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PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP
Innovative Approaches to Transforming the American High School
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Innovative Approaches to Transforming the American High School

Edited by
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About the Alliance for Excellent Education
The Alliance for Excellent Education is a national policy, research, and advocacy organization that works to help make every child a high school graduate—to prepare them for college, have success in life, and be contributing members of society. It focuses on the needs of the millions of secondary school students (those in the lowest achievement quartile) who are most likely to leave school without a diploma or to graduate unprepared for a productive future.

Based in Washington, D.C., the Alliance’s audience includes parents, teachers and principals, and students, as well as the federal, state, and local policy communities, education organizations, the media, and a concerned public. To inform the national debate about education policies and options, we produce reports and other materials, make presentations at meetings and conferences, brief policymakers and the press, and provide timely information to a wide audience via our biweekly newsletter and regularly updated website, www.all4ed.org.
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CONTENTS

Introduction ................................................................................................................... 8

Caring Enough to Lead: Reforming America’s High Schools 15
The Honorable Richard W. Riley, Former U.S. Secretary of Education;
Richard W. Riley Institute of Government and Politics at Furman University

Every Student Ready for College ................................................................. 22
Melinda French Gates, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Leading by Example......................................................................................... 29
Dr. Vartan Gregorian, Carnegie Corporation of New York

Cultivating High School Leadership: Theory in Action 36
Wendy Kopp and Abigail Smith, Teach For America

Repainting the Canvas: The Changing Artistry of the Principalship 42
Dr. Gerald Tirozzi, National Association of Secondary School Principals

A Recipe for Successful Schools.................................................................. 49
Jonathan Schnur, New Leaders for New Schools

Leadership for Learning ............................................................................. 57
Richard Laine, The Wallace Foundation

Ask the Right Questions: Rethinking High School Reform 65
Dal Lawrence, Toledo Federation of Teachers

What Can You Be When You Are No Longer the “Dynamo of Dixie”? 73
Dr. Dan Challener, Chattanooga Public Education Foundation

Mayors Must Make Better High Schools a Top Priority 81
Mayor Ron Gonzales, City of San José

The San José Unified School District Story: Implementing a College-Ready Curriculum for All 87
Dr. Linda Murray, San José Unified School District

Setting High Expectations for Denver Public Schools 95
Dr. Jerry Wartgow, Denver Public Schools

High School Reform: An Urgent Priority in a Changing Economy 103
Governor Mark Warner, Commonwealth of Virginia

For More Information .................................................................................... 110
Introduction

“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”
—John F. Kennedy

Over the past several years, the nation has begun to recognize the severe problems facing a large percentage of America’s high schools and their students. At the same time the public has learned that more than a third of high school students don’t receive a diploma within five years of entering ninth grade, they have also begun to understand that only a third of the country’s high school students will graduate prepared for college. In an increasingly competitive and global economy, concern about what will happen to these young people as individuals, and to the economic strength of the nation, is growing.

Everyone agrees, it seems, that “something has to be done” to improve our high schools and prepare our students for a better and more productive future. The question that has yet to be resolved is how to achieve those goals in the most effective manner, in the shortest possible time.

To change American high schools, we need a new collective imagination. To turn all of our high schools into places where every student graduates ready for college or a good job in a competitive economy, we must change not only what we do but what we believe.

In an age where the word “teenager” or “adolescent” often inspires fear or frustration, leaders must overhaul the public’s attitude about their high school students. In a time when many teachers believe their efforts cannot overcome poverty and other barriers to learning outside the classroom, leaders must challenge educators’ accepted
wisdom. In a system where some students are labeled “college material” and others “noncollege material,” leaders must make an unshakable commitment to graduate every child ready for life beyond the diploma.

The leaders in this volume prove that we do know how to educate every child to high standards. But their achievements prove that there is no single silver bullet that can be used to change the situation.

Instead, we need a comprehensive approach that takes into consideration the unique needs and assets of the students, teachers, leaders, and communities that the school system serves. Innovative leaders—leaders who are not afraid to defy the status quo—must develop creative approaches to lead high school transformation and must build a critical mass of caring and committed individuals who are willing and able to positively impact student achievement.

- Teacher leaders must demand achievement for every child, and principal leaders must make quality instruction a priority.
- Superintendents must engage parents and school boards, and community leaders must hold high schools accountable.
- Mayors must bring together the resources of the city to identify the needs of employers, and governors must make sure that every high school has both sufficient funding and the physical and human capital needed to succeed.
- And national leaders must set the tone of high expectations for all students, provide additional resources to help achieve results, and maintain an unwavering commitment to educational equity.

No single, simple solution will incite the type of change that is needed. Approaches to reform vary widely depending on the needs of schools, districts, and communities. Nevertheless, the essays contained in this volume demonstrate that there are common themes when it comes to effective high school transformation. Collectively, the authors of these essays convey the messages that leaders need to set clear, high expectations for all students; improve instruction through a targeted focus on literacy and math; select, train, and support quality teachers and school leaders; and build broad-based enthusiasm for change through proactive community engagement.
High Expectations for All Students
How can we, as a nation, achieve the goal of educating all students to high standards if we hold very different levels of expectations for them? The answer is simple: We cannot. Low expectations hold some students back from achieving their full potential and limit access to the type of rigor and support they need to graduate from high school prepared for college and a meaningful career. Setting high expectations is not just raising standards or aligning curriculum. It is fundamentally transforming a system that still, too often, operates as a giant sorting machine in which only one-third of its students graduate on the “college track,” into a system where all students complete a course of study that prepares them for post-secondary education and careers. This elemental change in mindset starts with strong leadership that challenges the status quo and engages the community to support raising standards for all students and providing struggling students with extra supports to achieve the standards.

One school system that is making great strides in this direction is the San José Unified School District. In 1998, after convening city-wide focus groups and town hall meetings, the district decided to make a college preparatory curriculum the “default” curriculum for all students. Today, when students graduate from a public high school in San José Unified, they’ve completed the University of California system’s entrance requirements, and the doors to college are no longer shut.

Ensuring that leaders have the skills, capabilities, and resources to raise student achievement is paramount to transforming high schools.

Focus on Instruction
Reform efforts that focus on teaching and learning yield big results. It should come as no surprise that to effectively raise student achievement, leaders must shine a spotlight on the type of instruction taking place in schools. They must work to develop a culture that focuses on literacy and math, uses assessment to drive teaching, and makes instruction relevant to students’ lives. For example, when Superintendent Jerry Watengow came to the Denver Public Schools, he and Chief Academic Officer Sally Mentor Hay understood the importance of literacy and math at the high school level and implemented a districtwide literacy program. Within two
years, only one of the district’s twenty-one “unsatisfactory” schools still held that ranking.

The trend toward a greater focus on instruction has influenced the way principals are trained in some professional development programs. In addition to day-to-day management, leaders must work relentlessly to give teachers guidance, support, and critical feedback. Effective instructional leaders must also use available data to make curricular decisions, rally teachers, parents, and students around measurable goals, and hold themselves and their staff accountable for achieving these goals. The importance of instructional leadership is echoed by all of the authors in this volume who work with principals.

The Quality of Teachers and School Leaders Matters
Ensuring that leaders have the skills, capabilities, and resources to raise student achievement is paramount to transforming high schools, and the abilities of the teacher and principal have a large and lasting impact on students.

Recruiting and placing high-quality professionals in schools should be a rigorous process that takes into account the needs of the school as well as the skills and qualities of the leader. Teach For America and New Leaders for New Schools have identified characteristics that make teachers and principals effective in under-resourced schools, and their selection criteria reflect these characteristics. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) has an online assessment tool designed to help identify effective leadership practices and measure leadership potential by diagnosing the behavioral strengths and developmental needs of prospective leaders. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley believes that the selection process should be based on choosing caring and smart leaders who are willing to address the problems of the American high school and manage a large and growing enterprise.

Teachers and principals need rigorous training and ongoing support to become highly effective leaders and remain in their schools long enough to make a systemic change. The NASSP and New Leaders for New Schools base much of the work they do with principals on providing professional development that focuses on instructional leadership. The Toledo Plan pairs expert mentor teachers with eight to ten new teachers each year to provide ongoing coaching and induction to help them develop into highly effective professionals.
Broad-Based Community Engagement
The most successful leaders turn their vision for high school reform into the widespread belief and practice of an entire community. They do this because broad-based community engagement is the only way to turn innovative ideas into lasting change.

When the Hamilton County School Board considered making every high school student take a college preparatory curriculum to graduate, some high-performing students protested with placards: college is not for everyone! Clearly, to get their reforms to take root and flourish, leaders in Chattanooga needed to push more than a policy lever. They needed broad-based community support. Once the school board approved the curriculum change, community leaders launched a vigorous campaign to win public support.

Sometimes leaders, like those in Chattanooga, change policy and then help communities own and implement that change. At other times, policy change follows a wave of public demand, as in San José Unified.

Regardless of the method, every effective leader learns to stretch what actually is into what can be. The push and pull between innovation and practicality is exactly what makes community engagement so necessary. Our nation needs leaders at all levels who can work within the tension of present and future possibility, stretching high schools and communities toward reform. This is how successful leaders make high school transformation the demand of many, rather than the wishes of a few.

Every leader featured in this volume reminds us that no successful high school reform effort, whether large or small, happens in a vacuum. While it is not always easy, it is crucial for leaders to understand the needs of their communities, solicit feedback from parents and students, and rally a variety of stakeholders in support of one common mission: improving educational outcomes for every student.

For example, Ron Gonzales, mayor of the city of San José, works with a variety of partners to make education at the high school level a priority for the entire community. These partnerships include city officials, local and regional businesses, superintend-
ents, and national organizations like the National League of Cities. San José’s approach is reflected in the words of Superintendent Linda Murray, who notes that “through a thoughtful engagement process, communities can build consensus, find common ground, and become partners in school reform.”

**Leading for Learning; Leading for Change**

Now more than ever, the education community needs strong, innovative approaches to high school leadership. New standards of accountability for high schools and the greater demands of college and the workplace mean that education leaders must meet increasingly higher expectations. And as these demands increase, school leaders, teachers, and students are rising to the challenge. There are remarkable examples of high schools that have beaten the odds and routinely meet high standards of student achievement. And leaders are learning from these successes. Building on his understanding of the importance of a high school diploma that prepares young people for the rigor of college and a competitive marketplace and makes high school completion a priority, Virginia Governor Mark Warner will make improving high schools the centerpiece of his work in the coming year as chair of the National Governors Association.

Visionary leaders in the philanthropic community, like Melinda French Gates of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Vartan Gregorian of Carnegie Corporation of New York, and Richard Laine of The Wallace Foundation, all of whose thoughts are included here, are setting examples for the public sector through their willingness to take important risks and invest in innovative approaches to high school reform. Such leadership is essential for creating true transformation—transformation that is systemic and replicable.

Nationally, we need to make innovation and entrepreneurship as much a priority in our work to transform high schools as we do in our approaches to the improvement of private-sector businesses. It is intolerable that, despite the successes of various school improvement efforts in some communities, U.S. eleventh graders continue to rank close to the bottom on international comparisons of

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reading and math skills, behind students from developing nations like Indonesia and Brazil.

The authors featured in this volume share their approaches to high school transformation, as well as their successes, challenges, and lessons learned, in the hope that others will be inspired to act now to change the high schools of tomorrow.

In our knowledge-based economy, our leading and most valuable natural resource is our people. Thus, it is imperative that we ensure that every young person has access to a quality education. Their futures, and the future of our nation, depend upon it.
The growing effort to improve our nation’s high schools is, at long last, gaining momentum, and it is not a moment too soon. Two reports by the Urban Institute and the Manhattan Institute have made it quite clear that too many of America’s young people are falling between the cracks and failing to graduate from high school. According to the Urban Institute, “nearly one-third of all public high school students fail to graduate,” and minority students have only a “fifty-fifty chance” of getting to graduation day with a diploma in hand.

This failure rate is staggering when you consider that it condemns so many young people to a life of struggle, poverty, and even imprisonment. All this comes at a time when our nation is coming up short in the global race in developing a workforce with the skill sets necessary to enter what Alan Greenspan has called the new “economy of ideas.”

While thousands of American high schools are successful launching pads for the college bound, there are two thousand high schools that are nationally recognized as “dropout factories,” according to researchers at Johns Hopkins University. These schools are little more than way stations for young people who already know that life is unfair.
What is striking about this very high failure rate is the lack of hue and cry about the problem. Imagine what would happen to a local hospital if one-third of all its patients regularly died on the operating table. Imagine what would happen if FedEx failed to deliver 50 percent of its packages on time on a regular basis.

The truth of the matter is that for the last fifty years, we have used our high schools as sorting machines, and they have done a good job at tagging and labeling young people as either successful, run-of-the-mill, or low-achieving. Unfortunately, a tyranny of low expectations has come to define and haunt young people labeled as low-achieving. We expect these students to fail, and when they do we are vindicated in our assessment.

During my last two years as U.S. secretary of education, we began to address the issue of high school reform with a special emphasis on the senior year of high school. Four years later, a great deal has been done to build a consensus on what we should be doing. But we are still coming up short when it comes to getting on with what needs to be done.

As a result, the promise of leaving no child behind is unfulfilled when we get to the high school years. The lack of full NCLB funding forces school districts to make tough choices about which students can be helped. In almost every case, school districts invest in the early grades, and struggling high school students do not get the extra help they need to graduate. This is a policy that essentially gives up on one generation of children in order to save another. What is most disturbing is the quiet resignation with which we accept a policy that is unfair, unwise, and ultimately more costly to our society in the long run.

If we are going to go in a different direction, we need a new generation of leaders willing to take risks and to challenge, with a sense...
of intensity, the inertia and orthodoxy that has led us to let so many young people down.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to write the foreword for *Care Enough to Lead*, a thoughtful book by my friend Dr. Leonard Pellicer. The title of the book has stayed with me, and it captures the essence of our current challenge to reform America’s high schools: We know what works, and if we care enough to lead, we can get the job done.

So what are we to do about the American high school?

**Making the Transition to High School Easier**
American education is increasingly doing a better job at educating young people in the years between prekindergarten and fourth grade. But much more work needs to be done to reform our middle schools and to recognize that the transition from middle school to high school can be daunting. Leon Botstein, the president of Bard College and the author of *Jefferson’s Children*, makes the salient point that the “weakest part of America’s educational system is located at the juncture of adolescence and schooling.”

Teenagers usually go from small schools to very large and often impersonal schools. As a result, young people at the margin, who are lost in the shuffle or struggling academically, start thinking of dropping out. Schools can create a smoother transition in a number of ways, such as freshmen academies, regular contact with the same group of teachers and advisors, and transition courses that address new challenges from study skills to understanding other cultures.

**The Reading Imperative**
Special attention needs to be paid to the fact that about a quarter of all secondary school students are reading “below basic” on the National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores. To date, little attention has been paid to the problems of adolescent literacy. We need to extend the scope of our current national efforts to improve literacy to include these older students.

To overcome this growing adolescent literacy crisis we need much more than just current remedial reading programs. We need literacy specialists in our middle schools and high schools, greater incentives to get our best teachers working with our poorest students,
and a comprehensive approach to keeping these young people engaged in school.

**A Six-Year Academic Plan**
The freshman year is also a crucial year for getting young people on the right track in terms of taking the right courses and getting them thinking about going on to college. This is why I want to support the good work that Gene Bottoms is doing as part of his High Schools That Work initiative, sponsored by the Southern Regional Education Board. Freshmen who participate in this program sit down with their parents and a high school advisor and sketch out a six-year plan. The young people get the message that they have new and higher horizons, and that going to high school has a larger purpose.

**Create Smaller Learning Environments**
School boards will need to resist the temptation to keep building big and impersonal high schools, as a growing body of research clearly suggests that smaller learning environments make a powerful difference in keeping students connected. This is why I support breaking up big schools into schools-within-schools and why we need to stop building high schools that are the size of shopping malls.

Small, personalized schools make a difference especially for those students on the margin, and they can be built in a cost-effective manner. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the KnowledgeWorks Foundation are driving forces in helping school districts create these new learning environments.

**Accelerate Learning**
High schools justly take great pride when their graduates go on to the best colleges and universities. But we can’t place all of our focus only on the gains at the top. We need to have an unwavering focus on academic achievement, combined with a “no excuses” attitude for those at the bottom. If a student is struggling, the answer has to be an intense intervention effort—some combination of tutoring, afterschool programs, Saturday schooling, and summer school—to help that student become more engaged, meet high standards, and be ready to go on to college with her or his peers.

This leads me, once again, to urge high schools to encourage their students to take the tough core academic courses. Research tells us
that the single most important factor in making sure a student gets admitted to college and completes the college degree is the academic intensity of the student’s high school curriculum. Taking the tough courses counts much more than test scores or class rank. This is especially true for minority students who want to get on track for a college education. We also need to put a new emphasis on global awareness and languages, and I believe it is sheer folly to cut back on music and the arts. The creativity of the arts is often the spark that keeps young people engaged in learning.

Young Men Are in Trouble
Educators who care enough to lead need to put the spotlight on the growing inability of our educational system to prepare young men for educational success. The gender gap between boys and girls is already established by fourth grade when it comes to reading and writing, and many boys never catch up. According to the Urban Institute, only 64 percent of all males finish high school on time. The graduation rate for young men of color is abysmal: 48 percent for Hispanics and just about 43 percent for African Americans. And we wonder why our prisons are full of angry and often illiterate young men who dropped out of school.

The failure to address this new and growing gender gap is a hidden crisis in American education, and it has enormous implications for our society. There seems to be little research on why young men are failing at such an alarming rate and why fully two-thirds of special education students are male. We need to focus on how boys learn and why they are failing. Of course, a new emphasis on helping boys succeed should not diminish our commitment to equity in education for young women.

Fix the Senior Year
Creative leadership is certainly a requirement in overcoming the institutional inertia that allows so many high school students to waste their senior year. Seniors who have completed their mandatory course load or have been accepted to college through early admissions often check out. At the other extreme, many students

Success in these and other initiatives to reform our nation’s high schools will only occur when good people step forward who are willing to take risks and care enough to lead.
who enter college are unprepared for college-level work (25 percent of four-year entering freshmen and 61 percent of two-year entering freshmen have to take at least one remedial class).

Senior year should be a well-thought-out transition into adulthood, with students being given increasing, not decreasing, responsibility. A variety of new learning experiences should be part of the mix: taking college courses while still in high school, accessing creative service learning options, and having more gap-year opportunities, senior-year projects, and internships that allow students to leave the isolated high school environment and engage the community.

**Higher Education Must Engage in High School Reform**

Leaders in America’s higher education community can no longer remain on the sidelines when it comes to high school reform, content to cherry-pick the very best high school graduates for their institutions. The six-year Bridge Project, led by Mike Kirst at Stanford University, is a rather devastating critique of the disconnect between our K–12 and higher education communities. Kirst has put forward a series of policy recommendations that merit serious study and should be acted on with a sense of urgency.

**Choose Caring and Smart Leaders**

Success in these and other initiatives to reform our nation’s high schools will only occur when good people step forward who are willing to take risks and care enough to lead. The ideal teacher loves teaching and conveys to his or her students a real love of learning.

It goes without saying that educators willing to take a leadership role in reforming our high schools must have integrity, good people skills, and all the organizational skills needed to manage a large and growing enterprise. All these attributes are necessary, but they pale in comparison to the most important attribute—an ability to convey to young people a real message of hope, promise, and possibilities combined with a rigorous “no excuses” attitude when it comes to academics.

John Stanford, the late superintendent of schools in Seattle, Washington, embodied this type of leadership. Despite the fact that General Stanford came to the Seattle system without years of experience in education, he was quickly able to gain the support of teachers, parents, and the broader community in his effort to
reform and retool the Seattle school system. Why was he able to succeed? I believe John Stanford succeeded because people bought into his belief that “victory is in the classroom” and recognized that Stanford deeply cared for his students and was willing to lead. We will need many more John Stanfords in the years ahead—caring leaders who will, with passion and purpose, guide young people through their high school years.

Richard W. Riley was chosen by President Clinton to be secretary of education in December 1992, after he won national recognition for his highly successful effort to improve education in South Carolina. During his first term, Secretary Riley helped launch historic initiatives to raise academic standards, improve instruction for the poor and disadvantaged, expand grant and loan programs to help more Americans go to college, prepare young people for the world of work, and improve teaching.

During the second term, Secretary Riley gained increased federal support to help all children master the basics of reading and math, make schools safer, reduce class size in grades 1–3, modernize and build new schools, help students learn to use computers, expand after-school programs, foster college preparation and access for underprivileged students, make postsecondary education more affordable, and promote lifelong learning.

Since leaving his national post in 2001, Riley has become distinguished chair at the Richard W. Riley Institute of Government and Politics at Furman University and rejoined the law firm of Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough. He served as a South Carolina state representative and state senator in 1963–77, was elected governor in 1978, and was reelected in 1981. Riley graduated from Furman University, served as an officer aboard a navy minesweeper, and received a law degree from the University of South Carolina.
Many readers of this collection will be familiar with the old story that’s often told about the first day of law school. A professor (who inevitably talks like John Houseman from *The Paper Chase*) surveys a room full of first-year students and says: “Look at the person on your left. Now look at the person on your right. Only one of you will graduate from law school.”

It’s a lively story that makes for good drama. But what if the scene shifts, and now the setting isn’t law school—it’s middle school. A teacher greets a class of new eighth graders and says: *Look at the person on your left. Now look at the person on your right. Only one of you will graduate from high school ready for college or a good job.*

Now the story isn’t just dramatic; it’s heartbreaking. Yet it’s true: only one-third of
today’s eighth graders will graduate from high school with the skills they need to succeed in college or to hold down a family-wage job. Another third will graduate, but will be totally unprepared to join the workforce or continue their education. And fully one-third of students will simply drop out.

These statistics represent a social, economic, and civic disaster. They are the reason that Bill and I have focused our foundation’s education program on a single goal: All students should graduate from high school ready for college, work, and citizenship.

I recognize that this is an extremely ambitious vision, given the many challenges our students and educators face. But what great changes have not been ambitious? In the time it will take to read this article, two dozen students will drop out. Tomorrow, three thousand will do the same. This year, it'll be a million. How could we possibly have a greater impact on the future of our country?

All Students College-Ready
Let me start by explaining what I mean by “all students college-ready.” First, we must do more for every high school student, including minorities. Almost half of African-American and Hispanic students will not graduate at all.

It’s also crucial that students graduate ready to take on advanced coursework. According to a report by the American Diploma Project, more than half of all college students take at least one remedial English or math class. Our high school graduates should not be forced to catch up with their fellow freshmen.

Finally, a word about what I mean by “college.” Most people think of a college as a four-year institution that offers a bachelor’s degree. But that’s only one of the many and varied educational possibilities that can follow high school. They can take a lot of different forms: community college, technical school, and apprenticeships, to name a few.

What’s At Stake
Whatever form it takes, post–high school education is vitally important. For one thing, our students’ economic well-being
depends on it. Our economy is changing fast, from a manufacturing base to one that values knowledge, adaptability, and higher-level skills. In fact, 80 percent of the fastest-growing occupations today will require some education after high school. Many graduates are finding that family-wage jobs require the same skills that they would’ve needed to get into college.

We also need to reemphasize a bedrock principle: that the United States is committed to equal opportunity. Bill and I created our foundation to increase equity, whether in health, education, access to digital information, or—in the Pacific Northwest—support for vulnerable children and families. In education, the greatest inequity stems from the fact that so few students graduate truly prepared to succeed after high school.

Obviously, no one can wave a magic wand and fix this problem overnight. Getting a student ready for college takes work at every level of the school system. But our foundation has targeted high schools as the area where we can make the most difference. They are certainly not the only area deserving of support, but they are where we feel we can make the biggest impact. Too many of them are big, impersonal schools where students are bored and teachers feel disconnected.

All excellent schools also incorporate a different trio: rigor, relevance, and relationships.

The New Three R’s
Fortunately, it doesn’t have to be that way. Bill and I are optimists; we believe that even our most difficult problems can be solved. In education, we know it’s true because we’ve seen successful schools all over the country, in urban and rural areas, facing every sort of challenge. We’ve found that they have three things in common; our foundation calls them the New Three R’s.

While the traditional Three R’s that we all grew up with will always be the core of a great education, we think that all excellent schools also incorporate a different trio: rigor, relevance, and relationships. That is, classes should challenge children rather than bore them. Students should have one-on-one relationships with caring adults who have a stake in their success. And curricula should be connected to students’ lives and aspirations.
The Gates Commitment: Transforming High Schools
The Foundation is partnering with school districts around the country to help the New Three R’s take root in as many schools as possible. Sometimes that means creating new schools; other times it means transforming large, impersonal high schools into small schools where students get personal attention and a rigorous curriculum that is relevant to their lives. A decade of research has shown that students in small schools have better attendance records, fewer behavior problems, and higher graduation rates than their counterparts in large schools.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation currently supports fourteen hundred innovative high schools across the nation. But that’s only 8 percent of public high schools in the United States. We hope to see an infusion of rigor, relationships, and relevance in every American high school.

I am not for a second under the illusion that we at the Foundation can do this alone. Nothing we do will ever compare to the work that students, parents, teachers, administrators, and school board members do every day. And they face some tough pressures, from legislative constraints and tight budgets to federal mandates.

Setting the Vision
These challenges are hard, but you can still take concrete actions to help every student graduate with the skills needed to succeed. To begin, you need to set the vision. If we believe that all students can graduate college-ready, and that our democracy demands no less, then we need to get that message out. We need to let everyone know, around the country and in every school district, how important this goal is. And we need to make sure that students know what’s expected of them. Young people want to be challenged—and they excel when they are.

For example, in the San José Unified School District, all students now take college-prep courses. The result? Reading and math scores are up, with the largest gains among African-American and Hispanic students. Test scores for African-Americans rose seven times higher than their peers statewide. How do they do it? The district sets high expectations but provides support and safety nets as needed so students are not overwhelmed. It is better for a student to learn algebra in three semesters than to waste two taking low-level math.
Learning from Success

But setting a vision is not enough. We need to learn from the success of other schools. Schools all around the country are doing this well. I can’t overstate how much I’ve learned from the simple act of going around and meeting dynamic school administrators. There is simply nothing like going outside one’s own district. You can benefit from seeing creative solutions firsthand, brainstorming, and sharing resources with others who are achieving results.

Just outside of Seattle, where I live, the Truman Center used to be a place for the district’s unwanted teachers and students. Now it’s exactly the opposite—two smaller schools of real learning and hope. There are no bells. No lockers. The students work all year in big open spaces they designed themselves. Everyone knows their names. Teachers give their students their attention, their confidence—and their home phone numbers. At the Truman Center I saw young people totally engaged in school, often for the first time, because teachers tapped into their skills and interests.

The students can now imagine themselves as professionals: doctors, legislators, and, yes, teachers. They understand why it’s important to take hard classes and go on to college. In just one year, dropout rates are considerably down, while the percentage of students going on to college and technical school has more than doubled. For the first time in Truman’s history, 75 percent of the 2003 graduates are pursuing further education.

Another model school is Boston Arts Academy. Highlighted as a “breakthrough” high school by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, it is the first high school in Boston that focuses on the arts, and does it in an innovative way that brings in science, math, technology, and world cultures. Students may take courses for college credit at one of five area colleges. And the local arts community contributes by offering classes and internships at local museums and theaters. Boston Arts Academy faces all of the challenges of a school in an urban setting. Yet it is seeing higher passing rates on exit exams than the rest of the district. Ninety percent of Academy students are graduating and continuing on to college.

Drawing from these trailblazers, you can create a responsive school within your own school system. What does being a “responsive
“School” mean, exactly? It means being aware of the needs of students, teachers, and parents. It means being accountable at every level. It means, especially, knowing when a school or a principal or a teacher needs a little extra help.

A final example I’d like to talk about is Withrow University High School in Cincinnati. Eighty-two percent of the school population is African American—50 percent qualify for free and reduced lunch. Withrow is a small redesigned high school, housed with two others in a large traditional building built in the 1920s. Yet Withrow is anything but traditional. Its motto and operating assumption are that “every student is college bound.” And they are. Since the school opened in 2002, attendance rates are over 95 percent and test scores have dramatically improved. Students have posted 40- to 55-point gains in state proficiency scores.

How has this happened? For starters, all ninth graders attend a five-week program called “Summer Bridge” at a local university. This improves their skills, gets them thinking about college, and explains the steps to get there. In school, students receive personal attention, an individually designed academic plan, mandatory afterschool tutoring if they fall behind, and college-level classes. Above all, they gain confidence that they can succeed in college, and they’re motivated to get there.

**Believing Is Seeing**
These schools, and others like them, are making a tangible difference. But a few good schools here and there are not enough. We need to provide ten thousand great high schools in the next ten years to meet the needs of this country’s children. It will require political will, money, and a great deal of hard work. But there is no valid reason that it cannot be done.

**We need to provide ten thousand great high schools in the next ten years. It will require political will, money, and a great deal of hard work. But there is no valid reason that it cannot be done.**
I know how daunting these challenges are. I also know that they are not insurmountable. If you finish reading this book of essays thinking only one thing, I hope it is this: “Every student can graduate ready for college, and I can go do something about it.” I hope you believe that. I know I do.

Melinda French Gates is cofounder of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Along with her husband and cofounder, Bill, Gates provides strategic direction for the Foundation, advocates for its core issues, and reviews its major grants.

Melinda Gates has met with children and women in Africa, India, and Thailand to gain firsthand knowledge of the global health work the Foundation supports. She has visited high schools in New York and California to promote smaller, more personalized learning environments where all students can achieve. And she is involved in a variety of philanthropic endeavors that support the arts, social services, and education in the Pacific Northwest.

Gates earned a bachelor’s degree in computer science and economics from Duke in 1986 and a master’s degree from Duke’s Fuqua School of Business in 1987. Upon graduation, she joined Microsoft, where she played a leadership role in the development of many of the company’s multimedia and web-based products until 1996.
Throughout most of the twentieth century, about half of our high school students dropped out without earning a diploma. Until a few decades ago, this wasn’t really a problem—either for the dropout or for society. There were plenty of good jobs available for blue-collar workers, particularly in manufacturing, allowing them to raise families in comfort and relative security. The armed forces offered good training and a stable career option for hundreds of thousands of others.

But these jobs are disappearing. The manufacturing sector in the United States has shrunk dramatically over recent years, and what jobs do still exist require a much higher skill level for entry-level workers than in the past. The military, for years a safety net for dropouts, no longer will take them as recruits. In fact, even individuals who have received a GED are unlikely to be accepted into the armed services—the army accepts only 10 percent of new recruits with a GED instead of a “regular” diploma, and the other branches take even fewer.
In the past, if a student dropped out and did not find a decent job, it might have been hard on the individual and his or her family, but society didn’t suffer very much. Here again, things have changed as the American economy has become more globalized. In order to sustain our nation today, we desperately need to tap all our human resources. We need every one of our citizens to be as well educated as possible, in order to effectively compete in a knowledge-based society.

International competition is now a factor as it never was for the United States before. People in countries all over the world are becoming better educated at an astonishing rate, as knowledge and information become more universal. Japan, Korea, China, countries in Europe, and nations across Africa are all recognizing that an educated and informed citizenry is their key to development and growth.

*We need every one of our citizens to be as well educated as possible, in order to effectively compete in a knowledge-based society.*

In the past, America has dealt with a lack of trained personnel for some industries by “importing” other countries’ intellectual capital—enticing talented scientists, researchers, doctors, computer programmers, and others to come to the United States, thereby compensating for the lack of skilled American workers. But this strategy is not likely to be effective for much longer, as other countries are able to provide these workers with attractive options at home. Instead, we must—*must*—do everything possible to ensure that all Americans have access to better education and achieve higher levels of educational success.

In many ways, the American high school has become a testing ground for the future of our nation. We can no longer afford a national graduation rate of only 70 percent, nor can we continue to lose up to half of our inner-city students before graduation.

American society has in the past been separated by color. We cannot, and must not, allow a new society to be created that is separated by knowledge. As we go forward, we cannot permit America to become a nation divided between those who have acquired knowledge
through education and those who have, for whatever reasons, dropped out of the educational system, been forced out, or lacked the motivation to achieve at high levels.

The high school of the twenty-first century should be the constructive force that leads people into the next phase of their lives. Individuals and society as a whole need an educational system that begins before kindergarten and continues well beyond the high school diploma, and which benefits everyone.

American foundations and nonprofit organizations have an important role to play in leading this effort. In my career, as an educator, president of the New York Public Library, president of Brown University, and in my current role as president of Carnegie Corporation of New York, I have been continuously involved in efforts to reform and redesign the public education system in this country. Over the years, we have tried many recipes for change, and have learned something from even the least successful of our attempts. A large body of information on effective reforms has been developed, and while we no doubt need to learn more, the reason we haven't achieved more in terms of educational improvement is not because of a lack of know-how. Rather, what we are missing, as a society, is the will and the resources to make schools effective, and also the sense of responsibility.

Only governments have the resources necessary to make large-scale changes in the way that our schools operate across the nation. But philanthropic foundations can be among the best incubators of ideas, and they can work with the nonprofit organizations they support to put effective educational models in place that can not only demonstrate success but also provide a road map for how it can be replicated.

Foundations should be leaders, too, in demonstrating that there is not necessarily any one-size-fits-all solution to the problems facing our high schools and their students. We must look for several options to deal with the same problem, so that local school districts can choose the remedies that best meet their needs and
circumstances. What works in some communities will not work in others with differing demographics and socioeconomic conditions.

Educators note that the nation’s comprehensive high schools in urban areas—which were designed for a different era, and to serve an industrial economy—represent the Mount Everest of school reform challenges. Since all the evidence we have shows that years of trying to improve high schools on a school-by-school basis have produced poor results, Schools for a New Society focuses on redesigning whole school districts so that every school within the district can achieve excellence.

This is a critical concept for a number of reasons, including the fact that excellent education must be available to all students—not just those who can get into the handful of “good schools” in their area, while other students must make do with the lower-quality learning and instruction available at schools that are failing or only doing moderately well. There are also many problems to be addressed that are common districtwide, such as the fact that nearly half of incoming high school students can’t read their textbooks fluently and teachers are not given the time or training to teach literacy skills during all academic classes. Typically, one-third of ninth graders fail several academic courses and only two-thirds of entering freshmen graduate within four years. The timing is especially right for redesigning general high schools, because communities have had a lot of experience and success in improving elementary and middle schools, some with the help of Carnegie Corporation’s early childhood education and middle school research and experimentation.

We are joining citizens in the seven Schools for a New Society cities in saying that public high schools, with community support, can become centers of learning and excellence that prepare every
student for success in our knowledge-based economy and equip them to participate in our knowledge-based democracy. We hope and believe that the Schools for a New Society model for systemic change will give a real boost to the high school reform movement.

We are aware, however, that other challenges face us as we move forward. One of the most pervasive is a destructive myth that has been promulgated by a variety of sources over the past twenty-five years: that the public sector is a mediocrity, peopled by relatively incompetent time-servers who are unable, through lack of ambition or intelligence, to “make it” in the private sector. Therefore, the storyline goes, the public sector cannot be expected to provide real value in anything for which it is responsible, including transportation, amenities, schools, or libraries. The conclusion is that democracy and excellence are not mutually inclusive.

I totally disagree. Democracy and excellence are not only compatible, they reinforce each other. In all our lives, almost every day, we interact in one way or another with the public sector and can see for ourselves that, in most cases, it carries out its numerous missions to the fullest extent possible. Where it does not, society must judge whether the function should be transferred to private control or whether the public sector should be strengthened to better perform its duty.

Over the years, two public institutions have been among the most effective equalizers of American society, creating opportunities, helping immigrants in the acculturation process, and strengthening democracy. The first is our public libraries, which, while too often underfunded, are at least generally acknowledged to be a public responsibility. The second is our public schools. Few would argue that the American public education system should—or could—be completely privatized, but too many critics question whether it can become more than mediocre.

Through efforts like Schools for a New Society and other promising educational initiatives that have been instituted across the nation, we can prove that public schools can indeed become excellent vehicles for the development of all students. In order to do that, we must first model effective interventions. Then we must extend accountability in education beyond teachers and principals to include government officials at the federal, state, and local levels,
and to unions, local school boards, and others who make the critical decisions that impact student achievement. All of these individuals and organizations have a vital role to play in the success of our students and our schools, and society must become vigilant in demanding that they take responsibility for ensuring that the resources needed for positive change are available. It is not enough to demonstrate solutions; we must implement them in all of the schools across America that are in need of help.

I believe that the kind of reform efforts being supported by Carnegie Corporation can make a real impact. For example, we hope that Schools for a New Society can help provide a greater measure of autonomy to schools, principals, superintendents, teachers, and students, but this must be balanced with responsibility and an expectation of success. A real turnaround in the quality of our high schools must also inculcate a sense of historical mission—and the understanding that these schools, teachers, and educational administrators, along with the combined efforts of the community, have the ability to rescue a whole generation and strengthen the entire nation. What we, as a society, are asking educators to do is not to take on just a normal, routine task. Instead, we are giving them the challenge of reinvigorating a culture that expects students to fail, and providing those students with the confidence and support that is necessary to their success.

In the midst of the Civil War, Congress passed legislation that created the first of America’s land grant colleges, a movement that went on to be arguably the greatest boon to higher education this nation has ever seen, providing educational opportunities for an untold number of Americans. This, in turn, spurred the nation’s economic, scientific, and social development. President Abraham Lincoln signed the bill—the Morrill Act—though one might expect that all his concern, and the nation’s resources, would have been devoted...
to trying to end the tragic conflict between the northern and southern states. It’s an extraordinary demonstration of the fact that Lincoln recognized the importance of building the nation’s educational infrastructure—of looking to the future—even during a time of war. Clearly, he saw education as an investment rather than a cost.

Today, we need to recommit ourselves to that vision of education as being of unparalleled importance. We must ensure that every American student is given the means and the opportunity to rise to a level of excellence. Our goal must be that all young people, no matter where they are born or what language they speak, have the right to learn, to be able to earn a living, to be independent, and to sustain their dignity and freedom in a society in which everyone is not only created equal, but treated as equal partners, with equal educational opportunities available to all.

Dr. Vartan Gregorian is president of Carnegie Corporation of New York. Born in Tabriz, Iran, of Armenian parents, he received his elementary education in Iran, secondary education in Lebanon, and higher education in the United States. He has served as president of Brown University, president of the New York Public Library, and founding dean and provost of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pennsylvania. In 1998, President Bill Clinton awarded him the National Humanities Medal.

Very successful high schools—that is, schools where all students achieve academically at high levels—share certain characteristics: clear and ambitious goals focused on student outcomes; strong cultures that promote high achievement; a sense of accountability on the part of every staff member; and effective systems that allow the work of the school to happen efficiently. Whether it’s a school focused on smaller learning communities or one that has adopted an established whole school reform model, there’s no way around the hard work of creating and maintaining an effective school, and the differentiating ingredient in this success is leadership. Ultimately, schools will be only as good as the people who lead them.

So the question is, how do we build a bigger and faster pipeline for talented people to become leaders in public school systems? While private-sector companies draw from many established leadership sources, public school systems have only started to view school and district leadership as a pipeline process. If our high schools—and indeed our school systems at large—are to be successful, we must be thinking about who school leaders are and where they are going to come from.
When Teach For America first set out, we theorized that the experience of teaching for two years in our country’s most challenged schools would lead people to become lifelong leaders in the fight for educational equity. We felt that if we as a nation were to eliminate the unconscionable gap in educational outcomes between children in low-income areas and their wealthier peers, we would need leaders in every sector with the insight, credibility, outrage, and sense of possibility that comes with having taught successfully in a low-income community. Fourteen years later, we have seen this theory play out, as alumni have taken on significant leadership roles in schools, districts, nonprofits, and all levels of government, as well as in journalism, law, and medicine.

Two of our alumni have been elected to local school boards; three currently serve as policy advisors to governors; and several dozen play key policy roles in major school districts. In Chicago, one of our alumni directs the dropout-prevention program for that city’s public schools, while another leads the charge at the district level to establish clear, high-level science standards supported by effective curriculum. Several alumni have started school-based health clinics across the country, while another coordinates school health programs in the San Francisco Unified School District.

While our alumni have had a significant impact in a variety of sectors, it is particularly instructive to look at their effect on school leadership. Fourteen years after our first corps members began teaching, at least two hundred of our alumni are serving as principals and assistant principals. Alumni have founded three dozen charter schools, including some of the most acclaimed schools in the country. More than two-thirds of the thirty KIPP network schools have been founded and/or are run by Teach For America alumni. Among the most recent cohort of New Leaders for New Schools fellows in Washington, D.C., half are Teach For America alumni.
alumni. As high school advocates encourage policymakers to focus their attention on the needs of our secondary schools, we think our experiences at Teach For America can lend a useful context about the need for actively developing a leadership pipeline.

Filling the Vacuum from the Bottom Up

There is broad recognition that the lack of effective leadership at the principal level adversely influences the recruitment and retention of good teachers; effective teachers do not want to work in ineffective environments. Less discussed, but at least as important, is the reverse: the lack of teachers with the skills and tenacity to turn around failing classrooms severely limits the supply of effective principals.

While others may be more qualified to speak to the whole range of characteristics of the most successful school and district leaders, we would argue that these leaders should come in large part from a talent pool of teachers who have been extraordinarily successful as classroom teachers. As we look at people like Chris Barbic (see box), we find that individuals who have gone on to lead entire schools to achieve at high levels are those who, while teaching, have effected dramatic gains in their students’ achievement, despite in some cases having worked in school environments that lacked basic resources or having taught students who faced significant personal challenges. Successful teaching experiences give educators the confidence, ability, knowledge, and credibility to lead others to have the kind of impact on students that they themselves had.

We know there is some question in the policy arena about whether excellent teachers necessarily have the skills that excellent school
leaders need. In our experience in the context of urban and rural schools, we have come to see that highly successful teachers in our nation’s most challenged schools are people who operate within their classrooms the way any effective leader would in any context. These teachers:

- define ambitious and focused goals;
- invest all interested parties in working hard toward those goals;
- work strategically and relentlessly, despite the inevitable obstacles; and
- deliberately improve their performance over time, through a constant process of self-evaluation.

We have seen that individuals who operate this way at the classroom level are likely to have the characteristics to develop into school leaders who will operate this way at the whole school level.

**Finding More Teachers with the Capacity for Leadership**

Through a series of internal studies, we have established that several personal characteristics differentiate our top performers in the classroom. Clearest and most consistent of these is *past demonstrated achievement*. People who succeed at high levels have an established record of success, in whatever arena they have operated. The second characteristic is the predilection, when faced with an obstacle, to strategize around what you can control yourself rather than to focus on assigning blame externally. This *internal locus of control* plays a significant role in our best teachers’ success. The *ability to influence and motivate others* and *organizational ability* have both also emerged as clear differentiators. Finally, our most effective teachers uniformly hold *high expectations for children and families in low-income communities, a commitment to educational equity, and the ability to work with others with respect and humility.*
To realize the potential of field-based education reforms, we must invest in building and nurturing pipelines of individuals who embody these characteristics. This requires aggressively recruiting such candidates into the classroom through defining the opportunities and the challenges in ways that will inspire strong potential leaders. It further requires selecting those who have the leadership characteristics we know are crucial to success and then providing the training and support necessary to accelerate their learning curves and ensure their success.

Teach For America is one such pipeline for talented, dedicated individuals from a diversity of backgrounds. Ultimately, to ensure the success of individual high schools and whole school systems, we must embrace within each of our educational institutions a “talent mindset,” prioritizing attention and resources on the effective recruitment, careful selection, and ongoing development of staff.
Wendy Kopp created and founded Teach For America in 1989. Since then she has served as president for Teach For America, which currently fields three thousand corps members and involves nearly nine thousand alumni who exert continuing leadership in education and social reform.

Kopp is the author of One Day, All Children (Public Affairs, 2001). In 2003, she was appointed to the President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation and to the Advisory Board of the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government. Kopp is the youngest person and the first woman to receive Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson Award (1993), the highest honor the school confers on its undergraduate alumni. In December 1994, Time magazine recognized her as one of the forty most promising leaders under forty.

Kopp holds a bachelor’s degree from Princeton University, where she participated in the undergraduate program of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

Abigail Smith is Teach For America’s vice president of research and public policy. Over the past ten years, she has served in several leadership roles at Teach For America, including as executive director of the Washington, D.C. program and as director of the preservice institute. She holds a master’s degree from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education. Smith first came to Teach For America as a 1992 corps member, teaching first grade in Weldon, North Carolina, where she cofounded an afterschool reading program for primary grade students.
As Michelangelo must have stood at the half-finished point of each of his masterpieces, envisioning the work in its entirety and understanding the magnitude of the task ahead, so too must we look at the profession of education generally and the high school principalship specifically. What areas need to be reworked or totally redone? Are principals and teachers helping students transform themselves into “masterpieces” or merely hoping that another artist will come along to resculpt the work? What are the consequences if we fail in our endeavor? Certainly the results will be more profound than a failure by Michelangelo.

Few Michelangelos are appearing in school leadership positions. And even if a hundred or more existed, such pockets of creative genius in schools here and there would be insufficient. The challenge to our collective genius is to unveil the treasures within all students in every high school. Each principal will have to answer the question, “Did my leadership make a difference in improving the academic achievement and social and emotional well-being of each student?” And if that question is to be answered in the affirmative, secondary school principals will have to acquire new and different skills.
The National Association of Secondary School Principals’ report *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* charts the course principals must take to be successful in tomorrow’s high schools.

**A Profession in Crisis**

The principalship has accumulated increased responsibilities without the incentives needed to attract high-quality candidates. The challenges for secondary schools and principals in the United States include changing demographics; schools and curricula that are inappropriately designed for today’s adolescents; increased expectations for improving student achievement and closing the achievement gap; principals trained to be managers rather than instructional leaders; and a dramatic shortage of qualified candidates willing to become principals.

A 1998 survey completed by the Educational Research Service (ERS) for the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) provides evidence of a shortage of qualified school leaders. According to the study, about half of the surveyed districts reported a shortage of qualified candidates for the principal positions they had attempted to fill. This shortage was present among all types of schools (rural, urban, suburban) and among all levels of vacancies (elementary, junior high/middle, and high school).

Why is there such a shortage of qualified high school leaders? A 1999 report from the National Association of State Boards of Education provides further insights:

- the principal’s job has become more complex and demanding;
- growing student populations, retirements, and decreasing numbers of applicants are creating significant shortages in some districts and regions;
- principal training, support, and professional development are largely inadequate and not up to the task of producing the capable principals we need; and
- states lack a coherent vision and system for developing and retaining high-quality principals.
The bottom line is that not only is it difficult to attract qualified candidates, but the training that candidates receive from administrator preparation programs is often inadequate, and ongoing professional development is episodic at best. Many university preparation programs for school administrators are not closely aligned with the instructional and real-world demands principals face, and the use of postcertification development programs is the exception rather than the rule.

The profession must insist that colleges and universities preparing high school administrators provide more rigorous course work and intensive internships. Only one-fourth of the districts surveyed by ERS reported the existence of a program to recruit and prepare aspiring principals. Furthermore, just under half of the districts have a formal induction or mentoring program for new principals. We must raise the bar of expectations for high school leaders. While significant challenges reside in administrator preparation programs, increasing the qualifications of candidates and of those already working as principals will require work at many levels of the continuum of leadership education.

Unfortunately, it appears that while we are raising the accountability bar with high-stakes testing, we are lowering the standards for entry into teaching and the principalship. If one principal is not properly trained and up to the task of leadership, it will have a damaging effect on hundreds of students—an unacceptable thought. Multiply those hundreds of students by several thousand, and one can readily see the impending problem society faces with a shortage of qualified high school leaders who possess the will and conviction to make a difference.

Building a New Role for School Leadership

The principals of tomorrow’s high schools must be instructional leaders who possess the requisite skills, capacities, and commitment to lead, not follow, the accountability parade. Excellence in school leadership should be recognized as the most important component of school reform. Without leadership, the chances for systemic improvement in teaching and learning are nil.

The principal’s role must shift from a focus on management and administration to a focus on leadership and vision—on facilitating the teaching and learning process. “Successful transformation,” notes John Kotter of the Harvard Business School, “is 70–90 per-
cent leadership and only 10–30 percent management.” Arguably, the management responsibilities of a school principal are important, but these are not the major reasons for which principals were put on this earth. A predilection for management keeps the cafeteria and buses running smoothly, but it accomplishes little, if any, transformation. Conversely, a commitment to leadership helps principals adapt to significantly changing circumstances. It defines what the future should look like, aligns staff members with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen.

Within each school, there must be a continuity of purpose and a commitment to excellence. Establishing this climate and preparing teachers for the “age of accountability” requires enlightened leadership. The principals of tomorrow’s secondary schools will not be recognized and rewarded solely for their managerial skills; they will be recognized as leaders of curricular change, innovative and diversified instructional strategies, data-driven decisionmaking, and the implementation of accountability models for students and staff. In a nutshell, the successful high school principal of the future will be the individual who raises academic standards, improves academic achievement for all students, and provides support and assistance to the faculty.

NASSP’s Efforts to Improve the Principalship
As the concept of school leadership has evolved from a more managerial orientation to one that focuses on instructional leadership, the definition of the qualities that principals should demonstrate has also evolved, with NASSP leading the way.

Professional Development Efforts
NASSP is actively engaged in working with state departments of education, school districts, and educational service centers to provide effective professional development opportunities for principals and prospective principals. NASSP has developed several skills assessment programs and diagnostic tools, including 21st-Century School Administrator Skills. These assessments are closely aligned
with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards and provide specific skill sets that principals must acquire to help them be effective in schools. Recently, NASSP has developed the Individual Professional Skills Assessment (IPSA), a contemporary online assessment tool that can help identify and develop effective leadership practices. It is designed to measure leadership potential by diagnosing behavioral strengths and developmental needs of prospective and practicing school leaders in the following skills: setting instructional direction, teamwork, sensitivity, judgment, results orientation, organizational ability, oral communication, written communication, understanding your own strengths and weaknesses, and the development of others.

**Preparation Programs at Colleges and Universities**

In collaboration with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, NASSP heads a project (the Educational Leadership Constituent Council—ELCC) that aims to restructure principal preparation programs at colleges and universities which are going through the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education accreditation process. The ELCC trains teams of reviewers to examine educational leadership preparation programs for alignment to a modified form of the ISLLC standards, and they grant “national program recognition” to those programs found in compliance with these standards. Preparation programs must show “application of knowledge”–type performance activities and assignments for their students and develop programmatic assessments to measure student achievement on the standards. These preparation programs must also provide field experience opportunities for students to apply their classroom knowledge in a six-month, full-time internship experience within multiple settings.

**Implementation of Breaking Ranks II**

*Breaking Ranks II* specifies that effective principals have to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be successful in three core areas: collaborative leadership, personalization, and curriculum instruction and assessment. The deep changes advocated in *Breaking Ranks II* demand the creation of a collaborative professional learning community led by a committed principal and leadership team.

In an effort to assist principals and high school leaders to begin the necessary conversations with their school communities, and with
support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, NASSP is able to offer competitive grants of up to $25,000 to approximately seventeen state associations to implement *Breaking Ranks II* state conferences. The state conferences, which encourage partnerships between NASSP state affiliates and state departments of education, will provide a forum where principals and their teams can begin to have substantive conversations about the *Breaking Ranks II* changes and what these can mean for their high schools and communities. It is hoped that the state conferences will center on the urgency of comprehensive high school reform, and will have as their centerpiece *Breaking Ranks II*, which embraces the notion of small, personalized schools with curricula that is rigorous and relevant.

In order to implement the *Breaking Ranks II* recommendations, NASSP has received a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to develop, plan, and deliver two seminars to a selected cadre of educators who will then become *Breaking Ranks II* trainers in their respective states. The training will target the seventeen states hosting statewide *Breaking Ranks II* conferences, and maximize the impact of the *Breaking Ranks II* initiative in those states. The trainers, selected by their state associations, may be practicing or retired high school principals, state association staff, and/or university personnel with a commitment to improving high schools. They will learn to assist schools and/or districts in their efforts to initiate *Breaking Ranks II* reform strategies.

**The Finishing Touches**

The vision for the complete “educational masterpiece” is beginning to take shape. We know that a key element is the principal. Without well-qualified, motivated leaders in every school, reform will succeed sporadically and the goal of having all students in every school and district able to meet high standards will be threatened.

Our next step is to ensure that well-qualified candidates assume these leadership roles. The political environment, the shortage of
highly qualified candidates desiring to become principals, and the call for increased accountability have provided a window of opportunity for advocates of high school leadership. The level of effort dedicated to filling these roles with well-qualified principals will determine the status of school leaders in high school reform—either as a cadre of collective leadership genius or as the managers of a process that leads to more of the same.

In *Leadership Is an Art*, Max DePree notes that “the first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.” The time has come for America’s principals to define a new reality for America’s high schools, a reality embedded in a belief that all—and *all* means *all*—children can learn to high levels. Leadership is not a spectator sport. It is reserved for participants. The time has come to put the principal’s leadership brush to the canvas to paint a vision of what tomorrow’s schools can and will be. The beauty of the finished canvas—equity and excellence for all children—will truly be a masterpiece.

Dr. Gerald N. Tirozzi is executive director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. He is a nationally recognized leader in education reform, having spent over forty years working to improve teaching and learning for all students by promoting high academic standards and initiating major teaching reforms. In 1996–99, Tirozzi served as assistant secretary of elementary and secondary education at the U.S. Department of Education.

Tirozzi has served as a tenured professor at the University of Connecticut, as the president of Wheelock College in Boston, Massachusetts, and as the commissioner of education for Connecticut. He earlier served as superintendent in the New Haven Public Schools, where he had also worked as a principal, guidance counselor, and teacher. He began his education career in 1959 as a science teacher at Notre Dame High School in West Haven.

Tirozzi holds a PhD in educational administration and higher education from Michigan State University. He has a sixth-year certificate in education administration from Fairfield University in Connecticut. He received a master’s degree in guidance and counseling and a bachelor of science degree in elementary education from Southern Connecticut State University.
New Leaders for New Schools was founded in 2000 with one clear mission: to foster high levels of academic achievement for every child by recruiting, training, placing, and supporting the next generation of outstanding principals for our nation’s urban public schools. While New Leaders for New Schools does not focus exclusively on high schools, we are committed to improving America’s secondary schools by improving principal leadership.

The evidence is clear that the leadership of effective principals is fundamental to high school improvement and student achievement. Yet, at just the time when school change and effective leadership are urgently needed, urban high schools face shortages of qualified school principals due to rising retirements, record student enrollments, and the growing movement to create new schools.
Nationally, 40 percent of all principals will be eligible to retire within five years, and urban areas report principal turnover rates of 10–20 percent per year. To make matters worse, the achievement gap in major urban areas across the country is profound.

To meet these challenges, particularly for high-need students, we believe that we must expand the pool of highly effective school leaders and create an attractive pathway into successful principalships. To support this effort, New Leaders for New Schools has established long-term partnerships with some of the nation’s largest and most visible urban school systems: Chicago, Washington, D.C., New York City, Memphis, and California’s Bay Area.

In the Beginning …
As a policy advisor on K–12 education in the Clinton administration for seven years, I found a trend in public education: virtually all of the high-performing schools I visited had one thing in common—excellent principals who focused on student achievement. It became clear to me that for years urban school systems have chosen to fight our nation’s historic battle to improve student achievement with one hand tied behind their backs. They have failed to embrace the powerful commonsense strategy that can be gleaned from nearly every effective company and school in America: You can’t change a company without a great CEO, and you can’t change a school without a great principal.

For years urban school systems have chosen to fight our nation’s historic battle to improve student achievement with one hand tied behind their backs.

In thinking about why so many schools, especially in underserved communities, lacked this kind of exceptional leadership, I found two reasons. First, the supply of principals is largely limited to self-selected former teachers and coaches who have made their way through traditional education administration degree programs and not received the preparation needed to successfully transform schools. These programs don’t currently select and train school leaders according to the unique combination of skills required for the job (that is, effective instructional leadership, management, community leadership, and leading for change). Second, the
demand for principals is distorted. The decisionmaking authority and compensation that school systems give principals does not correspond to the exceptional leadership and substantial results that are necessary to do the job.

This has left several problems to solve:

- How can we widen the pool of potential school leaders to go beyond self-selected candidates from within urban school systems to include outstanding candidates from inside and outside school systems?

- How can we train those people in a more hands-on way that prepares them for the complexity of leading high-need urban schools?

- And finally, how can we give leaders of this caliber the decisionmaking authority they need to run their schools well?

I left Washington with the idea of a program to aggressively recruit talented individuals—including high-performing teachers and teacher leaders who left their positions to assume leadership roles in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, aspiring leaders looking for a pathway to a principal position, and social entrepreneurs—and train them to become urban school principals. During course work at the Harvard Business School and Harvard Graduate School of Education, I met Benjamín Fenton, Monique Burns, Allison Gaines, and Mike Johnston, who helped to write the business plan for New Leaders for New Schools and launch the organization in 2000.

**Three Pillars of Developing New Leaders**

To date, New Leaders for New Schools has created a powerful program that has directly impacted the reform and improvement of school leadership nationwide. In pursuit of our mission, we developed “Three Pillars” that drive our overall program.

**Pillar I—Attract and Select New Leaders**

New Leaders for New Schools attracts, recruits, and selects outstanding future principals. We have a comprehensive recruiting and admissions program that aggressively recruits outstanding candidates from all walks of life to become aspiring principals, including leaders in nonprofit organizations and businesses.
But every candidate must have prior teaching experience. During our three-part acceptance process, we screen for qualities we have identified as necessary to be great principals:

- a relentless drive to foster high levels of academic achievement for every child;
- integrity and inner strength;
- self-awareness;
- a demonstrated leadership record with adults and demonstrated success with children; and
- excellent communication and problem-solving skills.

Pillar II—Provide New Training and Support

New Leaders offers intensive, research-based training from educational leaders and on-the-job support from highly qualified mentor principals and New Leaders staff. A hallmark of our program is one of the first and only yearlong, full-time principal residency programs in the United States, enabling residents to become full members of school leadership teams, drive academic achievement for a defined set of students in multiple classrooms, apply skills learned during course work, and reach proficiency on our program’s Principal Leadership Competencies—a set of personal and professional attributes shared by successful school leaders (see box). This is combined with intensive case- and problem-based course work focused on instructional leadership, community leadership, and management of systems, people, and financial resources.

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

For all children to achieve at high levels, principals need to:

1. Build trust to facilitate change
2. Plan strategically
3. Distribute leadership
4. Manage their own time and priorities
5. Focus on student outcomes
6. Learn from data
7. Nurture excellent teaching and learning
8. Develop and empower teams
9. Build a safe and supportive student culture
10. Engage parents
11. Schedule and manage effectively
12. Network outside the school
Pillar III—Place and Support Our New Leaders Principals

New Leaders supports the placement of our leaders after their residencies in urban public schools as principals. For our leaders we seek positions with maximum school-based decisionmaking authority over hiring, curriculum, and budgeting, in schools where there is a high degree of academic need among students. Of the people who have successfully completed our program in the first two years, 100 percent have accepted offers as principals or assistant principals, with more than 60 percent now serving as principals. Once placed, our Leadership Coaches (successful, veteran principals who visit schools regularly) provide feedback and coaching to support them for two years.

With our fifth cohort in place next year, we will have a 260-person national corps of New Leaders residents and principals to impact the achievement of 130,000 students annually.

New Leaders Are Successful Leaders

While we will continue to make improvements to our program, we have begun to see positive student achievement data from our program. Schools with New Leaders principals for the full 2002–03 school year experienced a 4–5 percent average gain in reading and math proficiency rates and a 4–7 percent improvement in the rates of students failing in reading and math—tripling the pace of improvement in New York and Chicago schools overall and representing even greater gains compared to other first-year principals in these cities.

Based on our success to date, there is strong national recognition for New Leaders for New Schools. We were selected by the U.S. Department of Education in June 2004 as one of only six case studies in the entire country to be highlighted in a best practices guide on school leadership. New Leaders for New Schools was recognized by Republican Senator Bill Frist in a Senate Floor Statement in March 2004. Senator Frist’s strong show of support is part of bipartisan backing of New Leaders for New Schools. Democratic Senator Hillary Clinton and Democratic Congressman Harold Ford Jr. have also supported our program. In their January 2004 issue, Fast Company magazine selected us as one of the Top 20 Groups That Are Changing the World. We were one of only six groups to receive the highest mark (A+) in the ranking’s Social Impact category. Additionally, we were selected in December 2003 by the Progressive Policy Institute as Innovators of the Year.
Reaching a Tipping Point: Impacting Urban Public Schools

Building on this foundation of results, we have set ambitious yet achievable goals. By 2014, we will build a corps of two thousand principals, impacting fifty thousand teachers and one million students every year. This rapid growth will have two significant impacts:

- **direct impact**—boost student achievement for every child served in urban public schools led by outstanding New Leaders principals through the Three Pillars; and

- **systemic impact**—boost student achievement systemically in urban public schools by reaching a “tipping point” of New Leaders high-performing principals.

Between 2006 and 2007, approximately 40 percent of the public schools in Washington, D.C., and Memphis will be New Leaders. And 6 percent of New York’s public schools (including 20 percent of New York’s new and charter schools being created under the city’s newly launched initiative) will be led by New Leaders. We believe those numbers create a critical mass of high-performing principals that will “tip” and transform school systems in the following ways:

- As exemplars of success, New Leaders will demonstrate that change can occur at scale (for example, 40 percent of D.C. principals in three years) and place more pressure on the rest of system to improve.

- New Leaders will change system policy and practices. Communities of excellent principals and the New Leaders staff team will advocate for necessary systemic changes.

- New Leaders will make the principalship a more coveted position. When a critical mass of principals perform at high levels, they will attract more great people to the principalship by raising the bar for what it means to be a school leader.

Lessons Learned

Our experience to date offers some very good news and some significant challenges for education in this country.

The Good News

First, there is a large supply of talented individuals who are interested in becoming change-oriented instructional leaders and principals across the country. We have received more than 2,600 applications
for our first 160 fellowships (yielding a 6 percent selectivity rate). A lot of people want to become principals with the right mix of community and support.

Second, urban school system leaders as well as corporate and philanthropic executives have begun to recognize the relationship between school leadership and student achievement and are beginning to champion the creation and support of programs like New Leaders for New Schools. In our case, we have terrific public-private partnerships in New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Memphis, and Oakland.

Third, results do happen. We are beginning to see examples in every city of outstanding school principals who are delivering great results for students by uniting the teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders around achievement, clear mission, and high standards for all students.

**But Challenges Remain**

First, in order to attract and retain the talented individuals who will consider school principalships and leadership roles, we must broaden and deepen efforts to aggressively recruit and select outstanding candidates, offer rigorous training and support programs, and increase the latitude we provide to effective leaders in those schools.

Second, we must find more public and private financial resources nationally, especially for high-need urban and rural communities, to support the highest-quality programs that will ensure outstanding principals for our highest-need students.

Third, we must work together to define rigorous goals, performance measures, and evaluation methods that include and go beyond well-measured gains in academic achievement. This will drive improvements in principal programs and fairly hold them accountable for performance.
Fourth, we must simultaneously invest in methods to ensure there are pools of both effective principals and effective teachers. Talented principals must be able to hire talented teachers, and talented teachers need to enter schools with talented principals. Together they can maximize their collective impact on student achievement. We shouldn’t invest in teacher quality without investing in principal quality; nor should we invest in principal quality without investing in teacher quality.

These opportunities and challenges call high school education leaders to systematically provide our students with the talented principals and teachers they need—to help every student, regardless of background, reach high academic standards and to participate successfully in America’s economy, society, and democracy.

Jonathan Schnur is the founder and chief executive officer of New Leaders for New Schools, a national nonprofit organization devoted to improving education for every child by attracting and preparing the next generation of outstanding principals for our nation’s urban public schools. Schnur was a policy advisor on K–12 education in the Clinton administration for seven years, serving as White House associate director for educational policy, Vice President Gore’s senior policy advisor on education, and special assistant to U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley. Schnur spearheaded the development of many educational policies in such areas as teacher recruitment and training, afterschool programs, school reform, and charter schools. He spent several months at Harvard University designing the business plan for New Leaders for New Schools while taking course work at the Graduate School of Education, the Business School, and the John F. Kennedy School of Government. Schnur graduated cum laude from Princeton University in 1989 and from a public high school near Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1984.
Five years ago, The Wallace Foundation made a major commitment to advancing student achievement by improving school leadership. To accomplish this we support innovative projects at the state and district levels, and we publish what we learn from these initiatives to inform policy and practice across the nation. We firmly believe that to transform all of America’s public schools, including its high schools, we must improve the performance of their leaders and the conditions in which they work.

A Focus on Leadership

The Foundation’s focus on education leadership evolved from more than a decade of support for education programs. In that period the Foundation granted more than $400 million to initiatives to improve school libraries, teacher recruitment and training, and vocational instruction. Through that work we began to realize that to go beyond the creation of pockets of excellence in particular schools—to ensure excellence in every classroom in every school in a district—would require leadership.

The implication was that leaders would have to be trained differently. Instead of being simply administrators, they would need to know how to improve instruction, how to pass this knowledge on to teachers, and how to transform their schools to emphasize student achievement.

As the Foundation was putting this new focus into action, the standards movement that began in the late 1980s was creating new expectations that all children could achieve academically at higher levels. The defining of new standards alone, however, did little to reallocate resources or change the capacities, working conditions, or accountability of public education to meet those heightened expectations. Just because you raise the bar doesn’t mean that everyone knows how to jump over it.
These expectations and the accountability that the No Child Left Behind Act has placed on public education, coupled with the budget shortfalls in virtually all states and districts, put the importance of high-quality school and district leadership into bolder relief than perhaps at any time in our history.

**Conditions as Well as Training**

In turn, the increased expectations of school leaders have called attention to the difficult working conditions with which so many superintendents and principals must contend. To put a well-trained leader into a bad environment is only to invite failure. Put good leaders in bad conditions, and the conditions will win every time.

Creating effective leadership includes not only enhancing the knowledge and skills of leaders, but also improving the working conditions and systems in which they work. At the district level, the conditions that affect leadership include governance structures, resource allocation, job descriptions, terms of employment, authority to make decisions, labor contracts, incentives, and community support. At the state level, conditions include standards, resource allocation, assessments used to measure progress, local leaders’ access to performance data, and the process by which leaders are held accountable.

**A State-District Strategy**

The Wallace Foundation recognized that to improve the quality of leaders and the conditions in which they work would require efforts at both the state and the district level. The context for school leadership is determined most directly by districts, where the conditions of leadership and the actions of the leaders actually play out. District conditions and practices, in turn, are shaped profoundly by state laws, policies, expectations, and resources that govern who can lead. Based on this reality, the Foundation has invested in states and districts that have proposed and begun enacting collective, coordinated changes at both levels.
Both levels are crucial. Changes made in isolation at either level are unlikely to last or have a full impact on improving the ability of leaders to enhance learning.

**Fifteen States, Twelve Districts**

Wallace currently works with fifteen states through its State Action for Education Leadership Project (SAELP). The vision of SAELP is to bring the right people, including governors, together at the state level to influence policy change. States set the policies and create the conditions necessary for successful school leadership, including high schools, and they set standards and provide the resources for preparing future leaders. By engaging a variety of stakeholders, SAELP participants develop aligned, interrelated strategies at all levels of the education system (state, district, local community, school, and classroom).

Through SAELP, state policies affecting leadership are coordinated with, and are supportive of, local district practices. SAELP states work closely with twelve districts chosen by the Foundation to participate in its Leadership for Educational Achievement in Districts (LEAD) initiative.

The long-term goal of this coordinated state-district strategy is to develop and share policies and practices that will be of value to other states and districts beyond those getting direct support from Wallace.
Imagining Reform: Breakthrough Ideas and Strategic Through-Lines

Each SAELP state develops and implements two to three “breakthrough ideas,” which are designed to improve student learning. These ideas, generated by the states, reflect each state’s unique needs. Breakthrough ideas fundamentally challenge the status quo; they propose dramatic, substantive changes in conditions that affect leadership, such as changing university preparation programs, certification requirements, or accountability systems for education administrators. To qualify as a breakthrough idea, each strategy must address potential obstacles, be measurable, and align or fit with other district, municipal, school, and classroom efforts already underway.

We call this alignment and connection across state, district, school, and classroom levels a “strategic through-line,” and states develop a through-line for each of their breakthrough ideas. This means that they identify strategies at each level to support and complement the breakthrough idea, and ultimately connect it to student learning.

Leadership for Learning Strategic Through-Line

One state’s leadership breakthrough idea might be to develop standards for leaders and certification policies that will result in a good education for every student. These efforts would be supported at the school level with practices such as mentoring new principals and giving them more authority to make decisions (a condition).

At the state level, reformers would codify those standards (a condition) and make sure that university preparation programs used them to educate their future principals. Then, at the classroom level, reformers would ensure that principals target instruction to students’ needs and assign the most effective teachers to students with the greatest needs—both practices are required by the new standards and are examples of conditions.

As for training, state strategies would be reinforced at the district level by creating training academies for aspiring principals and linking a principal’s hiring and evaluation (a condition) to the standards. The goal, with all strategies working together, is to significantly improve student achievement.
The through-line includes strategies to address both changes in the development of leaders and improvements in the conditions in which they work.

Growing Knowledge for the Field: Beyond the Pipeline
In addition to working directly with states and districts, the Foundation commissions and publishes research that captures the lessons being learned at these sites and that fills gaps in the field’s knowledge. One example of this research related to leadership is the policy brief titled Beyond the Pipeline: Getting the Principals We Need, Where They Are Needed Most.

Headline after headline and study after study proclaim an acute shortage of quality candidates for vacant principal positions. And the shortage will worsen, the studies argue, unless we troll for more candidates and step up recruitment. In 2003, The Wallace Foundation brought together the findings of three independent studies it had commissioned to provide different insights on the true nature, extent, and underlying causes of problems in the principal labor market. The result was summarized in Beyond the Pipeline. In this policy brief, we said that policies that only put more people into the candidate pool miss the core reasons why the pool is shrinking in the first place—reasons like inadequate incentives to get principals in high-need areas, counterproductive hiring practices, and regulatory hurdles.

We came to one conclusion: It’s time to move beyond the pipeline—away from policies aimed solely at increasing the number of certified candidates—and focus far more attention and resources on reforming policies and practices to:

• adjust incentives and working conditions to enable high-need schools to attract high-quality leaders; and

• bring recruitment and hiring practices in line with the changing skills and abilities good principals must have (such as instructional leadership versus management skills).

The brief says:

_The fact that some districts, and some schools, are experiencing difficulty in attracting adequate pools of certified principal_
candidates is NOT the same as saying “there is a shortage of principal candidates.” There is, nonetheless, a serious, unsolved dilemma in the labor market for the principalship: many credentialed or would-be candidates, both inside and outside the education field, either are not seeking jobs in the districts or schools that most need them—or are shunning leadership positions altogether. The stressful working conditions, inadequate job incentives, ineffective hiring practices, and increasingly formidable expectations for success, are deterring prospective candidates from entering the field.

Policies that only put more people into the candidate pool miss the core reasons why the pool is shrinking in the first place—reasons like inadequate incentives to get principals in high-need areas, counterproductive hiring practices, and regulatory hurdles.

Significant School Improvement: Making It Happen

If we as a nation are to grant every student a high school diploma that prepares him or her for success in college or a career in a competitive economy, we must improve the leadership of our schools.

True to our mission to expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people, The Wallace Foundation will continue to bring together the right people, provide them with the best research, and encourage their innovative ideas so that we can see lasting changes across states, districts, schools, and classrooms. Our country’s public school students deserve nothing less.

This work advances the Foundation’s larger mission. As President Christine DeVita has written,

"Our vision, while ambitious, is based on the belief that foundations play a critical role in generating solutions to national problems. We try out innovative solutions to pressing problems in places that appear to be poised for change and with people who are committed to driving that change. We use what we learn to influence change in other places that may never get our money. And we leave as our legacy a public record upon which others can build."
The Wallace Foundation Reports

Among the most popular of our reports, all of which are available in the Knowledge Center on our website at www.wallacefoundation.org, are:

Beyond the Pipeline:
Getting the Principals We Need, Where They Are Needed Most
(The Wallace Foundation)

Rolling Up Their Sleeves:
Superintendents and Principals Talk About What’s Needed to Fix Public Schools
(Public Agenda)

Making Sense of Leading Schools: A Study of the School Principalship
(Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington)

Who Is Leading Our Schools?
An Overview of School Administrators and Their Careers
(RAND Corporation).

An Impossible Job?
The View from the Urban Superintendent’s Chair
(Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington)

Leading for Learning: Reflective Tools for School and District Leaders
(Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy)

From Bystander to Ally:
Transforming the District Human Resources Department (Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington)

Good Principals Are the Key to Successful Schools: Six Strategies to Prepare More Good Principals
(Southern Regional Education Board)
Richard Laine joined the The Wallace Foundation in December 2002 as deputy director of education, and on April 1, 2003, was named director. Laine directs the Foundation’s national initiative aimed at strengthening the ability of education leadership.

Prior to joining the Foundation, Laine headed the Illinois Business Roundtable’s (IBRT) education efforts. He testified in 2002 before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce on the No Child Left Behind Act. Prior to the IBRT, Laine spent over four years with the Illinois State Board of Education as the associate superintendent for policy, planning, and resource management. He has published several articles and chapters with colleagues at the University of Chicago on the question, “Does Money Matter?” Laine received an MBA from the Graduate School of Business, a master’s of public policy from the Graduate School of Public Policy Studies, and a certificate of advanced studies in education policy, all from the University of Chicago.
American high schools are in trouble because one of their central organizing principles is that instructional leaders—teachers as well as principals—are managers who don’t teach. When one considers ways to make high schools more effective learning communities, immediately the overall competence of the instructors and the support they receive become critical priorities. But that support must accompany new roles and responsibilities for teachers and administrators.

In Toledo, Ohio, the Toledo Federation of Teachers (TFT) union is committed to transforming our high schools by changing the way we approach instructional leadership. During my thirty years with TFT, we have consistently used collective bargaining as a tool to improve teaching and learning and as a way to
professionalize an occupation that traditionally has been regarded as less than esteemed.

In 1981 we established an internship program to identify current teachers who should not teach and to offer practical, expert mentoring to all teachers new to the Toledo Public Schools. Beginning in 1973, we altered our support of graduate education by paying a substantial annual stipend to teachers who earn a graduate degree in a liberal arts discipline outside a school of education. Union leadership prompted the conversion of two of our seven traditional high schools to smaller schools that will be governed differently—with new relationships between teachers and school management. The designs were developed collaboratively between teachers and administrators, but TFT teachers drove the effort. And problem schools are subject to intervention by union and management.

I served as the president of the teachers’ union in Toledo for thirty years. I led two strikes and acquired a reputation as a tough negotiator. I love teaching and teachers, and I am an outspoken champion of public education. But my union leadership has not kept me from thinking differently about old problems that plague our schools.

Rethinking Old Problems
America’s schools operate on the faulty premise that leadership and personal success are exemplified by “promotion” away from the classroom, but the work that defines success is performed by those left behind—in the classroom. Plus, teachers work in an isolated environment overseen by managers who don’t teach but who do make key decisions affecting classrooms. How else can we explain the rapid unionization of our nation’s teachers? It certainly wasn’t because teachers were emotionally attached to the world of blue-collar workers. Teachers unionized because schools were, and largely still are, run exactly like a 1955 American automobile plant. The result is that the potential of teachers has never been tapped. That is why teacher union leaders model private-sector union leaders in what they demand—smaller classes and bigger paychecks. Calling for better working conditions is routine. Unfortunately, rethinking schools is not. In fact, it is an activity seldom engaged in by anyone in the school business.
Early on, I realized that delivering smaller classes and better pay had a shelf life of about three weeks. Teacher unhappiness would soon resurface, and the same union-management problems would occupy the district’s agenda. By 1971, I had come to the conclusion that the frustrations and conflicts produced by school governance would never change unless fundamental assumptions about how schools should operate were challenged: Why were teachers supervised? Teaching could become an occupation that is at least in part self-regulating. Why were there only four years of teacher training? Perhaps a fifth year, or an intern year, would be valuable. Why do so many good teachers leave the classroom to become administrators? Long-term teaching could become prestigious, and administration become a “step down” in status.

The Toledo Plan—
Competence Is Key
In 1972, I was appointed to an Ohio Department of Education committee that was to propose changes in teacher education standards for the state’s colleges of education. I argued for a fifth year of preparation, a year of full-time teaching supported by the college and the intern’s district. That would be a more sensible introduction to teaching, and it would allow more time for liberal arts courses that were often crowded out by questionable education school requirements. At the time, no one thought an intern year was a good idea—including the other teacher on the committee.

An internship for teachers would be a natural first step in building a profession with high standards for an occupation that had virtually no standards, at least not ones taken seriously.

It hit me several weeks after the recommendations were adopted (minus my contribution) that Toledo didn’t need permission from the state to start an intern program. We had great, experienced teachers, and we had new teachers who needed more help than principals could provide. We could match them up.

Teachers want to be part of a real profession that is respected for its excellence. Medicine has a rigorous and respected procedure for
introducing new practitioners to the vocation. An internship for teachers would be a natural first step in building a profession with high standards for an occupation that had virtually no standards, at least not ones taken seriously.

But to get an induction program off the ground, we had to first pose the right question to our members in a referendum: Would you like to be a member of a teaching profession that is respected for its excellence? Then we described the internship model, comparing it to medicine, and asked a second question: Should the union try to achieve this? The answer was a four-to-one yes. It was 1973, and I was heading into uncharted waters.

By 1981, we had our intern program. Unionized principals had fought successfully for nine years to block the Toledo Plan, because they didn’t want to give up their right to review teachers. But after a strike that left the district with a new superintendent and a new negotiator who was an attorney, not a school administrator, we agreed to a framework for the induction program.

The Toledo Plan—A Framework for Good Teaching
Good teaching practice is a fundamental element in high schools that produce successful students. Unfortunately, colleges seldom screen out inept future teachers, and seldom do districts remove bad teachers. Additionally, traditional teacher evaluation usually results in conflict.

Does this sound familiar? Dr. Best, principal of Elm Street High School, recommends nonrenewal of Susan Wright’s contract. Ms. Wright disagrees. Their disagreement soon finds its way to two other desks. Ms. Wright goes to the union. Dr. Best goes to the superintendent. Wright is wrong, according to Dr. Best. “Best is the worst, and he’s had it in for me ever since I started teaching,” according to Ms. Wright. Charges of ineptness and personality conflict are traded.

Union and management are unsuccessful in resolving the dispute. What’s wrong with this picture is not that a teacher is dismissed for poor practices. The problem is that neither the union nor management has reliable information about Ms. Wright’s performance. But that won’t stop either from a confrontation that will have negative ramifications beyond one teacher’s classroom performance. Trust is ruptured. Conflict and collaboration cannot coexist.
Under the Toledo Plan, expert mentor teachers are matched with eight to ten new teachers for two semesters. These veteran teachers evaluate and mentor new teachers. Recommendations for future employment are presented to a joint union-management panel for final consideration.

Inconsistent evaluations are eliminated, coaching is extensive, and teachers and managers share in the process of ensuring competence. And any beginning teachers who show little aptitude for teaching are dismissed—more than four hundred in the twenty-three years of the program.

Interns learning their practice from specially selected teaching experts, who must return to the classroom after three years, was a clear message to all that excellence is expected, and that its attainment is a responsibility shared by every teacher. This community interest in competence is what distinguishes a real profession from an occupation obsessed with “professionalism.”

We have positive results. Teacher retention has improved considerably. The number of teachers who now leave teaching because they are unhappy with the job is nearly half what it used to be. Principals who fought peer mentoring and review asked for their own Toledo Plan after seeing ours in action for two years. Predictably, teachers and administrators look at each other with new perspectives and respect, perhaps the most significant change of all.

**Turning the System Upside Down**

Teachers in Toledo who earn a master’s degree outside a college of education are paid $3,100 annually above their scheduled salary. There is respected research that indicates that better student results are linked to their teachers’ knowledge. Why pay extra for a degree in school management that might not be used or might not be entirely relevant?

What is not so obvious is the related goal of the union to capture as many talented people as possible, encourage them not to become principals, and put them to work replacing traditional supervisors who don’t teach but are licensed to tell others how to teach. In Toledo, there are no administrative supervisors. Teaching problems are addressed solely through the Toledo Plan.
Academic or curricular problems of the district are addressed by task forces of teachers. Our reading academy and science and math teams are teacher led, teacher staffed, and collaboratively selected by the union and school management.

In 2005, high schools will be staffed with similar teams of teachers, carefully and collaboratively selected, who will retool secondary curriculum aimed at improving student results on the new Ohio Graduation Test.

**School Intervention**

Our experience with peer intervention led us to consider intervention by union and management in schools that are dysfunctional—for various reasons. Scott High School was one of four schools subjected to scrutiny by a team of teachers and administrators jointly selected by the union and the superintendent. These teams have ranged in size from two to six people, with equal numbers from both sides.

In the late 1980s, Scott had a badly divided faculty, a mediocre administrative staff, and a student population that generally underachieved. A two-person team—the deputy superintendent and a TFT assistant—took up residence in the school for a week. They listened, they made themselves available, and they made recommendations to me and to the superintendent. The result was the creation of a school within Scott devoted to students who applied (parents had to sign supportive agreements) for a more rigorous curriculum. Teachers likewise volunteered for the program; they were accepted upon interview and agreement between union and management. The University of Toledo supplied a professor full-time to support the transformative work that was required. Last, a new administrative team was brought to Scott. The students were matched with one of two teams of teachers working in the program. From the freshman year through graduation, students would have the support of their team’s basic academic teachers. Test scores...
improved, parents were more supportive, and tougher academic requirements were accepted.

Scott High School is now one of three high schools moving to the small school concept for the entire school. The downside of the Scott experience was that some faculty members resented what they viewed as special attention for the single school within the larger school concept, a problem that has plagued other similar experiments across the country. But the ongoing transformation of Scott demonstrates that we are willing to try a different school organization and governance to better support our students, change instructional practice, and create new relationships among students, teachers, and administrators.

**Conclusion**

Some of our ideas represent abrupt departures from traditional assumptions about schools and the roles teachers, their leaders, and administrators should play. Standing alone, who would think that eliminating supervision or establishing peer review could be adopted, much less accepted? After all of the teacher dismissals, the Toledo Plan is still the most popular program with our members.

Paying incentives to attract teachers away from careers in school management or abruptly altering the way a high school operates would, at first glance, frighten and anger most people involved in schools. In Toledo, these reforms are second nature. In Toledo, fresh ideas that succeed lead to new thinking and new solutions.

The alternative is what counts. In reforming schools, one rule worth remembering is that what we know is often the problem, not what we don’t know or haven’t thought about. For union leaders, it means asking the right questions, such as, “Why spend inordinate amounts of money and time defending members who come to us from training programs to which we have virtually no input?” Or, “Why not seek new and better ways to produce excellence when the usual and well-worn paths lead to conflict?” Those are questions anyone concerned about the state of our high schools can ask—with a bit of courage.

From these models and ideas one can see that the Toledo Federation of Teachers has made a consistent effort to alter top-down, command-and-control features of traditional schools. It should be
obvious that if we continue to shackle the potential of teachers, high schools will continue to produce the same unhappy results. That is why the Toledo union has encouraged our teachers to “reach for the stars” by rethinking and refocusing their collective efforts on building a profession through ownership, pride, and accountability.

Dal Lawrence served as president of the Toledo Federation of Teachers, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, in Toledo, Ohio, from 1966 to 1996. Under his presidency, Toledo became a leader in union-management collaboration. His goal was to build a profession for teachers with a focus on excellence and high performance standards. In 1981, Lawrence invented and established the nation’s first peer review and assistance program for teachers, and he has negotiated new pay concepts aimed at keeping teachers in the classroom and pushed his members toward accountability and responsibility for student learning. Lawrence began his education career in Toledo as a high school history teacher in 1961.

Lawrence holds a bachelor of science degree from Findlay College and a master’s degree in American history from Ohio State University.
As recently as 1975, almost half of the men and women employed in Chattanooga, Tennessee, paid their bills by working in factories and foundries. This reliance on industry earned Chattanooga the nickname “Dynamo of Dixie.” Around the clock, the plants hummed and the smokestacks billowed. In fact, the smokestacks billowed so much that it wasn’t uncommon for drivers to use their headlights at midday and for the few men who wore suits to work to put on a clean shirt after lunch.

But all of that has changed now. Since 1975, there’s been a mass exodus of manufacturing jobs from Chattanooga. Today, fewer than 20 percent of our community’s jobs are in manufacturing. And in 2001, the city’s largest factory—Wheland Foundry—closed its doors, laying off more than thirteen hundred employees. As the
newly unemployed, many of whom had never graduated from high school, began their search for work, they learned that their days of $40,000 incomes and good family health benefits were over. Slowly, these displaced workers realized that they’d be lucky to make half their Wheland salary, and even luckier to get any kind of health care at all.

**Systemic reform of high schools is not for the faint of heart.**

But Hamilton County’s luck changed the month after Wheland Foundry closed, when Carnegie Corporation of New York announced that Hamilton County’s Public Education Foundation (PEF) and the Hamilton County Schools would receive an $8 million, five-year grant to transform all seventeen of our high schools.

Carnegie’s grant did not fall from the sky. Over the last decade, PEF and the Hamilton County Department of Education have established a powerful partnership that has yielded demonstrable improvement in the eighty-one schools that serve our county’s forty thousand young people. In 1998, through an Annenberg Foundation Challenge Grant and local support, PEF and the district created a leadership development program that has become the engine of all reform efforts. In 2000, the local Benwood Foundation challenged PEF and the district to transform the community’s nine lowest-performing elementary schools; the results have been dramatic and earned national recognition from *The Washington Post*, The Education Trust, and longtime IBM CEO Lou Gerstner’s Teaching Commission. Most recently, with support from the Lyndhurst Foundation, the Public Education Foundation has conducted pathbreaking work with William Sanders’s value-added assessment scores to understand what makes one hundred high-gaining teachers so effective.

We are now halfway through our five-year effort, and we are seeing uncommon success. Those outside the schools who clamor for quantifiable proof can look to significant increases in the number of ninth graders who are promoted to tenth grade in one year, the number of students passing our state’s gateway exams, and the number of students moving on to college. Those inside the schools can see more students engaged in challenging course work and more teachers engaged in effective instruction.
Systemic reform of high schools is not for the faint of heart. But at this juncture, we are ready to share four lessons that we have learned. We believe that any community that wants to improve its high schools should consider each lesson carefully.

**LESSON ONE: You can and should make your “college track” the track for all your students.**

Easily the most controversial strategy we’ve employed has been changing the graduation requirements for all students. Beginning in 2005, all ninth graders who enter a Hamilton County high school will be on what was once known as the “college track.” They can only graduate from high school when they have completed a course of study that includes four years of math, science, and English and qualifies them for admission to a four-year college.

In 2002, Superintendent Jesse Register built significant community support for this change by reaching out to parents and leaders in the business and higher education communities. Over a period of three months, he repeatedly described the importance of raising the standards. Because only 18 percent of adults in our county have a college degree, the proposal required our community to fundamentally rethink the purpose of high school. Nevertheless, parents and the business and higher education communities well understood the importance of these changes given the realities of the new “knowledge economy” and Chattanooga’s ever-diminishing manufacturing sector.

Predictably, there was opposition from a large suburban high school. Some faculty, parents, and students worried that the changes would water down the curriculum. Others worried that this would change the school they believed did not need to change at all. And they wondered aloud, “How can students from all parts of the county do what only our best students do?” The president of that school’s student council told the press that all students should not be expected to pass algebra and that if a more academically diverse group of students were in her chemistry class, it would be less challenging for her.

By trusting each school and allowing for dialogue and critical inquiry, we created momentum and commitment usually absent from most high school reform efforts.
Fortunately, the Hamilton County School Board did not listen to this small group. We had shown them data from the Education Trust that showed that in places like New York, Texas, and San José higher graduation requirements led to higher achievement, higher graduation rates, and more students going to college. The board passed the resolution seven to one.

There is no question that these new requirements will make us change what we teach and how we teach it. We will have to provide greater guidance and more support to the students who have previously struggled to graduate. But the Carnegie Corporation’s grant has given us the time and resources to address these new challenges. And given that we believe the changes will increase the number of students who are better prepared for challenging jobs and college, we have no doubt that we did the right thing.

**LESSON TWO: Locally built plans trump centrally mandated models.**

Hamilton County’s seventeen public high schools are very different from one another. We have urban, suburban, and rural high schools. We have K–12, 6–12, and 9–12 schools. We have large and midsize schools, and small schools of fewer than two hundred students. In some of our schools, almost all the children are African American, in others almost all are white. In only a few do we have a truly diverse population.

Given this landscape, the leaders of the Foundation and the district decided that it would be useless to mandate a reform model. We expressly did not, as so many districts have, begin our efforts by requiring all high schools to break up into themed academies with a mandated literacy program for all students. Why would we want to break up a rural high school with forty students in ninth grade? Why would we want to mandate a literacy program for a high school where most students are reading above grade level?

Instead of mandating the process, the Foundation and district established clear and quantifiable goals. We made it clear to all schools that to receive any of the Carnegie grant money, they needed to construct their own plan that would ultimately yield:
• 95 percent of students moving from ninth to tenth grade in one year;
• 95 percent passing state gateway exams;
• 95 percent graduating from high school; and
• a reduction by 75 percent of students needing remedial courses in college.

We recommended that they focus their efforts on four core strategies: increasing teaching quality; personalizing instruction for individual students; making academic courses rigorous; and creating flexible daily, weekly, and annual schedules to maximize student opportunity and support.

While we did not mandate a model, we did require all schools to gather and review an immense amount of data, including survey data from all ten thousand of our high school students. Schools were given a full year to review their data, learn about best practices, talk among themselves, and travel to high-performing high schools in different parts of the nation. Most importantly, each school’s staff was given time to construct its plan: monthly meeting time, four full professional development days, four half days, and a weekend retreat.

Because each school constructed its own plan, the blueprint for change has become part of each school’s daily work. When you walk into most schools, you’ll meet passionate advocates for the changes. It’s their plan, and they own it. Indeed, most of our high schools have developed themed academies, and almost all have implemented a literacy program. But they did this based on what their students said, what their data said, and what their teachers said—not because the superintendent mandated it. By trusting each school and allowing for dialogue and critical inquiry, we created momentum and commitment usually absent from most high school reform efforts.

This is not to say that community leaders sit and watch while schools do all the work. Our leadership role—the role of the superintendent, his senior staff for secondary education, and the members of the Public Education Foundation’s project staff—is to
Thus, we have invested most of our grant funds and lots of time to help each school improve instruction by building a culture where teachers learn together and focus on improving their teaching.

**LESSON THREE: High school reform must be about improving instruction.**

Across the country, too much of high school reform focuses solely on changing the structure of the school—such as creating academies or small schools—without changing instruction within the school. Some communities have difficulty realizing that if we take a huge box full of terrible teaching, toxic relationships, and low expectations and divide it into quarters, we won’t come out with better schools. Hamilton County holds a different belief, and we came to it because we listened to students.

In the beginning months of our work, we surveyed all ten thousand high school students about the quality of teaching in their school. Using a simple protocol, students interviewed each other. They then answered a survey that reported their opinions on a range of issues ranging from the rigor of instruction to how often they were asked to sit and take notes. This trove of information was then compiled by teacher leaders at each school who shared it with all their colleagues. The data subsequently served as the catalyst for a weekend retreat for the leadership teams from each school.

I won’t belabor the obvious: if you listen to students you will understand that the core problem in high schools is an instructional problem. Unless we improve instruction, all the academies and all the test prep courses in the world won’t change the outcomes. Thus, we have invested most of our grant funds and lots of time to help each school improve instruction by building a culture where
teachers learn together and focus on improving their teaching. The grant funds support experts and materials, but the district has provided an even more important resource: time. Because of strong leadership from the superintendent and a modicum of flexibility from state officials (they allowed us to access time from our banked snow days!), we have been able to annually provide teachers at all schools four full days and four half days of professional development. Teachers have had extraordinary opportunities to learn about best practices and to work together to improve their teaching. We see the success in our annual survey of students—what they say about instruction—and in increases in student attendance and in success in our state-mandated subject tests in English, algebra, and biology.

**LESSON FOUR: Knowing students well trumps everything.** Nothing matters more than knowing students well. Every survey, focus group, and interview with high school students reveals that most high school students feel disrespected and unknown. At the core of our work has been a series of investments that ensure that our students are known well by adults. The work begins before the first day of ninth grade.

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**What have we done to know our students?**

Every high school has created a summer program for all rising ninth graders. At some schools, these programs are two-day retreats in nearby state campgrounds. At other schools, all ninth graders attend a full week of enrichment classes at their new school. At all schools, the ninth graders get to know their peers, their future teachers, and the expectations set for them.

Every high school has developed an advisory program—a program where each student meets regularly with an adult to review progress. In some schools, advisories happen twice a week; at others, they happen once a month. But in all schools, adults are trying to connect with young people, and, according to our student surveys and focus groups, students are starting to feel like they are better known than before.

Almost all of our high schools have created at least one small academy, and many have created separate ninth-grade academies. We’ve tried to ensure that these academies do not simply retrack students. The academic results speak for themselves; the students in these academies consistently show greater achievement than they did before going into an academy.
Developing New Dynamos

Even with all this progress, we know we still have a long way to go. Improving instruction takes a lot of time and effort, and transforming seventeen diverse high schools will require years. Most recently, the district has suffered dramatic budget cuts because our county commissioners fear the wrath of antitax voters more than they fear the costs of an undereducated generation. Nevertheless, we have made clear progress across the district. The percentage of ninth graders who make a good start and are promoted to tenth grade inside of twelve months is up significantly in almost all schools, and we’ve seen a considerable decrease in the number of dropouts. Students in our academies are getting much better grades than before their academy experience. And in most schools, there are modest but clear improvements in ACT scores, college applications, and acceptances into college.

At the end of the day, we hope that what we’ve learned can help other community leaders make changes. But most importantly, we hope that our students will become the new dynamos of our community—and our nation.

Dr. Dan Challener is president of the Public Education Foundation in Chattanooga, Tennessee. As president, Challener oversees the Foundation’s efforts to strengthen student achievement in Hamilton County’s public schools. Among these programs is the High Schools for a New Society Initiative, which brings about innovative improvements in Hamilton County’s seventeen public high schools.

Before coming to Chattanooga, Challener served for seven years as CEO of the Providence Blueprint for Education (PROBE), a community-based advocacy and research project that involved communities in the improvement of schools in Providence, Rhode Island.

Challener holds a bachelor’s degree from Princeton University, and a master’s and PhD in English from Brown University. He is the author of Narratives of Resilience (Garland Press, 1997), a study of what builds strength in young people. He has taught high school in New Jersey and served on the faculty of both Brown University and Johnson and Wales University.
Mayors Must Make Better High Schools a Top Priority

Mayor Ron Gonzales
City of San José

The traditional job description for mayors includes fixing potholes, protecting public safety, building homes, and attracting jobs to their cities. For mayors in most American cities, schools aren’t on the list.

Today, that’s not good enough. Improving the quality of education must now be at the top of every mayor’s list of priorities. Good schools and successful children are essential for our future prosperity and the quality of life for our communities throughout the nation.

That’s what I have done in San José, California. City Hall doesn’t have direct authority over schools and education in our city, but I believe we have a very clear obligation to do all we can to improve educational opportunities and strengthen the learning environment for our families and children. The quality of our schools and their ability to prepare all of our children to achieve affects residents in each of our neighborhoods, and it is absolutely essential for our employers.
In San José we have accomplished many goals in early childhood education, teacher recruitment, and afterschool programs. But just as our early care and education programs get kids ready to learn, we also know we need to get them ready to earn.

That’s why high schools are so important for our city’s strong commitment to quality education. When high school students don’t make it in class, they won’t make it in society either. Poor results in high school could mean dead-end jobs, a life of crime, victimization, and/or a terrible cost to our community and our ability to compete.

But by protecting kids, providing better schools and stronger neighborhoods, and preparing our future leaders, we create a better quality of life for all of our residents. And that’s the first job for the mayor in any city.

**The Challenge**

San José’s high schools face the challenge of keeping students in school, raising graduation rates, and equipping young people with skills needed in the dynamic Silicon Valley economy. Our latest data show that nearly one out of five high school seniors in San José does not graduate on time with his or her class. This works out to nearly fifteen hundred students a year—the equivalent of an entire high school. Of those fifteen hundred, nearly a thousand drop out altogether every year. In a city of almost one million residents and nearly forty thousand high school students, that number might seem tolerable.

But it’s not. If an entire high school of one thousand students were to drop out at once, it would be headline news across the country. But one by one, a thousand lives are quietly failing every year. And this is unacceptable.

**Partnerships**

We are proud of San José as a city of solutions. We continually work with many partners to make our community better. This is true for education as well. The city government and the community regularly come together to meet the needs of our children and help them achieve. Here are some examples of our approach:
• The Schools/City Collaborative: San José is served by eighteen independent school districts, including three separate high school systems. We established the Schools/City Collaborative to improve communication and coordination between the city government and the leaders of all our different districts officials. Largely as a result of City Hall leadership, this has become a valuable forum to discuss trends, challenges, and opportunities in San José high schools. As a result we have supported school bond campaigns, linked city services to educational services, and developed a unified voice for speaking to our state legislature. For example, in 2003 the city built Alum Rock Youth Center on the campus of James Lick High School. While the school gave the land to the city for free, the city allows the school to use the center’s gym and facilities during school hours. And every day after three p.m., the center opens to serve the surrounding community, involving more city residents with their neighborhood high school.

• Tapping into national resources: In the past several years, I have worked closely with the National League of Cities (NLC) and its Institute of Youth, Education, and Families on a variety of issues. NLC identifies and promotes best practices for cities and their work in education across the nation. We are very fortunate to have the Institute of Youth, Education, and Families as our partners on a new high school reform project. With their help, San José is creating a comprehensive plan to ensure that students who are most at risk of failing have access to educational opportunities, a second chance, that can prepare them for college, work, and life. We are joined by four other cities in this effort, and we look forward to sharing our experience and results with others in the near future.

Staying Practical
Especially in education, one size does not fit all. We know there are many practical and innovative ways for mayors who don’t have a formal role to play inside our schools to help them. Our successful programs in San José include recruiting and retaining quality high school teachers, ensuring our high school campuses are safe, and acting as a catalyst for vital connections between businesses and high schools.

• Retaining teachers: Over the past four years, the San José Teacher Homebuyer Program has helped more than four hundred teachers buy their first homes and put down roots in our city. We provide up to $40,000 for a zero-interest loan used for down payment assistance for eligible teachers. In a region with very high housing costs, we have helped our schools recruit and retain high-quality teachers.
• **Providing safe high schools**: Children cannot learn, and teachers cannot teach, in an environment where they don’t feel safe and secure. San José has made it our goal to ensure that our campuses are among the safest in urban America. Our Safe School Campus Initiative reduces violence and risk for violence at and near our schools by planning and training for campus incidents. The city organizes simulations of potential threats like bomb threats or school shootings to prepare school officials to respond to crises. To prevent violence, the mayor’s award-winning Gang Prevention Task Force works with schools, law enforcement, and community organizations to steer young people to positive paths and away from gang crime.

• **Connecting businesses to high schools**: Businesses are becoming more selective in hiring, and high school students must be prepared to learn how to earn in a competitive environment. Schools and businesses have much to gain from each other, and mayors have the contacts and the vision to engage business leaders in our high schools. We must become the catalyst to make the business connections that can provide expertise and resources for schools and help schools understand what employers need in the job market. In San José, I regularly gather our region’s largest employers—Cisco Systems and eBay, for example—to discuss what skills they need from high school graduates and how they can contribute to improving those high schools. By getting the business sector on board with education reform, the city is poised to connect high schools in need with the financial and social capital of local businesses. Adobe Systems and Applied Materials have combined to give about $1 million to one of our newest high schools, Downtown College Prep.

**Support Innovation**

City leaders across the country have been at the forefront of encouraging innovation in education. An example in San José is my involvement with Downtown College Prep (DCP), the first charter high school in San José. DCP targets underperforming middle school students and offers a rigorous college preparatory program that creates the opportunity for students to go on to college. We are proud to say that DCP graduated its first class in 2004, and 94 percent of the class was accepted to four-year colleges. Statewide, only 19 percent of high school graduates enter a four-year college, while 32 percent enter a community college.

Mayors also can use many practical approaches to foster an environment of educational innovation in high schools. Some of the
approaches that have been successful in San José include financial support, facilities support, and plain old-fashioned political support.

- **Financial support:** Led by the mayor, cities can direct grants or loans to innovative high school programs or new alternative high schools whose mission follows the city’s general educational goals, including reducing the dropout rate and increasing graduation. This direct assistance to innovative high schools, including alternative and charter schools, also gives them the leverage they need to raise more funds. Mayors can help connect high schools to businesses and foundations. This is where those mayoral rolodexes come in handy. Anything a mayor can do to help organizations concentrate on instruction and alleviate time-consuming fundraising is a welcome step.

- **Facilities support:** For new alternative and charter high schools, cities should utilize zoning and planning data to help organizations find locations that best serve their high school students. Additionally, building and fire permits that require city approval should be fast-tracked to ensure that a new, innovative high school is up and running within their timeframe.

- **Political support:** Using the bully pulpit, mayors can be effective advocates for better schools. I attend high school district board meetings, parent/teacher meetings, first-day-of-school events, and graduation ceremonies to show the public and the educators where our priorities are.

**Conclusion**
San José views its role as an engaged partner in education. By positively affecting schools, we improve the lives of children, families, and businesses—all appropriate responsibilities of local government.

America’s high school students are at a point in their lives where options will give them the greatest opportunity to succeed. While there are some successful plans in place and numerous organizations working to address this issue, these efforts are not all inclusive or focused. With partnership, assistance, commitment, innovation,
and the use of practical methods, mayors can positively affect the high school landscape, lower dropout rates, and increase high school graduation.

Helping high schools prepare our children for success is essential to San José’s prosperity. Our youth, our workforce, and our future leaders are today’s high school students, and it is our community’s obligation to ensure they succeed.

Ron Gonzales was reelected as mayor of San José, the capital of Silicon Valley, in March 2002. His goals as mayor include strengthening neighborhoods, improving public education, and ensuring the continuing economic vitality of the city with high-quality public services and effective solutions to affordable housing and traffic congestion in the region.

His goals on education have been highlighted by the New York Times and Education Week in a piece entitled “10 Ways a Mayor Can Help Improve Public Education.” Among those goals, he has committed to making San José the most teacher-friendly city in California through helping recruit and retain teachers by providing loans to help them buy homes within the communities they teach.

Gonzales is also a founding board member of Downtown College Prep, Santa Clara County’s first charter high school, which focuses on the academic success of high school students from the San José central city area.
San José Unified School District is an urban district in the heart of California’s Silicon Valley. The school district has 32,000 students, representing the broad ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of California.

The Work
Beginning in the early 1990s, the San José Unified School District embarked upon a series of high school reform initiatives focused on raising standards for all students and assuring that minority, poor, and immigrant students are prepared for college and post-secondary careers. Today we have the highest graduation requirements in the state, with all students completing the University of California system’s entrance requirements (commonly called the A-G requirements) in order to earn a high school diploma. Among other prescribed course work, this includes three years of college preparatory math through algebra II, three years of college preparatory science, including two lab sciences, and two years of a foreign language. In June 2004, San José Unified graduated its third class under these rigorous standards, with no dropoff in graduation rates for any of the three classes.

We began our journey with a vision that high school should be a gateway to all possible pursuits beyond high school, including college. In 1992 our district became a partner with the College Board in a national initiative called Equity 2000. The initiative engaged six
sites across the country in a five-year effort to demonstrate that all students could successfully complete algebra and geometry, the two major gatekeeper courses that serve as barriers to college access nationwide. By 1993, San José Unified had eliminated all math courses below algebra I from its ninth-grade offerings. Gone were consumer math and other “dumbed-down” math classes. Our early success in demonstrating that all students could enroll and be successful in algebra was nothing short of eye-opening. Not only were all beginning high school students required to take algebra, but to the surprise of many, the nontraditional algebra takers were passing it at the same rate as they had passed consumer math!

We learned so much through this early reform effort. Particularly, we realized that teachers need quality staff development, and struggling students need safety net systems. Intensive staff development was clearly necessary to provide teachers with a broad repertoire of instructional strategies designed to make algebra accessible to all students. It was also clear that staff development must instill in the teachers the attitudes and beliefs that all students have the ability to master algebra. Summer institutes for both middle and high school math teachers focused on algebra readiness and instructional methods for teaching algebra to all.

Students were part of the institutes, so the professional development included direct teaching and reflective practice as new skills were acquired. Seminars and workshops during the year focused on developing high expectations for all students. We also learned along the way that strong safety net programs would be essential to ensure success for all students. Saturday academies, tutorials, shadow classes, and afterschool and summer extension classes were created to give necessary support to students. The powerful lessons learned in those early days would become essential components of

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**We realized that teachers need quality staff development, and struggling students need safety net systems.**

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Fifty-one percent of the student population are Hispanic, 29 percent are white, 13 percent are Asian, and 7 percent are other. Twenty-eight percent are English-language learners, and 41 percent are socioeconomically disadvantaged.
future work when it came time to implement a comprehensive college-readiness curriculum for all students.

**Another Bold Step**
In early 1994, during my first year as superintendent, we took another bold step. In the eighth year of a federal court order to desegregate our schools, we began to negotiate a consent decree that changed the focus of the existing order from busing for integration to Hispanic student achievement, equity, and access. I clearly saw the opportunity for the consent decree to be a major lever in our reform agenda, using the authority of the courts to mandate changes that were essential to move the district forward. The decree would focus district efforts on issues of equity and access for Hispanic students and require needed academic support for them to be successful in a rigorous curriculum. I believed, as did plaintiffs in the lawsuit, that insidious practices such as tracking (grouping students by ability) had to be eliminated and that classes needed to be desegregated to reflect the overall population of the school.

Further, to ensure participation of Hispanic students in the most rigorous high school course work, the decree required an aggressive effort to increase minority participation in honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate classes. Parent involvement was also a required component to ensure that parents of Hispanic students would be engaged around high achievement for their children and begin to see the possibility of college in their children's futures.

By 1996, we began to discuss taking the boldest step of all—making it a policy that every high school student graduate prepared for college. At the same time, we realized that we needed to work more closely with community stakeholders to prepare them and gain their support for such a move. Because of my involvement around public engagement with the Danforth Foundation on a national level, the district had access to organizations like Public Agenda, experts on public opinion research. With their assistance we were able to put together a
comprehensive public engagement strategy to test the waters and ask the question of all district stakeholders, “How good is good enough in San José Unified School District?” This question was pursued through a series of seven formal focus groups involving groups of parents from the suburbs, parents from urban areas (including one focus group conducted totally in Spanish), district residents with no students in school, high school teachers, and high school students. After seven sessions that probed whether the district was delivering a “good enough” education, the feedback pointed us toward raising standards. Every parent and community group clearly called for a common set of standards for all high school students that would prepare them for college.

Higher standards and expectations did not lead to more dropouts but to greater achievement.

The teachers, though more skeptical about their ability to implement a college preparatory curriculum for all students, articulated that they could do so if sufficient training and student support systems were there to help them be successful. The students presented the most compelling arguments for moving forward. Whether from a poor urban high school or an affluent suburban high school, they all said the same things about high school: it is not challenging, expectations are low, you can get by with doing the minimum, no one pushes for excellence, and teachers don't care.

This enlightening focus group research helped us structure our next major public engagement initiative, a town hall meeting that we called a “community conversation.” With the help of Public Agenda and the Institute for Educational Leadership we brought together a group of 150 broadly representative parents, teachers, and community leaders to explore in depth the need for rigorous standards and the notion of a college preparatory curriculum for all students. We walked away from that conversation convinced that our major stakeholders were ready for San José Unified to move down this path. Our conviction was validated by a follow-up written survey to all high school parents, students, and teachers. We knew we had a mandate to proceed, and in January 1998 the Board of Education adopted the University of California system’s entrance requirements as our graduation requirements, to begin with the entering freshman class of 1998.
**Successes, Results, and Outcomes**

Our success in implementing this major reform is clear. Three years of data show that graduation rates have not declined and that the grade point averages of graduating seniors are actually on the rise. Sixty-five percent of the graduates have passed every one of the required courses for entrance to the state’s university system with a C or better and are therefore eligible to enter directly out of high school—statewide, the percent is 33 percent. Even more dramatic, 45 percent of the Hispanic graduates are university eligible right out of high school compared to 21 percent statewide. And enrollment of Hispanic students in Advanced Placement courses has more than doubled in recent years. Higher standards and expectations did not lead to more dropouts but to greater achievement:

- Graduation rates have remained steady.
- Achievement scores and SAT scores have risen.
- GPAs have risen.
- The number of Hispanic students in AP courses has doubled.

Test scores on state examinations and the national SATs have been steadily increasing each year since this reform was put in place. Perhaps most importantly, the focus on high school graduation has driven higher standards and expectations all the way down to kindergarten. The most powerful trickle-down outcome is our district’s steady progress in closing the achievement gap at the elementary and middle school levels.

Climate surveys administered annually to parents, teachers, and students show continued satisfaction with the preparation of students and the quality of education they receive. The rise in parent satisfaction has spilled over into other important outcomes, such as the passage of two major bond initiatives (totaling over $600 million) and numerous awards—California Distinguished Schools, National Blue Ribbon Schools, a New American High School, and two district awards for quality from the California Awards for Performance Excellence.

**Community Engagement: A Strategic Approach to High School Reform**

While it took a long time and focused resources, our public
engagement work with the Danforth Foundation guided our belief that major reforms require a comprehensive public engagement strategy. Early work through the College Board and our court-ordered consent decree was necessary to position the district to move forward with a reform agenda focused on preparing all students for college, but it was not sufficient to implement this major policy reform. We needed public support, and we knew that achieving broad-based community support was not a matter of selling the reform with a convincing marketing strategy. Rather, we had to engage our stakeholders in the decisionmaking process itself.

In a democracy made up of people from all kinds of backgrounds and cultures with differing beliefs and values, a deeper level of work is necessary for leaders to implement a bold vision for the future. Some would call it consensus building; others call it finding common ground. Whatever the terminology, it is clear that finding out what the public is thinking on matters of great importance is critical to reform work. Enlightened leaders must trust the public to engage in thoughtful civil debate around issues for which there are no right or wrong answers. Through a thoughtful engagement process communities can build consensus, find common ground, and become partners in school reform.

**Where Does San José Unified Go from Here?**
Our journey continues and is taking shape in a whole new set of reform initiatives around creating a college-going culture within San José Unified and our stakeholders. As powerful as our work
has been in producing dramatic increases in college-ready graduates, district graduates are not yet accessing four-year colleges directly out of high school at significantly greater rates. Given this challenge, we are committed to creating a college-going culture through a focused and comprehensive pre-K–12 initiative. The Board of Education recently launched this initiative by passing a resolution that incorporates a college-going culture into its mission. The resolution addresses the board’s commitment to ensuring that students see college as a possibility from preschool through high school. It calls for students to be able to assess their own progress toward college readiness and for all teachers to be engaged as the single most important contributors to helping all students envision college as a possibility. Finally, it requires that parents be continually and systematically given the knowledge and skills to help their children prepare for postsecondary endeavors.

San José Unified School District’s high school reform work to date has clearly demonstrated that high school can be a gateway to college for students from all backgrounds. Yet we have found that it is not enough to prepare students to stand at the college doorstep—we must get them to walk through that door. In the years to come, district leaders will work diligently to make sure that all students and their families know and believe from the very beginning of their formal schooling that the promise of a college education is truly open to them.
In August 2004, Dr. Linda T. Murray retired after serving for twelve years as the superintendent of the San José Unified School District. Under her leadership, student achievement improved significantly, with overall rankings growing by fifty-four points in the past four years. Among urban districts in northern California, San José Unified ranks first in overall student performance. Murray also led the district to increase its number of California Distinguished Schools from three to twenty-three and the number of National Blue Ribbon Schools from zero to ten since 1998.

From 1989 to 1993, Murray served as associate superintendent of instruction for Broward County Schools in Florida. And from 1971 to 1993, she was both an educator and an administrator in the Broward County school system.

Murray received her bachelor’s degree in mathematics from Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York, in 1966, and a PhD in educational psychology from the State University of New York in 1970.
The mantra of high expectations in the Denver Public School District is now three years old and, I believe, still rings true.

The district has three goals:

1. set high expectations for students, parents, teachers, principals, and all other staff of Denver Public Schools (DPS) and the community it serves;

2. improve the performance of all students; and

3. close the gap between better- and poorer-performing students.

These goals are a check against which every decision is processed. They provide teachers, principals, and all employees a clear sense of purpose, and they have inspired employee performance.

Many who work in public education do so because of a passion for the mission, not for financial reward. However, employees in any organization are more engaged in their work when they know how their work supports the organization’s goals. It’s also crucial, of course, for high school leaders to commit to meeting those goals—and to ground every school and department in the overall mission.

The oft-stated goals of Denver Public Schools have energized community and political support. That support, in turn, has provided
Employees in any organization are more engaged in their work when they know how their work supports the organization’s goals.

The district serves 72,000 students in 140 schools and has been enjoying a twelve-year growth in enrollment. The district’s student population today is 56 percent Hispanic, 20 percent white, 19 percent African American, and 3 percent Asian. Nearly fourteen thousand of our students are English-language learners, and about 63 percent of the student population is eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.
Studio Course©. The course, carefully sequenced, provides a
double-block of time to support each student’s learning. It is
shaped by “thinking about” and “doing things with” the notion
of language studies.

The districtwide literacy program fostered higher levels of student
engagement, performance, and growth. In addition, the program allowed teachers to spend the
majority of their day in small-group instruction, thus improving the intensity and quality of
teacher time and tailoring instruction to the
appropriate level for each student.

Key to the plan was hiring and training a new
cadre of district employee—the literacy coach.
These coaches work directly in schools helping
teachers with hands-on staff development and
providing instant feedback on classroom
instruction techniques.

**Transforming the High School with Rigorous Instruction**
But why implement a districtwide literacy program? There was one
main reason.

When I first stepped into the superintendent’s position, the style
and content of instruction across the city of Denver was left in
large part to each individual school. There were some common ele-
ments, naturally, because schools were required to help students
reach the district’s model content standards. But one school’s
instructional approach and curriculum could appear radically dif-
ferent from schools in adjacent neighborhoods. This clearly made
it difficult for students moving from school to school during the
school year.

Additionally, the new literacy program organizes instruction
around effort—sustained and directed effort during class time to
show that hard work is rewarded with understanding and learning.

To provide a strong incentive to students to continue the reading
effort—and to give the phrase “high expectations” some real mean-
ing—the district also launched its Million Words Campaign,
designed to urge every student to read one million words each
DPS also implemented new rigor in math instruction, bringing focus and consistent direction to math classrooms throughout the district. The mathematics program increases the use of manipulative materials, cooperative group work so students can listen to mathematical ideas, everyday multistep problems and applications, and writing and reading about mathematics, among many other strategies. By having students read and write about math, we are also improving their literacy skills.

school year. The campaign netted twelve thousand “millionaires”—students who met the goal—in its first year alone.

**The Results Are In**
When academic performance results on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (the state assessment system) were announced in 2002, fourteen of Denver’s twenty-one “unsatisfactory” schools had climbed to “low.”

Two years later, only one of the original twenty-one “unsatisfactory” schools still held that same ranking.

For each year of progress, DPS earned Colorado Governor Bill Owens’s Distinguished Improvement award for demonstrating the most progress among 176 school districts in the state. Governor Owens even touted Denver Public Schools as the “bellwether for reform” in public education.

“Bellwether for Reform”: *Transforming Teacher Compensation*

The governor’s recognition of the Denver Public Schools was partially about the achievement gains, but it was also about the district’s ongoing work to implement a new salary system that will pay teachers for improving student achievement and for accomplishing other specific objectives that are aligned with DPS goals.

Many public school officials have eyed the issue of reform in teacher pay with considerable trepidation. Others have said it simply could not be done. But at the beginning of my management of DPS, I sought to improve the dynamics within this labor-management relationship, which had a history of turning adversarial. I believe that superintendents and principals have every reason to make
teachers successful—because it is the performance in each classroom that adds up to how we, as a district, are ultimately graded.

As a district, we provide one core service to our student and parent customers. That service is, of course, teaching. I believe that parents disengage from public schools—in fact I think they grow extremely cynical about the chances for any improvement in public schools—when they see traditional disputes erupt between labor and management.

It’s been my goal from day one to ensure that we are presenting a picture of a unified team working toward our three goals. I firmly believe that to the extent we work together, the better off we will be in gaining community trust and support—and in accomplishing even greater things.

When I took the superintendent’s position, the district had already worked closely with the teachers’ union to launch a pilot pay-for-performance program for teachers. But I wanted to redouble our efforts to work more collaboratively. I made sure our team listened hard to union issues, opened up the negotiations process through an interest-based approach, and involved the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) in many high-visibility events and recognitions.

For several years, we cosponsored an annual gathering at the beginning of the school year to celebrate our collaboration and launch the school year on the right foot. And to signify the importance I placed in the teacher pay reforms that were being contemplated, I requested that the union leader, an individual who had been instrumental in the reform’s first phase, report directly to me at first. While district budget issues have strained the relationship with the teachers’ union of late, there is little doubt that we remain committed to an open, forthright, and collaborative relationship.
**From Transformation to Implementation: Making ProComp Happen**

The result of our collaboration is ProComp, the new Professional Compensation System for Teachers that can be used by teachers to increase career earnings through improving student achievement, earning successful professional evaluations, working in the most academically challenged schools, and advancing their skills and knowledge.

In March 2004, teachers voted overwhelmingly (59 percent in favor) to support the plan, which is now in the hands of transition committees working to make the switch.

The final step will be approval by Denver voters—scheduled for November 2005—of $25 million in additional revenue to fully fund the new pay system. I’m convinced Denver voters will see the true reform represented by this initiative and the solid collaboration that lies behind it.

When the teachers’ vote on the issue was announced, we were joined at DCTA headquarters by members of the DPS Board of Education and Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper, who is a self-acknowledged “chief cheerleader” of the system. He knows our goals and recites them, too.

**It Takes a Village: Counting on Strong Community Support**

The success with the Denver teachers’ vote, in fact, followed just five months after voters in the city backed—by wide margins—the district’s proposals for a three-year, $310 million bond effort and a $20 million mill levy (property tax) increase. Along the campaign trail, Mayor Hickenlooper was relentlessly upbeat, urging full support of the proposals and carrying a tireless schedule. (In Denver, the city and the school system are separate political subdivisions even though they serve the same population.)

The bond proposal garnered 56 percent of voter support; the mill levy proposal earned a whopping 60 percent voter approval.

The bond will yield construction of schools and major renovations of others, but much of the political focus and hope rests on the $20 million mill levy proposal. This additional revenue stream will
provide $6.5 million for art and music teachers in elementary schools, $2.5 million to revitalize and reconstitute neighborhood schools, $2 million to increase support for capital investments, $3.5 million for new textbooks, $3.5 million to expand all-day kindergarten and early childhood education opportunities, and $2 million to support middle and high school reforms.

Together, all six mill levies are expected to provide an enormous boost in enhancing the educational experience for students. Considerable attention here is being paid to the $2 million earmarked for reforms of secondary schools, although the precise use of the dollars has not yet been decided. The twenty-seven-member Commission on Secondary School Reform is exploring the issues through a six-month investigation that will result in recommendations to the DPS Board of Education geared toward significantly improving the success of all students, increasing graduation rates, and lowering dropout rates.

This commission has high expectations for what it delivers. At the outset, the commission was organized around some blunt language that set the scene for the commission’s charge: “By any measure the number of students who enter DPS high schools but fail to graduate is unacceptably high; and the gap in achievement, graduation and college attendance between high performing students and lower performing students is of great concern.”

I expect the commission to return suggestions and make recommendations that tackle the issue as seriously as it was described.

The Denver Public Schools Foundation: Leading the City from Worst to First

No better proof of broad community enthusiasm is needed than the Denver Public Schools Foundation, a powerful example that the goals of the district supersede partisan politics and have become imbued in the community itself. The Foundation is cochaired by influential leaders from the Republican and Democratic parties who have put aside their political agendas to work together on behalf of Denver Public Schools.

At the annual DPS Foundation gala dinner in May 2004 this “working together” theme was in full effect, as $1.2 million was raised in a single night. More than one thousand DPS employees
and community members turned out for the colorful celebration of district accomplishments. The gala was double the size of the premiere event.

“This is a district that’s not afraid of challenges,” said Governor Owens in his remarks to attendees. “This is, I believe, the best urban school district in the nation.”

**Bearing Down on High Expectations**

Around the schools and in the community, the goals of Denver Public Schools—setting high expectations, improving the performance of all students, and closing the gap between better- and poorer-performing students—permeate the business of teaching and learning.

The task now is to build on the renewed optimism and continue to bear down on the three goals—as real, meaningful, and reachable targets.

Dr. Jerry Wartgow was appointed superintendent of Denver Public Schools in June 2001. Prior to joining DPS, he served as president and CEO of the International Training and Education Alliance, Inc.

Between 1986 and 1998, Wartgow served as founding president of the Colorado Community College and Occupational Education System, during which he transformed a loose federation of community colleges into a unified system. From 1978 to 1986, Wartgow was executive director of the Auraria Higher Education Center, and from 1973 to 1978 he served as the deputy executive director for the Colorado Commission on Higher Education. A former university professor, Wartgow served three years as dean of students of the International School of Bangkok in Thailand.

Wartgow holds a PhD from the University of Denver, a master of education degree from the University of Hawaii, and a bachelor of science degree from the University of Wisconsin.
During the two and a half years that I have been Virginia’s governor, perhaps no priority has been more important to me than promoting economic prosperity and bringing good jobs to the people of the Commonwealth.

To create the Commonwealth of Opportunity that is at the heart of our state’s agenda, more of our young people need the kind of advanced training that is required for the workplace of the twenty-first century. And this is true whether we’re referring to advanced career and technical training or to the instruction provided in our traditional institutions of higher education.

As I have traveled around Virginia, both as a businessman and more recently as governor, I have seen over and over again how the supply of highly skilled, technologically skilled workers can spell the difference between success and failure when a company plans to invest in a community.

As we have talked with teachers, administrators, employers, and parents about how we can build an education system that is responsive to this urgent need, one of the things we’ve heard
repeatedly is that our efforts at reform must emphasize high school—and particularly the senior year of high school. The senior year is obviously the critical intersection between K–12 education and either higher education or the world of work.

For too many students the senior year lacks academic challenges and adequate preparation for the workplace. For those students going to college, the day that acceptance letter arrives in the mail is usually the day their interest in high school vanishes. For those students not going to college, a high school diploma is simply not enough preparation for what is to come when they enter the workforce. Empirical data support what parents, teachers, and administrators have observed: only 70 percent of all high school students earn their diplomas, placing the United States seventeenth among developed nations in the percent of youth graduating from high school. Only three out of ten graduate ready to attend a four-year college, and only 40 percent of students who enroll in college actually earn a degree. These days, a high school diploma is the minimum credential for any career, and economists have shown that post-secondary education is important to increasing earning power.

Traditionally, there has been one route to high school completion. The student graduates high school, receives a diploma, and then goes on to a postsecondary education institute or joins the working world. This is “business as usual.” In Virginia, we are taking a different course. We have embarked on a series of reforms that are intended to increase the rigor of the senior year, better prepare students for college and the workforce, and give students new opportunities to earn college credits or career training while in their senior year. Equally important, we have instituted new measures to ensure that students who are at risk in our standards-based system will get the help they need to earn a standard diploma. We matched the tough rhetoric of standards with a commitment from the state to “walk the extra mile” with students potentially impacted by higher standards.
As chairman of the National Governors Association, I have made high school reform—focused on the senior year—my chairman’s initiative for 2004–05. This means that we'll direct many of the Association's considerable staff resources and expertise toward examining how to strengthen high schools. We’ll examine and publish best practices that are occurring throughout the fifty states.

In Virginia, our reforms are called Path to Industry Certification, the Early College Scholars Program, and Project Graduation.

Path to Industry Certification
The Path to Industry Certification is designed to serve those students who start their senior year with no plans to attend college and without the requisite career training to obtain a high-wage job. Every year in Virginia, more than 12,000 of the state’s 75,000 high school seniors fall into that category, and they will need skills to get a job once high school is finished. The bottom line is simple: even if seniors have not planned to continue their education beyond high school, they must be prepared to enter the working world. Statistics show that the average salary of an individual with a high school diploma is roughly $21,000 a year. Yet if they start earning an IT certification in high school and finish it in a post-secondary institution, their earning power would jump to around $27,000.

The Path to Industry Certification will give these students a leg up by preparing them with vital job skills while they are working toward a high school diploma. Our initial goal when we started the program last year was to identify a group of two hundred seniors to participate in the program. We have met that goal.

Participating students and their parents sign a “student compact” stating that the student will complete high school and then enroll in technical training to acquire the appropriate skills and certifications needed to enter a higher-wage career. Training for that particular certification will start during the student’s senior year and culminate after three to six months of additional training at a local community college or other predetermined location.

With this compact, the student will receive the extra training at no cost to the parent or student—provided that all the requirements outlined in the compact are met within a year of high school graduation. One of the things that currently stands in the way of
students’ wanting to earn industry credentials is that not enough teachers have themselves been certified by industry to teach relevant skills.

To address this need, the Virginia Department of Education and the Virginia Community College System have established Technical Certification Training Academies designed to allow more high school faculty to earn industry certification. More than five hundred teachers have received certification due to these training academies.

**Early College Scholars Program**

Just as we are trying to give advanced career training to seniors who are bound for work after graduation, we also want to offer new opportunities to high school seniors who are college bound. These programs will enhance the senior year, expand opportunity, and make Virginia more economically competitive.

Today, an average semester in a public four-year institution costs around $5,000 for the student. In addition, taxpayers pick up approximately $3,000 of the cost of tuition for each student.

Virginia expects enrollment at our public colleges and universities to grow by 61,000 students by the year 2010. We need to find a way not only to maintain excellence in Virginia colleges and universities, but also to make sure all students graduate on time.

The Early College Scholars Program allows high school seniors to complete their high school diploma while simultaneously earning fifteen or more hours of transferable credits toward a college degree. That means a more productive senior year—and lower college tuition bills for families.

This option will allow high school seniors to have a semester of college under their belts before they arrive on a college campus. It will allow Virginia families to save the $5,000 that would have been spent on the first semester, and it will provide taxpayers with a $3,000 savings for each student who takes advantage of this opportunity. It’s a win-win situation for everyone involved.

An Early College Scholars Agreement will be established for high school students who are prepared and interested in accelerating their course work. This agreement will take place between the student,
parent, and school officials. These students will be noted in college applications as Early College Scholars.

Criteria such as a student’s academic record, previous successful experience in college-level courses, and an interest in accelerated courses will be used in selecting students for this program.

College credits may be earned through advanced placement (AP) courses; dual enrollment courses including those through distance-learning classes; the International Baccalaureate (IB) program; and the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP). Currently, about three-quarters of Virginia’s high schools offer some AP courses. To serve students in schools that do not offer extensive AP courses, the Department of Education has established a Virtual Advanced Placement School that will coordinate AP course offerings through distance learning at no charge to the student.

Along with the Virtual AP School, a website has been created to provide high school students and counselors with information on how to earn these credits. A “virtual guidance counselor” maintains the site, interacts with students, and assists school divisions in deciding appropriate course offerings.

Like the Path to Industry Certification, the Early College Scholars Program will increase in participation over time. I am pleased, however, that more than 6,600 Virginia students had enrolled in the program as of the fall of 2004. This will expand their opportunities in college, make the senior year more productive and engaging, and potentially save their family’s resources.

**Project Graduation**

The Class of 2004 was the first class in Virginia history that was required to complete high-stakes testing in order to graduate. In Virginia, our seniors must now earn six verified units of credit to graduate with a Standard Diploma.

Most members of the Class of 2004 were able to meet these new graduation requirements. But there were some students who spent last year playing catch-up. They may have failed our reading and writing Standards of Learning (SOL) exams, or lacked some of the other verified credits in core areas needed for graduation. The question we faced in Virginia was how to assist those students
at risk of failure without sacrificing accountability or gutting the standards that are so important.

Project Graduation has been our answer. It represents an aggressive effort by the state to reach out to at-risk seniors and provide them with the help they need to complete the requirements for graduation. Because no single approach works for all students, Project Graduation includes a variety of education techniques, ranging from summer academies to online tutorials to distance learning. In addition, Project Graduation highlights best practices on the part of school divisions in tracking the progress of students toward graduation. Through the intervention of this program, thousands of high school juniors and seniors have received the help they need to graduate on time with their class.

We are taking other steps to strengthen high schools as well. We have instituted a program of turnaround specialists modeled on similar initiatives in the private sector. These educators have received special training from a partnership between the Curry School of Education and the Darden Business School of the University of Virginia in how to address the special problems facing troubled schools. We are also enlisting the support of the private sector in our Partnership for Achieving Successful Schools (PASS), which focuses remedial help on schools at risk of failure.

Together with our efforts to strengthen early learning and elementary education, our senior-year initiative marks a clear departure from how business is normally done in our high schools. It will give many of our college-bound students a jump start on their college courses, it will help those who are entering the workforce attain better jobs, and it will deliver help to those students at risk of failure.
Mark R. Warner is the governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The first in his family to graduate from college, he completed his degree at George Washington University in 1977, and graduated from Harvard Law School in 1980.

As governor, Warner has implemented innovative, low-cost programs to increase student achievement and accountability in public schools through his Education for a Lifetime initiative. Governor Warner assembled a bipartisan coalition to win approval from the 2004 Virginia General Assembly for one of the nation’s most ambitious tax reform proposals, allowing the Commonwealth to make historic investments in public education, higher education, law enforcement, and healthcare, while preserving the state’s reputation for fiscal integrity.

As chair of the National Governors Association he has made high school reform the chair’s initiative for 2004–05. Governor Warner is also chair of the Southern Governors Association, recruitment chair of the Democratic Governors Association, and states’ cochair of the Appalachian Regional Commission.
For More Information
These profiles in leadership make clear that high school reform is becoming a national priority that can no longer be overlooked or approached apathetically. While serious efforts to help every child graduate with a meaningful diploma are underway in many communities, driven by innumerable individuals, this volume could only paint the art of high school transformation with broad strokes.

Readers who want to learn more about the authors, organizations, and programs featured in this volume should visit the websites listed below. Those interested in finding out more about high school transformation and gaining a deeper understanding of what it will take to ensure that every child has the opportunity to graduate from high school, ready for college and career, are invited to visit the Alliance for Excellent Education’s website, view its publications, and sign up for its electronic newsletter.

Melinda French Gates, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Education/
TransformingHighSchools/

Vartan Gregorian, Carnegie Corporation of New York
http://www.carnegie.org/

Wendy Kopp and Abigail Smith, Teach for America
http://www.teachforamerica.org/

Gerald Tirozzi, National Association of Secondary School Principals
http://www.nassp.org/

Jonathan Schnur, New Leaders for New Schools
http://www.nlns.org/

Richard Laine, The Wallace Foundation
http://www.wallacefunds.org/WF/

Dal Lawrence, Toledo Federation of Teachers
http://www.tft250.org/
Dan Challener, Chattanooga Public Education Foundation
http://www.pefchattanooga.org/www

Hon. Ron Gonzales, Office of the Mayor, City of San Jose, California
http://www.sjmayor.org/

Linda Murray, San Jose Unified School District
http://www.sjmayor.org/

Jerry Wartgow, Denver Public Schools
http://www.dpsk12.org/

Honorable Mark Warner, Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia
http://www.governor.virginia.gov/

Alliance for Excellent Education

Selected Alliance publications can be found at
http://www.all4ed.org/publications/index.html:

• *Every Child a Graduate: A Framework for an Excellent Education* (September 2002)
• *Investing in Excellence: Making Title I Work for All Children* (September 2001)
• *Adolescents and Literacy: Reading for the 21st Century* (November 2003)
• *Tapping the Potential: Retaining and Developing High-Quality New Teachers* (June 2004)

To receive *Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress*, the Alliance’s biweekly newsletter, please add your name to our mailing list at http://www.all4ed.org/whats_at_stake/mailinglist.html.
LEADERSHIP

PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP

Innovative Approaches to Transforming the American High School

Jerry Wartgow
Mark Warner
Linda Murray
Richard Riley
Gerald Tirozzi
Abigail Smith
Wendy Kopp
Vartan Gregorian
Melinda French Gates
Richard Laine
Dal Lawrence
Dan Challener
Ron Gonzales
Richard Schnur
Melinda French Gates