale** currently serves as Vice President for Public Leadership at the Education Testing Service. In their paper, *The Missing Middle: Aligning Education and the Knowledge Economy*, Carnevale and Desrochers offer the following argument for taking action:

**“While reforming and aligning education is costly, not implementing these changes is perhaps even more expensive. At stake are our economic competitiveness and our ability to sustain high levels of growth and the productivity gains we have recently recaptured ... Education is the best bet to help us maintain our competitive edge. At the same time, failure to serve the educationally disadvantaged is a lost opportunity in a time when more and more skilled workers are needed. Failure to take advantage of the unmet demand for skilled labor will move us further away from our egalitarian goals as low-skilled workers are blocked off from access to good paying jobs, further increasing earnings inequality between the most and least educated ... The inescapable reality is that ours is a society based on work *and* knowledge. If educators cannot fulfill their *economic* mission to help our youth and adults become successful workers, they also will fail in their *cultural* and *political* missions to create good neighbors and good citizens.”**

While warning that Washington should “tread lightly” in the area of high school reform, **Chester Finn**, who leads the *Fordham Foundation* and is a well respected and widely quoted education policy expert, made the following observation in his paper:

**“Re-engineering the high school needs changed attitudes and expectations at least as much as it calls for new structural arrangements. National leaders can do a great deal here: calling attention to problems, giving air time to ideas, saying things that get journalists to write about them, rewarding innovators, fostering debate about options, creating ‘summits’ to focus the minds of others on these issues. Today, one seldom hears top federal officials – in Congress or the executive branch – addressing high school issues (except for discipline and violence) in sustained and interesting ways. That should change.”**

*More information on Preparing America’s Future, including electronic versions of the papers presented at the symposium can be found on the Department of Education’s Web site at: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/paf.html>*

**Straight A’s: A Citizen’s Update on Education** is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, D.C., and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a non-profit organization working to help make it possible for every child in America to receive an excellent education.