Every Child a Graduate

A Framework for an Excellent Education for all Middle and High School Students

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ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUCATION

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a national policy, advocacy, and research organization created to help middle and high school students receive an excellent education.

The Alliance focuses on America's six million most at-risk 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, DC, we work to make it possible for these students to achieve high standards and graduate prepared for college and success in life.

Our audience includes parents, teachers, 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 bi-weekly newsletter and regularly updated web site, www.All4Ed.org.

Author Scott Joftus joined the Alliance for Excellent Education as Policy Director in the summer of 2002, bringing to the organization over ten years of experience in national education policy, research, and evaluation.

Prior to joining the Alliance, Dr. Joftus was the Director of Policy, Research, and Evaluation at the McKenzie Group, a national comprehensive educational consulting firm. Previously, he served as a Senior Policy Analyst for the Council for Basic Education, managing projects that developed and analyzed academic standards, including the first-ever analysis of rigor in state standards. He worked with states and districts to develop and improve standards and associated reforms, developed and presented standards-based workshops for teachers, parents, and administrators, and wrote articles for publication.

From 1994-1996, Dr. Joftus worked on state education policy in California, participating in the design and implementation of two national evaluations: a high school drop-out prevention program and a short-term unemployment insurance program.

Dr. Joftus was selected as one of the first participants in Teach for America, where, from 1990 to 1992, he taught fourth-grade bilingual students, created and coached after-school basketball in California, and was a fifth-grade teacher in Brooklyn, NY.

Foreword

For many years, the United States has claimed with great conviction that "our children are our future" and asserted the importance of investing in them. Yet, despite some positive efforts that have resulted in better early education for our kids, the nation has continued to ignore the ways that we are failing America's children as they grow.

We are guilty of allowing some of our most vulnerable young people to fall through the cracks–the six million secondary school students who are most at risk of failing to graduate from high school or of graduating unprepared for success in college or a career. This is particularly troubling when one considers the long-term economic and social consequences of this neglect.

The President, Congress, and other policymakers have enthusiastically embraced the goal of "no child left behind." But only recently has the nation and its leaders started to recognize that a major component of that objective involves focusing more attention on our at-risk middle and high school students.

Now, we need to encourage the nascent national discussion about the ways in which the federal government can best become an active partner of states and local communities on this issue.

The question is not *whether* to act. It is *how* to do so most effectively. As *Every Child a Graduate* so eloquently states:

> The time has come for the federal, state, and local governments to form a national partnership that transforms middle schools and high schools from warehouses of student failure and frustration into centers of learning and engagement that prepare students for rewarding and meaningful lives.

This report, authored by Scott Joftus and informed by the thoughts and insights of many researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, provides a Framework designed to significantly change the status quo.

We at the Alliance for Excellent Education believe that by implementing the recommendations described here, our country can–and will–move rapidly toward a time when *all* American middle and high school students will receive an excellent education.

Susan Frost
Executive Director
Alliance for Excellent Education

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We are particularly grateful to the Alliance for Excellent Education's founders, Gerard and Lilo Leeds, for their vision and passion in advocating on behalf of millions of students and insisting that every child become a graduate prepared for college.

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The Challenge

Six million students in our nation's middle schools and high schools are in serious danger of being left behind as the nation begins to implement the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. These young people live in our cities, suburbs, and rural areas and reflect all income levels.

While great attention has been paid to increasing early childhood education opportunities and reaching the national goal of making sure every child can read by the third grade, little has been done to confront the real and growing problem: Hundreds of thousands of high school students can barely read on the eve of their high school graduation. The problem begins earlier, in our nation's middle schools. Less than 75 percent of all eighth graders graduate from high school in five years, and in urban schools these rates dip below 50 percent.

We believe that the great promise that no child will be left behind should not be limited to just the children in America's elementary schools. Overwhelmed with the task of implementing NCLB legislation, educators have all but decided that the limited resources they have will be targeted to improving only the front-end of the American educational system. The real tragedy is the quiet resignation that seems to pervade education circles and the view that little if anything can be done. We are promised that no child will be left behind, but these promises do not include adolescents who continue to struggle to meet high standards or, worse, simply give up and leave school without a high school diploma.

Approximately 25 percent of all high school students read at "below basic" levels. Affecting more than their achievement in English and language arts classes, low literacy levels also prevent students from mastering content in other subjects. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many teachers in schools serving large

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numbers of low-performing students are neither trained to teach reading nor well-qualified in the subject they teach. Due, at least in part, to lack of success in school, students become disengaged from school, which results in failure to work hard, seek assistance, and take appropriate courses.

The real tragedy is the quiet resignation that seems to pervade education circles—and the view that little if anything can be done.

Many high schools are not structured to ensure that needy students receive support services and individual attention from caring adults. This lack of targeted support forces students who lack skills and motivation to fend for themselves. At the same time, pushed by the federal government, many states are raising expectations for what these students should know and be able to do without providing them with the needed extra assistance to achieve at higher levels.

Facing even one of these barriers to learning would be a challenge for any student. In our nation's lowest performing schools, however, we ask students to overcome all of these barriers. Not surprisingly, many fail.

The Solution: Framework for an Excellent Education

The good news is that we know how to educate low-performing adolescents to high standards, and many schools are doing so. These schools are raising the achievement levels and increasing the options available to students who would otherwise drop out or merely "get by."

The good news is that we know how to educate low-performing adolescents to high standards, and many schools are doing so.

We know that there is no single strategy for increasing student achievement. Successful secondary schools take a multi-pronged approach to educate and support all students. Effective, research-based models share a set of common components for educating at-risk students to high standards. Working in partnership with states and local school districts, the federal government can play a significant role in ensuring that these essential components are in place in every middle school and high school in the country. Therefore, the Alliance for Excellent Education calls for the adoption of four research-based national initiatives that constitute a Framework for an Excellent Education for all middle school and high school students.

Adopting the Framework will help us to change the culture and conditions of middle and high schools, creating an academically rich, supportive environment that ensures that every student–regardless of socio-economic status and race–graduates with the skills to succeed in college.

The Framework addresses the problems of low literacy skills, poorly prepared teachers, absence of academic and social supports, lack of motivation, and other roots of student failure by pulling together resources and strategies that have been shown to improve outcomes for youth. These include:

- High-quality teachers
- Focused learning time
- Effective instructional methods and rigorous curriculum
- Counseling that encourages parental involvement
- Smaller learning environments

Specifically, the Adolescent Literacy Initiative, Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative, College Preparation Initiative, and Small Learning Communities Initiative make up the research-based components of the Framework.

The Alliance strongly recommends that Congress and the President support and fully fund these four initiatives for middle and high school students. Doing so will reinforce the commitment to improving public education made when President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. These initiatives–summarized briefly below–expand upon current or proposed policies in NCLB, including Title I, as well as policies to be debated in the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Education Act, and the Higher Education Act.

1. Adolescent Literacy Initiative

Approximately six million secondary school students are reading well below grade level. This prevents them from succeeding in challenging courses and places them at great risk of dropping out of school. Research shows, however, that students who receive intensive, focused literacy instruction and tutoring will graduate from high school and attend college in significantly greater numbers than those not receiving such attention. Despite these findings, few middle or high schools have a comprehensive approach to teaching literacy across the curriculum.

The Alliance calls for Congress and the President to strengthen and expand the Reading First program, which currently supports literacy in early grades, by adding an Adolescent Literacy Initiative to its mission. Under the new Initiative, every high-needs middle and high school would have a literacy specialist who trains teachers across subject areas to improve the reading and writing skills of all students. In addition, teachers would learn to identify reading difficulties and could ensure that students receive the extra help they need to become effective readers and writers.

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2. Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative

In addition to acquiring strong literacy skills to succeed in challenging courses, students need teachers who are knowledgeable in the subject they teach and can convey the subject matter effectively. For this reason, we propose a Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative that builds on Title II of the No Child Left Behind Act. The new funds would be used to provide incentives to educators to work in high-poverty schools, to provide mentoring for new teachers, and for ongoing professional development for all teachers and principals.

The Initiative addresses the fact that many of the most highly qualified teachers and principals avoid working in schools with the largest numbers of low-performing students. Moreover, many teachers and principals leave their profession because of low pay, lack of support, and limited opportunities for professional growth. The No Child Left Behind Act already authorizes significant funds to help states and districts recruit and retain teachers and principals and to reform certification and licensure

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systems, but more needs to be done to increase the pool of talented teachers available to serve our neediest students. The Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative includes several components to reach this goal, including:

- A powerful incentive–a $4,000 annual income tax credit–to encourage America's best teachers and principals to accept the challenge of working in high-needs schools.
- Funds to recruit beginning teachers for these schools that would target $20,000 in grants to each of our best college juniors. These grants would help them complete their studies and become certified to teach in their major. Additionally, up to $17,500 in loan forgiveness would be offered to highly qualified teachers in exchange for a commitment to teach in high-needs schools for at least four years. In return, the schools would provide a mentoring program for first-year teachers and a high-quality professional development program for all teachers.
- Funds to support new professional development programs designed specifically to help current teachers improve low-performing students' skills. To promote principals as instructional leaders, school districts would develop and manage academies and mentorship programs funded by new federal dollars and matching local and state funds.
- A call to upgrade NCLB's definition of a "highly qualified" teacher to require all secondary-school teachers to have the equivalent of a college academic major.
- Continued support for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The federal government would share some of the costs school districts incur if they raise salaries for teachers who achieve National Board Certification and teach in high-needs schools.

3. College Preparation Initiative

To start on a path to college, students must have a clear plan.

To start on a path to college, students must have a clear plan that assesses their needs and identifies courses, additional learning opportunities (e.g., tutoring), and necessary health and social services. Consequently, the Framework for an Excellent Education includes a College Preparation plan to be developed by all entering ninth graders with the assistance of teachers, an academic counselor, and their parents. Since sound advice and strong support are critical to guiding students and coordinating the efforts of parents, teachers, and community members to promote student learning, federal funding would be made available for additional academic counselors. These professionals would serve as student advocates, responsible for developing, monitoring, and ensuring the fulfillment of each student's plan.

The federal government also can help fund needed college counseling and individualized student learning by increasing funding for the GEAR UP and TRIO programs. These programs have strong track records for helping disadvantaged students progress through the academic pipeline from middle school through college but serve only 10 percent to 20 percent of eligible students.

Similarly, since before- and after-school programs extend students' learning time

beyond the regular school day and allow them to develop basic skills and participate in enrichment activities, federal funding for such programs should be increased to provide greater student access.

4. Small Learning Communities Initiative

Small schools personalize and contextualize students' educational experience.

Decades of educational reform and research have revealed proven strategies for improving middle and high school students' performance: using research-based strategies for improving students' literacy skills, delivering engaging instruction through teachers who are experts in their fields, providing relationships with caring adults, and ensuring that support services are available for those in need. One element, smaller schools, has been shown to enhance these and other strategies and to increase student achievement. Small schools personalize and contextualize students' educational experience and facilitate the implementation of other effective strategies.

These positive findings have spawned a widespread movement toward smaller learning environments, including building small schools and creating schools within schools. These schools are successful not *because* of their small size, but because small size allows strong principals to implement positive changes, including innovative programs, alternative teaching methods, and individualized attention for students. Building on the current Smaller Learning Communities program, the federal government can extend its current grant program for all large Title I-eligible secondary schools.

Investing in Excellent Education Pays Off

An investment in the Framework will pay for itself.

The Framework for an Excellent Education seeks to harness Americans' belief that every student deserves access to a high-quality education and should graduate from high school prepared for college and/or a meaningful career. The time has come for the federal, state, and local governments to form a national partnership that transforms middle schools and high schools from warehouses of student failure and frustration into centers of learning and engagement that prepare students for rewarding and meaningful lives.

The investment in this Framework will pay for itself. It will strengthen the nation's economy and communities by helping to make every student a contributing member of society. The amount spent on at-risk middle and high school students will be recouped many times over in economic growth, enhanced tax revenues, and reduced spending on unemployment, criminal justice, and social welfare programs.

THE CHALLENGE: ACADEMIC FAILURE AMONG SECONDARY STUDENTS

"My understanding is that high school should prepare you for college or get you ready for a future career, but a lot of things that we do in high school don't teach us anything." — Carolynn Laliberte, recent graduate of alternative Burchnell High School, who now lives on her own with her three-year-old son.

As the nation begins to implement the historic No Child Left Behind legislation one thing is very clear–six million students in our nation's middle schools and high schools are in serious danger of being left behind. These young people live in our cities, suburbs, and rural areas and reflect all income levels.

While great attention has been paid to increasing early childhood education opportunities and reaching the national goal of making sure every child can read by the third grade, little has been done to confront the real and growing problem: Hundreds of thousands of high school students can barely read on the eve of their high school graduation. The problem begins earlier, in our nation's middle schools. Less than 75 percent of all eighth graders graduate from high school in five years, and in urban schools the graduation rates dip below 50 percent.[1]

We believe that the great promise that no child will be left behind should not be limited to just the children in America's elementary schools. Overwhelmed with the task of implementing NCLB legislation, educators have all but decided that the limited resources they have will be targeted to improving only the front-end of the American educational system. Indeed, the real tragedy is the quiet resignation that seems to pervade education circles and the view that little if anything can be done. We are promised that no child will be left behind, but these promises apparently do not include adolescents who continue to struggle to meet high standards or, worse, simply give up and leave school without a high school diploma.

Many of the students who ultimately drop out or fail to finish school on time can be identified ahead of time. The six million secondary students who comprise the lowest 25 percent of achievement are 3.5 times more likely to drop out than students in the next highest quarter of

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academic achievement, and 20 times more likely to drop out than top-performing students.[2] Overall, the students in the lowest quartile account for about two-thirds of all dropouts. At the same time, these lowest performing students represent only 4 percent of all college graduates.

Implications of Academic Failure

Students who fail to develop skills and perform well on standards-based assessments will pay dearly for their academic failure. All states are ratcheting up standards, and about half will soon require students to pass exit exams to graduate.[3] And, though it is primarily focused on the early years of schooling, the new federal No Child Left Behind Act requires new high school tests in reading and mathematics (starting in 2002-2003) and science (starting in 2007-2008).

These exams will do little more than highlight the failure of huge numbers of students—many receiving inadequate education and virtually no assistance from their schools—unless we provide the students with the resources and strategies that have been proven to increase student achievement. In New York City, for instance, a quarter of the class of 2001 could not graduate because they failed the state's required Regents Exam in English or mathematics (and that proportion does not include the third of the original class that had already dropped out). Little more than half (56 percent) met the higher score that will be required in 2005.[4]

In Massachusetts, 82 percent of the class of 2003 passed the state English exam required for a high school diploma and 75 percent passed the required exam in math. But in urban districts, only 59 percent of students passed the tests. In vocational and technical schools, only 46 percent passed.[5] The failure rates now seen in New York and Massachusetts could become a national phenomenon.

The standards-based reforms increase pressure on students but reflect a crucial fact: Society can no longer afford to let students drop out or fall behind. In today's global knowledge economy, every student needs to achieve high standards, graduate from high school, and go on to some form of postsecondary education.

Most jobs today demand strong cognitive abilities and problem-solving skills. Today's workers must cope with myriad evolving technologies and make on-the-spot decisions that would have bewildered previous generations. As a result, it is all the more imperative that students attain a higher level of education.

In addition, jobs that were once available to dropouts and high school graduates are disappearing rapidly. In 1973, 36 percent of Americans in skilled blue-collar and related careers had not finished high school, while just 17 percent had some college or a degree. By 1998, only 11 percent had not finished high school, while 48 percent of such workers had some college or a degree. The trend is similar in clerical and related profes-

"The United States has increasingly turned to workers with at least some college or postsecondary training to fulfill a wide variety of labor-market slots, leaving the least educated workers with few opportunities to access good-paying jobs."

Anthony P. Carnevale and Donna M. Desrochers, *The Missing Middle: Aligning Education and the Knowledge Economy.* Educational Testing Service. April 2002.

sions. The percentage of such workers who had not completed high school dropped from 14 percent to only 4 percent, while the percentage with some college or a degree rose from 25 percent to 44 percent.[6]

Meanwhile, employment projections indicate that jobs requiring a bachelor's degree will grow by a quarter by the year 2008, and those requiring an associate degree will grow by nearly a third (31 percent). Those requiring only a high school diploma, however, will grow by just 9 percent.[7] In today's workplace, nearly eight in 10 adults with bachelor's degrees are employed, but for those who completed high school only, the figure falls to roughly six in 10. And for students who dropped out, it plummets to four in 10. The gap in employment between blacks who graduated and those who dropped out is even wider.[8]

Not surprisingly, employers are hesitant to hire applicants lacking basic skills. The failure rates on employment exams testing applicants' basic literacy and mathematics increased from 18.9 percent in 1996 to 35.5 percent in 1998.[9]

These days, a bad education is a million-dollar mistake. Students who drop out or do not go on to post-secondary education have significantly lower annual and lifetime earnings than those who continue their education. Simply put, students who learn more earn more.

Assuming that each works until age 65 and earns the average salary, a male high school graduate will earn nearly $333,000 more than a dropout, and a worker with some college will earn $538,000 more. A male with a college degree, a privilege available to less than 6 percent of those young people whose family income is less than $25,000[10], will earn almost a million ($945,670) more than the high school dropout.[11]

Causes of Failure

Why are American secondary school students performing so poorly? A primary reason is that significant

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Annual Earnings, 1999[12]

	Average Earnings for Men	Average Earnings for Women
High School Dropout	$25,035	$17,015
High School Graduate	$33,184	$23,061
Some College	$39,221	$27,757
College Associate Degree	$41,638	$30,919
College Graduate with BA	$52,985	$37,993
Professional	$100,000	$59,904

Literacy failure has become almost a national epidemic.

The consequence of having our least qualified educators responsible for our neediest students is clear.

numbers of students read poorly. National longitudinal studies show that approximately 75 percent of students with reading problems in third grade still experience reading difficulties in the ninth grade, and many suffer what has been called the "Matthew Effect," a gap between good and poor readers that widens through the grades.[13] It appears that if a student has not learned to read by the fourth grade or fails to improve as a reader after the fourth grade, she will not receive the support to learn to comprehend texts necessary for success in high school and beyond. This is especially true if she attends a school that serves large numbers of poor or minority students.[14]

Left unchallenged, literacy failure has become almost a national epidemic. Approximately 25 percent of secondary school students are reading at "below basic" levels, almost 20 percent of adolescents cannot identify the main idea in what they have read, and fewer than 5 percent can extend or elaborate on what they read.[15]

And reading problems are more widespread among poor students of color. The average minority or low-income ninth grader performs at only the fifth or sixth grade level in reading.[16]

Affecting more than their achievement in English and language arts classes, low literacy levels prevent students from mastering content in other subjects as well. This happens in two ways.

First, poor readers struggle to learn in text-heavy courses such as mathematics, science, and history. Second, poor readers are frequently blocked access to academically challenging courses, channeled instead into classes where they receive poor-quality instruction and a significantly narrowed curriculum.[17]

Students with low levels of literacy also tend to be taught by inexperienced, poorly prepared teachers, a problem that becomes magnified in poor and urban schools, which have a hard time recruiting and retaining the best trained teachers and principals.

Indeed, "the more impoverished and racially isolated the school, the greater the likelihood that students in the school will be taught by inexperienced teachers, uncertified teachers, and out-of-field teachers who do not hold a degree in the subject they are assigned to teach. Schools with these characteristics are invariably low-performing schools."[18]

For example, nearly one in 12 practicing teachers in Illinois failed a basic competency test; in schools serving high concentrations of low-income or minority youth, the number was one in four.[19] Similarly, across the country, one in eight teachers is uncertified (12.5 percent). In high-poverty schools, the figure is one in five (20 percent).[20]

Meanwhile, nearly three in 10 high school students are taught by teachers without a college major and certification in English (30 percent), mathematics (31 percent), science (27 percent), or social studies (28 percent).[21] Districts have reported comparable problems with recruiting

qualified principals.[22]

The consequence of having our least qualified educators responsible for our neediest students is clear: The achievement gap continues to grow. One study found that variation in teacher expertise (as measured by performance on state teacher assessments, years of teaching experience, and completion of an advanced degree) was the largest factor explaining the gap between black and white student achievement, accounting for 40 percent of total variation.[23]

When students continue to fail and are sent the message that no one cares about them, they become disengaged from school. This disengagement results in a failure to work hard, to seek assistance, or to take appropriate courses. "Today's students feel as though high school is irrelevant, that classes are boring, and that they are just passing time until something important [...] comes to pass," according to one analysis.[24]

Believing that school is boring or irrelevant causes students to become disengaged. Researchers have found that disengagement with school is common, with 40 percent of high school youth and nearly 50 percent of middle school youth reporting such feelings.[25]

Rates are even higher for adolescents and minorities attending urban schools.[26] Lawrence Steinberg has found that students become increasingly disengaged from school between seventh and ninth grade. He says "It has something to do with the nature of junior high schools or middle schools or with the lack of fit between the way these institutions are structured and the developmental needs of young teenagers."[27]

Unfortunately, many schools are not structured to ensure that low-performing and/or disengaged students receive support services and individual attention from a caring adult, forcing students who lack skills and motivation to fend for themselves. Indeed, out-of-classroom assistance all but vanishes after the eighth grade.

The remedial programs that do exist typically focus only on the most basic skills. Low performers are not given a chance to develop more advanced skills, such as the ability to comprehend new readings or analyze texts for specific purposes. In short, current extra-help programs pigeonhole these students in non-academic courses that lack rigor and rich content.

Too often extra-help is viewed as remediation rather than as an effective means to accelerate learning so students can master rigorous coursework.[28] Such pigeonholing disproportionately affects minority and low-income students,[29] resulting in demonstrable negative outcomes.

Bored by their unchallenging and seemingly irrelevant schoolwork, students fail to complete assignments. In a vicious cycle, schools respond by "dumbing down" content even further. Ultimately, some students simply give up out of frustration, boredom, or because they feel underappreciated or misunderstood.[30]

Unfortunately, many schools are not structured to ensure that low-performing and/or disengaged students receive support services and individual attention from a caring adult, forcing students who lack skills and motivation to fend for themselves.

THE SOLUTION: FRAMEWORK FOR AN EXCELLENT EDUCATION

- **Adolescent Literacy Initiative**
- **Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative**
- **College Preparation Initiative**
- **Small Learning Communities Initiative**

The goal of the Framework is to change the culture and conditions of middle and high schools, creating an academically rich, supportive environment that ensures that every student graduates with the skills to succeed in college.

The good news is that we know how to educate low-performing adolescents to high standards, and many schools are doing so, raising the achievement levels and increasing the options available to students who have too frequently dropped out or merely "gotten by." Realizing that there is no single strategy for increasing student achievement, successful secondary schools take a multi-pronged approach to educating and supporting all students. Effective, research-based models share a set of common components for educating at-risk students to high standards. Working in partnership with states and local school districts, the federal government can play a significant role in ensuring that these essential components are in place in every middle school and high school in the country. Therefore, the Alliance for Excellent Education calls for the adoption of four research-based national initiatives that constitute a Framework for an Excellent Education.

The goal of the Framework is to change the culture and conditions of middle and high schools, creating an academically rich, supportive environment that ensures that every student–regardless of socio-economic status and race–graduates with the skills to succeed in college.

The Framework addresses the problems of low literacy skills, poorly prepared teachers, absence of academic and social supports, lack of motivation, and other roots of student

failure by pulling together resources and strategies that have been shown to improve outcomes for youth: high-quality teachers, focused learning time, effective instructional methods and rigorous curriculum, counseling that encourages parental involvement, and smaller learning environments.

Moreover, the Framework is based on the premise that all schools should seek to foster an appreciation of American values within students. These values include knowledge of right from wrong, respect for differences in a diverse society, and understanding of individuals' privileges and responsibilities in a democracy.

In particular, the Framework includes four research-based components: the Adolescent Literacy Initiative, Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative, College Preparation Initiative, and Small Learning Communities Initiative.

The Alliance strongly recommends that Congress and the President support these four initiatives for middle and high school students. Doing so will reinforce the commitment to improving public education made when President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. These initiatives–summarized briefly below–expand upon current or proposed policies in NCLB and policies to be debated in the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Carl D. Perkins Vocational-Technical Education Act, and the Higher Education Act.

1. Adolescent Literacy Initiative

The main objective of the Framework for an Excellent Education is to provide youth with the skills they need to be successful in high school. Since no student with low literacy skills can graduate from high school prepared for college or a career, the starting point of the Framework is an Adolescent Literacy Initiative. The Initiative builds on the Reading First program, which will distribute $5 billion over five years to states to establish high-quality, scientifically based, comprehensive reading instruction for students in kindergarten through third grade, but which will not help middle or high school students.

The Alliance's Recommendation

Approximately six million secondary school students are reading well below grade level, preventing them from succeeding in challenging courses and placing them at great risk of dropping out of school. Research shows, however, that those who receive intensive, focused literacy instruction and tutoring graduate from high school and attend college in significantly greater numbers than those not receiving such attention. Despite these findings, few middle or high schools have a comprehensive approach to teaching literacy across the curriculum.

Consequently, the Alliance calls for Congress and the President to

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Under the Adolescent Literacy Initiative, every high-needs middle and high school will have a literacy specialist who trains teachers across subject areas to improve the reading and writing skills of all students.

strengthen and expand the Reading First program by adding an Adolescent Literacy Initiative to its mission. Under the Initiative, every high-needs middle and high school will have a literacy specialist who trains teachers across subject areas to improve the reading and writing skills of all students.

In addition, teachers will learn to identify reading difficulties and ensure that students receive the extra help they need to become effective readers and writers and thus able to succeed in challenging high school courses.

The additional federal funding will pay for the diagnostic assessments, research-based curricula, release time for teachers to participate in professional development, and literacy specialists to train all teachers in Title I middle schools and high schools.

With a comprehensive literacy program targeted to improving the skills of students reading below grade level, all teachers will be expected and empowered to ensure that every student has the literacy skills to succeed in challenging courses, meet academic standards, and graduate from high school prepared for college.

Supporting Evidence for the Adolescent Literacy Initiative

The Adolescent Literacy Initiative is based on three premises. First, all students – even those with very low literacy skills – have learning strengths. Researchers have found evidence suggesting that adolescents who appear most at risk of failure in the academic literacy arena are sometimes the most adept at (and interested in) understanding how media texts work and, in particular, how meaning gets produced and consumed. For example, in a review of literature, researcher Catherine Snow describes a four-year study of working-class adolescents deemed at risk of dropping out of high school.

The study noted that students were quite successful in producing their own electronic texts, such as multimedia documentaries, and critiquing media violence by using multiple forms of visual texts. The students were found to be capable and literate when print was not "privileged" over other forms of literacy. This finding has been replicated in a study of an after-school program.[31]

This research is important, as it shows that adolescents with reading problems are not "dumb," and that with the right motivation and training these students can learn at high levels. In fact, many, if not most, low-achieving secondary school students can master college-preparatory material if provided with literacy programs and other forms of extra help.[32]

Recognizing students' capacity to succeed in rigorous courses, Texas has passed legislation requiring that all high-school students take a college-preparatory curriculum, and California is considering similar legislation. It remains to be seen, however, whether students are provided the necessary support to be successful.

The second premise of the Adolescent Literacy Initiative is that, although more difficult than teaching young children, adolescents can be, indeed, must be, taught to read at much higher levels. The International Reading Association's Commission on Adolescent Literacy argues that improving reading in early grades cannot by itself solve literacy problems at the high school level because many students need help to progress through the later developmental stages of reading facility and comprehension.[33] According to the Commission, "Even if all children do learn to read by Grade 3, the literacy needs of the adolescent reader are far different from those of primary children. Many people don't recognize reading development as a continuum."

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University note that there is also a continuum of services that low-skilled readers require. The first group in this continuum consists of a very small percentage of students (5-10 percent) who are in need of intensive and massive extra help. Such students are those who enter ninth grade testing at the third or even second grade level and still need to learn elementary level skills. Next along the continuum, there are a considerably larger number of students who have mastered the most basic skills but lack intermediate level skills. These students can decode, but read with limited fluency. They test at the fifth and sixth grade levels and essentially enter high school without the benefit of a middle school education. Finally, there is a third group consisting of students who are not fully prepared to succeed in standards-based courses because they have only partially mastered intermediate level skills and knowledge and have not developed the more advanced reading capabilities increasingly assumed by challenging high school work.[34]

All but the very lowest of these readers (who require special remediation focused on the most basic decoding skills) can be helped to become significantly better readers. Exciting new research is finding that the deficits in brain organization and activation found during brain scans of poor adolescent readers, including those with dyslexia, can be reversed after sufficiently intense intervention lasting as little as two months.[35]

In general, adolescents with poor literacy skills need clear goals for a comprehension task, comprehension strategies, feedback on their progress, and the development of self-efficacy.[36]

Although there are few reading programs that have been scientifically proven to improve the literacy skills of adolescents, promising practices do exist. For example, Strategic Reading is an instructional component of the Talent Development High Schools comprehensive school reform mode. Students in the Strategic Reading course in Baltimore and Philadelphia have shown significantly greater gains

Improving reading in early grades cannot by itself solve literacy problems at the high school level.

The deficits in brain organization and activation found during brain scans of poor adolescent readers, including those with dyslexia, can be reversed after sufficiently intense intervention lasting as little as two months.

Teacher change needs support in the context of practice.

in comprehension and vocabulary sections of standardized reading tests than students in control groups receiving only the school's usual English curriculum.[37] In addition, Language!–which is a comprehensive literacy intervention for grades four through 12 used in general education for students reading below grade level and in programs for special education, Title I, and English language learners–has had a significant and positive impact in a number of middle and high school settings.[38]

Other research indicates that tutoring and other interventions help low performers achieve higher results. For instance, the Southern Regional Education Board's High Schools That Work program helps low-performing ninth graders complete algebra I, geometry, and two years of college-preparatory English (including doubling the amount of English and mathematics required in grades nine and 10).[39] Some 58 percent of students in the program who reported getting extra help from teachers had significantly higher levels of achievement.[40]

Similarly, research on the 21st Century Community Learning Centers found that students participating in after-school programs are more interested in learning, stay in school in greater numbers, and have higher levels of achievement in reading and math.[41] According to one report, "evaluations of high-quality ELO [Extra Learning Opportunities] illustrate that they improve academic achievement, prevent juvenile crime, decrease the amount of television watched, improve behavior in school, improve self-confidence, and show several other positive outcomes."[42]

Another study has found that enhancing adolescents' literacy skills through "teacher modeling, direct teaching of literacy skills in context, frequent assessment, focusing on higher-order thinking, and student collaboration" and by "explicitly teaching vocabulary, text structures, and discourse features of various disciplines" improves student perfor-

Teaching Literacy in Denver's Secondary Schools

In August 2002, hundreds of Denver's middle school and high school students ended their summer vacations with a surprise waiting for them. They returned to school to find that their schedules included the Reading and Writing Studio Course, a part of the district's new focus on literacy. The two-period-per-day program focuses on students reading below grade level and requires them to read a million words a year (about 25 adult-length books) and to write everyday. The program provides teachers with detailed lesson plans that describe mini-lessons and then give students the opportunity to read, write, and work on skills such as using quotation marks.

The program—brought to the district by Sally Mentor Hay, recently hired as Denver's Chief Academic Officer (CAO)—entails the use of literacy coaches to work with teachers to ensure that the Studios are taught effectively and that lessons are reinforced in other classes. The new CAO is confident that the program will have a big impact on student achievement. "You'll see it work," says Mentor Hay. "You'll be amazed."

mance in content area courses.[43] Students who receive concentrated, focused support in literacy graduate from high school and attend college in greater numbers.

Some large districts–including Los Angeles Unified School District and Miami-Dade County Public Schools–already recognize the importance and viability of improving the literacy skills of their middle and high school students. In 2002, Los Angeles embarked on a remedial reading program for 35,000 middle school and high school students who lacked the literacy skills they should have learned by the third grade.[44] Similarly, Miami began implementing a $6.7 million reading program in its 16 elementary, middle, and high schools that failed or nearly failed the state assessment.[45] Such programs suggest that educators want to, and believe they can, help adolescents who are struggling to read at grade level, but that the required investment is large.

The third premise of the Adolescent Literacy Initiative is that secondary school teachers need support if they are to teach their students to become better readers. The incidence of reading failure among students can be drastically reduced–says Louisa Moats, a reading expert–"when teachers are taught how to implement instructional programs based on scientific studies, when they are helped to understand the theory behind what they are teaching, and when they are supported by informed leaders."[46] Moats adds, however, that teacher preparation programs have "seriously underestimated" the demands of competent reading instruction.[47] Demands could be said to be even greater for middle and high school teachers who are typically not trained to teach reading and expected to focus on the content of their own discipline.

Researchers at the University of Kansas Center for Research and Learning found that secondary teachers can help adolescents become better readers, but, to do so, schools must clarify teachers' roles and expectations, support collaboration among the whole school staff, build an environment with special supports for literacy, and provide professional development for teachers. Literacy instruction, the researchers note, must include continuous assessment, instructional accommodations matched to needs, elaborated feedback, structured instruction to help students along each step, high-interest materials to engage students, and sufficient time for students to learn.[48]

To train secondary teachers in providing literacy instruction and assistance to students, professional development should avoid "one-time" workshops, be based on sound instruction tailored to teachers' unique environments, include peer mentoring and coaching, ensure implementation, provide follow-up assistance, and be offered at the school site.[49] "The salient point," writes researcher Patricia Anders and her colleagues, "is that teacher change needs support in the context of practice."[50]

Students who receive concentrated, focused support in literacy graduate from high school and attend college in greater numbers.

2. Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative

The most critical element to teaching literacy, and all other subjects, is ensuring the presence of high-quality educators in schools serving the neediest students. For this reason, the Framework for an Excellent Education includes a Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative that builds on Title II of the No Child Left Behind Act and current federal proposals under consideration by providing incentives and support to educators working in high-poverty schools.

No Child Left Behind and Expanded Loan Forgiveness

(Current Policy)

The Program: Eligible teachers can receive up to $5,000 in student loan forgiveness for teaching in qualified low-income schools.

Eligibility: Highly qualified teachers who were new Federal Family Education Loan or Ford Direct Student Loan Borrowers as of October 1998 and teach math, science, or special education in qualified low-income schools for five consecutive years.

Funding: In 2002, President Bush's budget proposed expanding this program, which is estimated to cost $45 million in fiscal 2003 and a total of $112 million over the next five years.

The Alliance's Recommendation

In the past, the federal government played a major role in teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention through the National Defense Education Act and the now-defunct TeacherCorps. Under the Framework for an Excellent Education, the federal government can resume this role by launching a Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative that encourages our best teachers and principals to work in needy schools, improve their skills, and grow in their professions. New funds would be used to provide incentives to educators for working in high-poverty schools, mentoring for new teachers, and ongoing professional development for all teachers and principals.

The initiative addresses the fact that, given the option, many of the most highly qualified teachers and principals avoid working in schools with the largest numbers of low-performing students.

Moreover, many teachers and principals leave their profession because of low pay, lack of support, and limited opportunities to grow professionally. The No Child Left Behind Act already authorizes significant funds to help states and districts recruit and retain teachers and principals and to reform certification and licensure systems, but more needs to be done to increase the pool of talented teachers available to serve

our neediest students. The Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative includes five components to reach this goal:

- **A powerful incentive–a $4,000 annual income tax credit**–to encourage America's best teachers and principals to accept the challenge of working in high-poverty schools. The credit would go to teachers in states and school districts that are willing to increase resources dedicated to paying teachers as skilled professionals.
- **Federal funds to recruit beginning teachers for these schools that would target up to $20,000 in grants to college juniors with a 3.4 grade point average or higher in their major.** These grants would help them complete their studies and become certified to teach in their major. And for highly qualified teachers, up to $17,500 in loan forgiveness would be offered in exchange for a commitment to teach in high-needs schools for at least four years.[51] In return, the schools would provide a two-year mentoring program for new teachers and a high-quality professional development program for all teachers.
- **Federal funds to support new professional development programs designed specifically to help current teachers improve low-performing students' skills.** The new program would focus on training high school teachers to help students improve their reading comprehension and fluency nation-wide. It might also include time for "lesson study," based on the Japanese model, in which teachers develop lessons collaboratively and share ways to improve them based on classroom experience.[52] To promote principals as instructional leaders, school districts might develop and manage academies and mentorship programs funded by new federal dollars and matching local and state funds.
- **A call to upgrade NCLB's definition of a "highly qualified" teacher to require all secondary-school teachers to have the equivalent of a college academic major in their subject area.** This tougher definition would require many current teachers to upgrade their content knowledge and teaching skills. To help them meet this higher standard, the federal government would help states offer teachers advanced training through colleges and universities; distance learning programs; and state-, district-, or union-run "education boot camps" that provide intensive summer and weekend study.
- **Continued support for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.** Teachers become National Board

The Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative builds on Title II of the *No Child Left Behind* Act by providing incentives and support to educators working in high-poverty schools.

Certified by passing a series of rigorous assessments. The process not only helps good teachers become better, but also encourages them to stay in the profession.[53] The federal government would share some of the costs school districts incur if they raise salaries for teachers who achieve National Board Certification and teach in high-needs schools. The federal government would also support other models for developing teacher career ladders that can help produce the next generation of urban school leaders.For instance, the Rochester, N.Y., Career in Teaching plan organizes teachers into four levels, with different expectations and tasks.[54]

Supporting Evidence for the Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative

The Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative, like the Adolescent Literacy Initiative, is based on three premises. First, compelling research indicates that teacher quality–though difficult to define–is the single most important school variable affecting student achievement.

A growing number of researchers–including Ronald Ferguson, Helen Ladd, and William Sanders–are finding that teacher characteristics have a greater impact on student achievement *gains* than any other variable.[55] A study by statistician William Sanders, for example, found that fifth-graders who had been taught for the previous three years by

Teach for America: Providing Low-Income Students with High-Quality Teachers

Teach for America (TFA) is probably the best-known teacher recruiting program. It is also one of the most successful. Describing itself as a national corps of "outstanding and diverse recent college graduates of all academic majors who commit two years to teach in urban and rural public schools," TFA placed more than 1,700 outstanding college graduates, of 14,000 applicants, in teaching positions in fall 2002.

Corps members attend an intensive five-week training session before their assignment and receive continuous professional support on the regional and national level. Corps members receive full-time teacher salaries, which currently range from $22,000 to $40,347, depending on the school districts that hire them, as well as transitional packages ranging from $1,000 to $4,800, and they qualify for student-loan forbearance and payment of accrued interest during their two years of service. After completing each of the two years of service, corps members also receive an education award of $4,725 (a total of $9,450 for the two years), which they can use to pay off qualified student loans or to defray future education costs.

Since 1990, the organization has placed 8,000 corps members in 16 urban and rural areas, and these teachers in turn have taught more than one million children. An independent evaluation of Teach for America completed in 2001 concluded that, on average, the impact of having a TFA teacher was always positive and that TFA teachers as a group showed less variation in quality, were more likely to hold a bachelor's degree, and were less likely to leave after the first year than teachers entering from other routes.

very effective teachers gained 50 percentile points more on a state's assessment than those who had been taught by ineffective teachers.[56] Studies in New York City have found that more than 90 percent of the variation in student reading and mathematics achievement was due to differences in teacher qualifications.[57]

To date, the teacher characteristics that lead to higher student outcomes are largely unknown, because pinpointing specific teaching traits has proven difficult using large-scale experimental studies. In a large-scale analysis of the determinants of student test scores in Alabama, however, Ferguson and Ladd have found that "the skills of teachers as measured by their test scores exert consistently strong and positive effects on student learning."[58]

As other researchers have concurred with this finding,[59] it seems apparent that any definition of a high-quality teacher must include the idea of a strong academic background.

It also seems apparent that all teachers and principals, even the best prepared, need continued professional development. Studies indicate that improving teacher preparation can boost student achievement. A 1996 analysis of 60 studies on teacher quality found a direct link between improvements in teacher education and student test scores.[60] Similarly, schools that have success with at-risk students were found to benefit from training staff within a comprehensive school reform framework.[61]

The second premise underlying the Teacher and Principal Quality Initiative has been discussed previously. As noted, tremendous disparities exist in student access to well-qualified teachers. It is well-documented, for example, that poor and minority students are significantly more likely than their white, middle-income peers to be taught by inexperienced, uncertified, and ill-prepared teachers.[62]

The final premise on which the Initiative is based is that incentives can be used to attract highly qualified educators to work in the country's neediest schools. Low salaries are widely believed to be one of the chief deterrents to becoming and remaining a teacher or principal. Remuneration is especially problematic in schools serving large numbers of at-risk students where effective teachers and principals often put in extra hours and deal with over-crowed classrooms, crumbling buildings, inadequate resources, and students who struggle with basic skills. Consequently, financial incentives have become an increasingly popular educator recruitment and retention strategy.[63]

For example, a $2,000 cash incentive is available to teachers employed in certain Maryland schools and 19 hard-to-staff schools in Philadelphia. Teachers in Fairfax County, Virginia, who have achieved national certification from the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) can receive an additional $3,500 per year for working in schools that serve large numbers of

Teacher quality—though difficult to define—is the single most important school variable affecting student achievement.

disadvantaged students. California has also pledged $20,000 ($5,000 a year for four years) to every nationally board certified teacher who agrees to work in a school in the bottom half of the state's academic performance list.[64]

Congresswoman Heather Wilson (R-NM), a sponsor of a federal proposal to provide tax credits to educators working in Title I schools, succinctly summarized how financial incentives would help attract teachers to schools serving large numbers of at-risk students.

"In reality, the problem is not an overall teaching shortage in the country, but rather a problem with the distribution of teachers between affluent and disadvantaged schools," said Wilson. "We need qualified, competent teachers to stay in the neighborhoods that need them most. [Financial incentives] will help recruit and retain teachers in the most needed areas."[65]

Long Beach United School District: Cadre of Coaches Improve Teaching

The Long Beach United School District instituted a "cadre of teacher coaches" into the field in 1998 to improve academic achievement, reduce teacher turnover, and help implement the district's standards-based reforms. All of the coaches were expert teachers with many years of experience, chosen for their demonstrated excellence and their success in adapting their teaching to the district's standards-based model. Their overarching responsibility is to help teachers use the district content standards to raise student achievement.

Each coach specializes in a specific subject—math, science, English, history—and works four days a week to mentor new teachers, model instruction methods, and help select and use resources. In addition to these content coaches, the school district provides a variety of first-year teacher coaches who help inexperienced teachers learn classroom management, essential elements of effective instruction and other important skills. The California School Board recognized LBUSD's Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Project (BTSA) as an exemplary and effective program by giving it the 2001 Golden Bell Award for High School Professional Development.

First-year teacher Jason Marshall's enthusiasm suggests the positive impact the coaches have on the school:

"I go home smiling every day," Marshall said. "I don't feel frustrated. Just yesterday we spent a few hours just picking (our history coach's) brain and working with her to try to create lesson plans for the next six weeks. We've got clear ideas about how to tackle each lesson we're going to be doing. I don't feel burdened. I feel excited about coming to school."

Marshall said some of his students had discipline problems at the beginning of the year, but he believes his fellow teachers' collaborative efforts made the difference. "Hamilton is known as a tough school to work in. For a first-year teacher at this school, it's pretty difficult. But I was able to get help from all four of our coaches. In classroom management, they all have their own style and you can choose what you like. They come in the class and model for you or give you tips. It's been an unbelievably positive year."

3. College Preparation Initiative

To ensure that students not only have the access to the highest-quality literacy instruction and educators, but also to the courses and support structures necessary to succeed during and after high school, the Framework for an Excellent Education includes an initiative that promotes student planning and support.

Building on current federal programs, the College Preparation Initiative calls for the development of a six-year academic and support plan for all entering ninth graders facilitated by an academic counselor and/or intervention specialist who would also be responsible for ensuring that students receive the services identified in the plan and transition smoothly to college or a career.

The Alliance's Recommendation

To start on a path to college,[66] students must have a clear plan that assesses their needs and identifies courses, additional learning opportunities (e.g., tutoring), and necessary health and social services. Consequently, the Framework for an Excellent Education includes the College Preparation Initiative, in which a plan is developed by all entering ninth graders in consultation with their schools. Since sound advice and strong support are critical to guiding students and coordinating the efforts of parents, teachers, and community members to promote student learning, new federal funding would be made available for additional academic counselors and intervention specialists. These professionals would serve as student advocates, responsible for developing, monitoring, and ensuring the fulfillment of each student's plan.

The federal government also can help fund needed college counseling and individualized student learning by increasing funding on the GEAR UP and TRIO programs. These programs have strong track records for helping disadvantaged students progress through the academic pipeline from middle school through college but serve only 10 percent to 20 percent of eligible students.

GEAR UP forms partnerships among colleges and universities, schools, and private organizations to help students beginning in middle school and through graduation. The partnerships provide tutoring, mentoring, information on college preparation and financial aid, and in some cases scholarships.

The TRIO programs help low-income and at-risk students from age 11 to 27 overcome barriers to success in school and college. They offer extra help, tutoring, mentoring, and counseling.[67]

Similarly, since before- and after-school programs extend students' learning time beyond the regular school day and allow them to develop basic skills and participate in enrichment activities, federal funding for the 21st Century Learning Community Centers program should be increased

The College Preparation Initiative calls for the development of a six-year academic and support plan for all entering ninth graders.

GEAR UP and TRIO programs have strong track records for helping disadvantaged students progress through the academic pipeline from middle school through college, but serve only 10 percent to 20 percent of eligible students.

to enable more students to have access to them. The 21st Century Learning Community Centers program provides funding to communities to establish or expand opportunities for students to receive academic enrichment (including music and art), tutoring, mentoring, counseling, and other support services (e.g., drug or violence prevention) outside of the regular school day.

Currently, however, more than 60 percent of poor middle school students neither receive care from an adult nor attend a center-based program after school.

Under the Framework for an Excellent Education, annual follow-up meetings would be held to make sure students remain on track and to provide an opportunity for them to catch up through extra help, academic enrichment, and other supports. Extra help should be geared toward helping low performers develop the comprehension strategies, learning methods, and study skills that more successful students pick up automatically.

Some students may be encouraged to participate in alternative programs that take non-traditional approaches to college preparation or vocational programs with rigorous academic components. Examples include the Minnesota Youthbuild Program, which helps students improve their basic skills while they build housing for the community.

Another example is the El Puente Academy for Peace & Justice, an alternative public high school in Williamsburg, NY, which combines an academically rigorous, project-based curriculum with supports such as internships, an extended school day, college and vocational preparation, and the arts.[68] Some students are encouraged to accelerate their learning through dual enrollment programs in local colleges.

Whether in alternative, non-traditional programs or comprehensive high schools, most adolescents need guidance and support at some point. The College Preparation Initiative provides the process and opportunity for a close relationship with a caring adult to ensure that students successfully complete high school and transition seamlessly to college or a rewarding career.

Supporting Evidence for the College Preparation Initiative

Young people have a strong need for community, a sense of meaning in life, physical and emotional security, and basic structure in relationships and living. As they move through and beyond high school, many of these basic needs evolve, requiring reevaluation and support at different times. In addition to changing relationships, questions emerge as to how to make a living, how to plan meaningful activities, and how to manage time effectively.

To facilitate these changes, young people need to establish a sense of purpose and understand how they are meeting their current and future needs.[69]

Not surprisingly, then, a common element among high-performing, high-poverty schools is that they offer extra help to students who need it. Such schools regularly assess students' academic progress, identify which students need help, and employ creative scheduling, such as after-school and summer school sessions, to give students the additional instructional time they need.[70]

These schools also tend to offer opportunities for students to learn study and social skills to help them negotiate the rigor of high school work and the challenges of adolescence.[71]

Assessing needs and providing guidance and support to adolescents is not only important for "at-risk" students. According to researchers Robert Rossi and Samuel Stringfield, regardless of the communities in which they live, "Students often do not know the required courses they need to take during the middle and high school grades to qualify for college admissions in major fields that can lead to a chosen career.

Students in these grades may also discount entrance into many more selective colleges because they are unaware of available sources of financial aid. Such lack of knowledge prevents students from seeing the current relevance of working hard in challenging courses to earn admission to more selective colleges or to preferred major fields."[72]

Academic guidance and support services are not the only benefits that students receive from the planning

Institute for Student Achievement

An effort that began as an after-school tutoring program for 25 ninth graders in Long Island, N.Y., is now a national nonprofit organization that works in partnership with schools and school districts to enable at-risk middle and high school students to stay in school, graduate, and go on to college or other postsecondary education, job training, or work. The Institute for Student Achievement (ISA) believes that with high-quality, intensive academic enrichment and counseling support, every child can succeed in school.

Two programs, COMET (Children of Many Educational Talents) for middle schools and STAR (Success through Academic Readiness) for high schools, have been implemented in 10 school districts in four states, serving 2,000 secondary students. In small learning communities, academic coordinators, counselors, and a career and college coordinator work with teachers to evaluate each student's academic needs, attitude, attendance, and parental support and develop an academic intervention plan. This support team stays with the students from year to year, providing continuity and consistency.

ISA's model has improved student achievement—all participating students progress from grade to grade on time, 95 percent graduate from high schools, 85 percent go on to postsecondary education, and attendance rates are significantly higher than the national average.

One ISA graduate said, "All through life, stumbling blocks are going to be thrown in your way. STAR gave us the positive reinforcement and showed us they are only stumbling blocks."

process. Research shows that one of the most important factors behind student success in high school is a close connection with at least one adult who demonstrates caring and concern for the student's advancement.[73]

In addition to helping chart a course and support students' progress along the way, then, the planning process can also be seen as a means to facilitate relationships between students and an adult in the school who provides guidance in the present to ensure success in the future.

In its image of the school of the future, one analysis envisioned high schools that provide information about their expectations and students' progress to students and parents on a regular basis. The vision includes guidance and career counselors working with students on learning plans that will "help transition the student into and through the high school years and will detail the courses needed to meet personal and academic goals."[74]

Under such a program, students, parents, teachers, and counselors work together to develop a plan that meets the specific student needs and to ensure that students receive the supports identified by the plan.

4. Small Learning Communities Initiative

Finally, the Framework for an Excellent Education calls for the development of school environments that are nurturing and academically focused and that facilitate the implementation of the Framework's first three initiatives. The Framework's Small Learning Communities Initiative builds on the federal Smaller Learning Communities program under Title V of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The Alliance's Recommendation

Decades of educational reform and research have revealed proven strategies for improving middle and high school students' performance–using research-based strategies for improving students' literacy skills, delivering engaging instruction through teachers who are experts in their fields, providing relationships with caring adults, and ensuring that support services are available for those in need.

One strategy, smaller schools, has been shown to enable these and other reforms and to increase student achievement: small schools personalize and contextualize students' education experience and facilitate the implementation of other effective strategies.

Time and again, research has found that small schools are an effective and cost-efficient way to improve student achievement and other outcomes for youth.

These positive findings have spawned a widespread movement toward smaller learning environments, including building small schools and creating schools within schools. These schools are successful not *because* of their small size, but because small size allows strong principals to implement positive changes, including innovative programs, alternative teaching methods, and individualized attention for students.

Building on the current Smaller Learning Communities program, the federal government can approve additional grants targeted for large Title I-eligible secondary schools.

Current grantees use funds, for example, to develop career academies or schools within a school, assist students transitioning from middle school, institute block scheduling, administer student advisory and mentoring programs, and provide professional development.

The Alliance calls for federal grants to all large middle schools and high schools serving significant numbers of poor students. Across the country, there are approximately 1,400 Title-I eligible (those with at

High Tech High: An Experiment in 21st Century Personalized Learning

With the structure and atmosphere of a modern office and the mission of immersing students in a rigorous learning environment that engages their interest, San Diego's new High Tech High (HTH) takes an innovative approach to alternative education. The small, public, tuition-free charter high school occupies part of the former Naval Training Center, and the students sitting at its workstations, project studios, construction labs, and meeting spaces are getting something much different than traditional instruction—they are learning through experience.

HTH's educational program is founded on three key principles: Personalization, Real-World Immersion, and Intellectual Mission. Each student has a personalized learning plan and an adviser who remains constant through the four years at HTH, both individually and as part of an advisory group with other students. Teachers and students remain together for two years, with each teacher assigned to about 50 students. The curriculum is aligned with college-entry requirements and based on periodic projects with hands-on components like internships rather than daily assignments. Students prepare personal digital portfolios to document their resumes, projects, and achievement; use computers to write papers and journals; and use multimedia and video tools to create online documents, Web sites, and projects. Projects are displayed to the community in public exhibitions. HTH also schedules daily staff-group planning, giving teachers the formal opportunity to plan, review, and collaborate on curriculum activities and learning programs.

Last year, HTH's students, who reflect San Diego's economic and cultural diversity, performed well on California's state test, edging out nearby La Jolla High, one of the wealthiest and highest-scoring schools in California. HTH had the highest test scores of any high school in San Diego County. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation awarded a grant to HTH to replicate their school design across the country, and American School Board Journal writer Lawrence Hardy describes the school as embracing "project learning, multilevel classrooms, and video portfolios of student work. While many schools hunker down under the weight of … policies that emphasize what students can't do, this 10-month-old school focuses on what they ***can*** do – offering them adult responsibilities and freedoms and a voice in running their school."

least 35 percent of their students in poverty) middle schools and 3,700 Title-I eligible high schools with more than 1,000 students.

Grants to these schools would allow millions of students to attend schools that are safer, more nurturing, and much more likely to improve student learning.

Supporting Evidence for the Small Learning Communities Initiative

In school districts around the country, personalized learning plans, reading coaches, and successful teacher recruitment initiatives are already in place. Almost without exception, the most successful programs are found in small learning communities.

While a small learning community is not a "silver bullet" for education reform, it is an important tool to ensure that the Framework for an Excellent Education is successful in raising student performance.[75]

Schools have grown tremendously over the last half-century; with school enrollment increasing five-fold on average and even more in low-income neighborhoods.[76] According to the U.S. Department of Education, approximately 70 percent of American high school students attend schools with enrollments of 1,000 or more students, and nearly 50 percent of high school students attend schools in which the student population is over 1,500.[77]

Large schools create huge problems for many students, with rigid bureaucratic structures and impersonal classrooms increasing student disaffection.

Large schools create huge problems for many students, with rigid bureaucratic structures and impersonal classrooms increasing student disaffection.

A growing body of research shows that small schools, defined as 400 to 800 students, combat student alienation and enable teachers to learn students' individual cognitive and

Talent Development High Schools

A Talent Development High School is a comprehensive reform model for large high schools that face serious problems with student attendance, discipline, achievement scores, and dropout rates. A key component of the model, created through a partnership with Johns Hopkins University, is the academy system; a Ninth Grade Success Academy helps ease the transition from middle to high school, and a Career Academy assists students in planning a path to college and the workforce. A four-period day allows for block scheduling, and a common core curriculum eliminates tracking for students. The curriculum focuses on innovations in reading and math instruction that enhance student engagement and learning, and the students spend twice as much time on English and math as other schools. Curriculum "coaches" work with teachers to ensure that the core components are being met. The results of the Talent Development Model have been very positive. For example, in one high school in Philadelphia attendance rose 15 percent, the number of children passing algebra and English grew by nearly 20 percent and the percentage of students suspended dropped by more than 10 percent after only the first year of implementation.

developmental needs and offer personalized assistance.[78]

These positive findings have spawned a widespread movement toward smaller learning environments, including newly built small schools and schools-within-schools, which are academies or small learning communities housed within larger schools.

These schools are successful not *because* of their small size, but because small size has been the catalyst for positive changes, including effective innovative programs and alternative teaching methods.

By contributing to a safer, more nurturing environment, small learning communities can also improve student achievement and can provide a more positive educational experience for students. This is especially true in schools with large concentrations of poor and minority children.[79]

Research has shown that smaller school size also has positive effects on student outcomes as evidenced in higher achievement and self-esteem, higher graduation and attendance rates, and lower dropout rates.

A four-state study by the Rural School and Community Trust shows that smaller schools reduced "the harmful effects of poverty on student achievement by up to 50 percent," with the greatest effects in the least affluent communities.[80]

Smaller schools are also safer schools where students are far less likely to experience physical danger, loss of property, and vandalism.[81]

Another important factor behind student success in high school, especially among disadvantaged students, is personalization.[82] In small schools, teachers get to know students as individuals and take an ongoing interest in their success. They have the opportunity to develop personalized learning plans that tailor the curriculum to the student's needs, both because the teacher knows the student's needs and has time to plan for and address them.

Small schools also allow administrators and teachers to communicate frequently and develop a sense of shared mission and common approach to teaching. Smaller staffs can more easily work collaboratively, address challenges and implement changes, maintain an academic focus, grow professionally, and integrate technology into classrooms.[83]

Moreover, although it would seem as though small schools are more expensive to operate than large schools, the added benefits of small schools appear to outweigh the costs. A 1998 report found that when calculating the costs to taxpayers per graduate, rather than by student, small schools were actually less expensive than large ones because of their lower dropout and higher graduation rates.[84]

Although the advantages of small schools are clear, school administrators with shrinking budgets cannot afford the transition from large to small.

There are three sets of costs that go along with creating smaller schools: modest redesign of schools (each

Small schools personalize and contextualize students' education experiences and facilitate the implementation of other effective strategies.

Time and again, research has found that small schools are an effective and cost-efficient way to improve student achievement and other outcomes for youth.

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When calculating the costs to taxpayers per graduate, rather than by student, small schools were actually less expensive than large ones because of their lower dropout and higher graduation rates.

smaller learning community needs to occupy space within a larger school); professional development (training educators for closer relationships, new techniques, the infusion of technology, connection of curriculum to real world experience); and development or modification of information technology systems.[85]

States facing budget deficits and school administrators with shrinking school budgets cannot afford these expensive transitions and assistance from the federal government has been minimal, at best.

In fiscal 2002, Congress appropriated $142 million for the Smaller Learning Communities grant program. These funds are competitive grants that allow school districts to plan, implement, or increase the number of Smaller Learning Communities in large high schools of 1,000 or more.

The program sets a goal of no more than 600 students in a learning community. President Bush's fiscal 2003 budget "zeroed out" funding for the program.

Consequently, the most significant investments in small learning communities is coming from private organizations. The Ford Foundation, Annenberg Institute, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Carnegie Foundation have all invested in smaller schools nationwide.

Over the last couple of years, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has committed $350 million in multi-year grants to school districts across the country to create small, focused and personalized high schools, either through redesigning large, ineffective schools or starting new small schools from the ground up.[86]

Although the public and private grants have been significant, there is insufficient support for small schools given the research base demonstrating their effectiveness in improving outcomes for youth.

INVESTING IN EXCELLENT EDUCATION PAYS OFF

The Framework for an Excellent Education seeks to harness Americans' belief that every student should have access to a high-quality education and graduate from high school prepared for college and/or a meaningful career.

The time has come for the federal, state, and local governments to form a national partnership to get the job done.

Federal investment in the Framework will be recouped many times over in economic growth, enhanced tax revenues, and reduced spending on unemployment, criminal justice, and social welfare programs.

For example, in recent decades, increases in education have produced as much as a fifth of the nation's productivity gains.[87]

But this is just a beginning, as we have the capacity to make additional gains through ongoing educational improvements.

If U.S. workers' literacy levels were the same as those in Sweden, for example, (where the percentage of workers at the lowest literacy level is a third of the U.S. percentage), our gross domestic product would rise by $463 billion.

The nation would also reap an additional $162 billion in federal, state, and local taxes.[88]

Similarly, increasing minority participation in college to the same percentage as whites would add $231 billion in increased gross domestic product and generate at least $80 billion in new tax revenue.[89]

It would also decrease the incidence of poverty, reducing the percentage of Hispanic families with inadequate incomes from 41 percent to 21 percent and the percentage of black families with such incomes from 33 percent to 24 percent.

Moreover, gains in education would save companies billions of dollars in training costs.

In Michigan alone, businesses spend approximately $40 million a year to teach their workers how to read, write, and perform basic math operations.

If U.S. workers' literacy levels were the same as those in Sweden—where the percentage of workers at the lowest literacy level is a third of the U.S. percentage—our gross domestic product would rise by $463 billion.

The nation would also reap an additional $162 billion in federal, state, and local taxes.

When including the cost of technology used to compensate for employees' lack of basic skills, the price of correcting the shortcomings of workers who leave high school without basic skills in Michigan is about $222 million each year.[90]

Improved education in middle and high schools, then, would not only improve outcomes for students, it would improve the bottom line for companies.

History shows us that these positive economic outcomes can be achieved.

The Morrill Act in 1862 and the GI Bill in 1944 both dramatically increased the nation's productivity by bringing more people into higher education.

There is no reason we cannot achieve comparable gains by helping more students graduate from high school with stronger skills.

The Framework for an Excellent Education has been developed to achieve these gains.

A federal investment in the Framework can transform middle schools and high schools across the country by giving every student the opportunity to meet challenging standards and graduate prepared for college.

And this investment in turn can strengthen the nation's economy and the nation's communities by helping to make every student a graduate who can achieve high standards and become a contributing member of society. ◘

A federal investment in the Framework for an Excellent Education can transform middle schools and high schools across the country by giving every student the opportunity to meet challenging standards and graduate prepared for college.

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