



PROSPECTUS

Renewing Our Schools, Securing Our Future: A Task Force on Public Education for the 21st Century

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*An initiative of the Center for American Progress and
the Institute for America's Future*

INTRODUCTION

American public schools have not kept up with the times. We've entered the 21st century, but in fundamental ways our school system reflects the needs and realities of a bygone era. This threatens the nation's prosperity and even democracy itself.

Renewing Our Schools, Securing Our Future is a joint project of the Center for American Progress and the Institute for America's Future. The Task Force will bring together educators and leaders in a range of other disciplines to create a new agenda for investing in our public schools. The Task Force will examine strategies that work, including "home-grown" initiatives of proven effectiveness and successful approaches adopted by other nations. The Task Force will conduct a series of public hearings in different regions of the country, will commission and publish papers by leading thinkers and researchers, and will develop concrete recommendations for modernizing and renewing public education in the United States.

THE CHALLENGE

Our system of free public education is a cornerstone of our economy and our society. The nation needs an educated workforce and citizens who can make informed choices in the marketplace and fully participate in civic life.

Ninety percent of the nation's children attend public schools, and public education enjoys overwhelming public support. Yet we have failed to fully mobilize the tools and resources at our disposal to ensure that the public education system enables all of our children to reach their full potential. As the National Commission on Excellence in Education pointed out twenty years ago in *A Nation at Risk*, this failure endangers the "intellectual, moral and spiritual strengths of our people."

A quick look at our current system, which for decades has remained largely unchanged, reveals how far we have to go. America was the first country to require 12 years of formal schooling. Yet today, that is inadequate to prepare students for the challenges that await them. Compulsory education begins with kindergarten at age 5 and ends at 16 – it starts too late and ends too soon. We employ an outdated agrarian model for the school day and school year. High schools prepare only a small proportion of students for college. Most classes are taught by a single teacher lecturing to 20, 30, or even more students, reflecting the production-line model of the Industrial Age, rather than the technological demands of our Information Age. Many school buildings date from the 1950s; they violate safety codes and hinder the integration of technology into learning.

In years past, a 16-year-old who left school to join the workforce could make a living and support a family. That is seldom possible today. Over 80 percent of the 23 million jobs that will be created over the next 10 years will require at least some postsecondary education. Over the last 30 years, the proportion of factory jobs held by individuals who attended college has tripled. By 1950, 60 percent of workers had unskilled jobs; in 1997, that number had fallen to 15 percent. Today, even jobs that require only a high school degree actually demand “college ready” skills – for example, prerequisites for a telecommunication line installer include algebra and trigonometry.

We must also take advantage of new research related to how children learn. For example, educational research related to early brain development – not available in 1950 – demonstrates the importance of high quality preschool programs and other early childhood interventions. Despite this information, many children do not have access to high quality programs. Research also tells us that the increased childhood exposure to television, computers, and video games affects attention spans and learning styles. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, children now spend 5.5 hours each day using these media; only sleeping takes up more of their time. These facts should inform how teachers teach.

Schools also must respond to changes in the American family and the social structure since the 1950s. One-third of women over 20 worked in 1950; today, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly two-thirds do so. The number of single mothers and the number of teenage mothers – who are much more likely to be poor – has also grown. As more mothers work, families – especially poor and single parent families – need access to after-school and summer programs.

We are now seeing the largest increase in the student population since the baby boom. One in five public school children is poor. Although the nation made headway in desegregating public schools in the 1970s and 1980s, demographic shifts have reversed much of that progress, concentrating poor and minority children in schools with the fewest resources. Disparities in resources are a major cause of persistent achievement gaps among different racial and ethnic groups. For example, the math and reading skills of African American and Latino 17-year-olds equal those of white 13-year-olds. In addition, massive increases in immigration are filling some schools with students who do not speak English – including schools in communities that have little or no prior experience with immigrants.

Among these significant challenges, there are bright spots, and new developments that engender positive change. We now know that all children can achieve to high standards. New research allows us to design instruction in a way that responds to each child’s individual needs.

Evidence shows that many public schools are working. Others are not, leading some critics to conclude that public schools will never be up to the challenge. These critics urge the adoption of private school voucher schemes and other measures that would diminish the already inadequate resources available for public education. While such efforts may be well-intentioned, the challenges are real and serious, and they cannot be addressed by turning our backs on public schools.

OUR RESPONSE

Renewing Our Schools, Securing Our Future will convene leading thinkers in an examination of how our public education system can be redesigned to address inequities and ensure that it responds to the demands of the new century. We will engage Americans in this effort through a series of public hearings around the nation and by publishing op-ed pieces and longer papers and articles. The project will conclude with a series of concrete recommendations for modernizing and renewing public education – reforms we believe essential to the nation’s future economic and civic well-being.

We start with the recognition that the current scope of the universally available public system is too limited. We will call for access for every child to preschool through at least two years of education after high school graduation – a “P-14+” initiative – and we will explore and outline a realistic plan for creating such a system. We also will call for greater integration among preschool, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education (“P-20”).

We will examine strategies for structuring K-12 schools so they prepare every student for advanced learning and for life in light of 21st century demands. The most critical component to improving outcomes in our elementary and secondary schools is teacher quality. We will explore approaches that will attract and retain gifted teachers and provide them with the support they need to meet the challenges they face.

Every Student Prepared: A proven tool for ensuring success in school and in life is access to high quality early childhood programs. Research tells us that critical brain development takes place even before birth and in the first year of life, and that the first few years determine how our brains are “wired.” We must strive as a society to ensure high quality prenatal, infant and toddler care.

Research also clearly indicates the benefit of universal access to formal early education programs for pre-schoolers. Children in good early learning programs are almost twice as likely to be in school at age 21 and to attend a four year college. The well-known High/Scope Perry Preschool study reveals that children who participated in High/Scope programs, in comparison to those who participated in other programs, were more likely to: (1) not be arrested; (2) have higher monthly earnings; (3) own homes and cars; (4) stay off welfare assistance; (5) graduate from high school; (6) stay married; and (7) avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

If our nation is to maximize its investment in public education, we must explore the broad range of effective early education strategies, including a minimum commitment of universal access to at least one year of preschool.

Redesigning Schools, Welcoming Innovation: The Project will strive to “think outside the box” in identifying innovative ideas that work.

Successful schools use an array of techniques to create learning environments that promote effective instruction. Many do so by building strong relationships between teachers and students and enabling teachers to take each student’s needs into account.

We will examine a wide range of approaches, including small classes, opportunities for teacher collaboration, small schools, and classes and schools that allow for more fluid advancement from grade to grade by combining multiple grade levels. Some have suggested eliminating middle schools as we now know them in order to improve transitions to the secondary school level and keep students in school longer. After reviewing the evidence, we will make recommendations that optimize learning and child development.

Extending the school day through quality afterschool programs will likely be among the necessary ingredients for such a model. Children in quality afterschool programs have better grades and conduct in school and lower incidences of drug use, violence and teen pregnancy. These programs also provide opportunities for enrichment and social interaction that help build important nonacademic strengths, including artistic, interpersonal and communication skills. We also will look to communities with experience with extended school years – beyond nine months – and consider the impact and viability for broader application.

Children's ability to learn and succeed in school often is affected by challenges arising outside of school. To meet those challenges, we need to consider the benefits – to children, schools and society – of building stronger connections between educational systems and other social and community services. We also know that strong relationships between schools and families improve student performance, and we need to identify the most successful models for strengthening those relationships. As more and more parents work and societal pressures increase, our schools and communities need to think creatively about how best to deliver an integrated array of services to families.

We also must address the huge challenge presented by aging, dilapidated facilities and growing student populations. Far too many students are being taught in trailers, closets, libraries and gyms, or in buildings that do not meet basic safety regulations. In 1995, the General Accounting Office estimated that we need \$112 billion simply to bring schools up to safety standards.

We must ensure that all children have access to a safe learning environment. As we strive to create the next generation of schools, we also need to incorporate infrastructure improvements that provide access to new technologies – both to enhance the learning experience and to ensure that students become proficient in the use of technologies they will need to succeed in the workforce. A 2000 study by the National Education Association estimated that we need \$322 billion to update schools for advanced technology and needed repairs.

Access to Advanced Learning for All Students: The rewards of advanced education – to students and to the economy as a whole – continue to grow. College graduates earn 80 percent more than high school graduates – an average of over \$1 million more over a lifetime. Yet these rewards remain elusive for many in our society. College completion rates for white students are twice those of African Americans and three times those of Hispanics. College participation rates are 30 percentage points lower for poor students than for their higher income peers. Addressing these disparities will benefit our democracy and society as a whole by creating a better educated citizenry. It also will have tremendous impact on our economic well being: the Congressional Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance estimates that closing the gap based on

income would add \$250 billion to our annual gross domestic product and would provide \$85 billion in tax revenues.

The first step in ensuring access to college for all students is to ensure that our elementary and secondary education system is preparing them for the challenges of postsecondary education. More than 70 percent of high school graduates enter two- and four-year colleges, but fewer than half leave with a degree. Part of the problem is the lack of connection between our K-12 and postsecondary systems. Standards for completion at the high school level often do not prepare students for the expectations they must meet in college. Lacking basic skills, many students fail to graduate from high school. In some schools, dropout rates exceed 50 percent. Among those who go to college, 53 percent must take at least one remedial English or math class. We will explore the many innovative models for ensuring that students successfully complete high school and that they have the preparation, information and encouragement that they need to pursue and complete advanced learning.

We also must ensure that students are not denied access to higher education due to financial constraints. More and more students – including many in the middle class – are finding college out of their reach. Tuition and fees have risen by as much as 40 percent in some states. Students are taking on high levels of student debt (\$17,000 on average), working long hours during school (to the detriment of their academic and overall college experience), or forgoing college altogether. According to a recent report by the Congressional Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, more than four million high school graduates will not attend a four-year college and two million will attend no college at all due to financial barriers. This represents a huge loss to the nation.

Not every student will choose to attend college, but every student should be able to do so. We must ensure that students who require financial assistance have access to at least two years of college. At the same time, we should expand support for students seeking four year and graduate degrees.

Renewing Our Commitment to Teaching as a Profession: The 21st century demands on teachers are greater than ever. As a recent report released by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future stated, “[i]n order to prepare each child for successful employment and productive citizenship in the 21st century, teachers must know their subject areas deeply, understand how children learn, be able to use that knowledge to teach well, use modern learning technologies effectively and work closely with their colleagues to create rich learning environments.”

For many reasons, it has become harder to attract and retain strong teachers. Over the last 50 years, women have had expanded opportunities beyond traditional careers in teaching and nursing. Teacher salaries are not competitive with other professions requiring a four year degree. Compensation levels inconsistent with job market realities and poor working conditions discourage talented individuals from entering the teaching profession, create high turnover rates, and lead to acute shortages of teachers in areas such as math, science, and special education. These problems are most acute in high poverty schools, leading to huge disparities in the quality of the teaching workforce between high-poverty and low-poverty schools.

Just as our schools must reflect 21st century realities, the teaching profession should reflect a 21st century job market. We must ensure a stable and adequate supply of highly-qualified and committed teachers for all students through compensation structures and support systems that promote and reward professional excellence and encourage gifted teachers to serve in areas of higher need. Support systems should include strategies that improve teachers' job satisfaction while also improving instruction. The 19th century production model of one teacher in an isolated classroom must make way for an information age model incorporating team strategies. Moreover, teachers must be given opportunities to be full participants in the design and direction of their schools.

CONCLUSION

We anticipate calling for significant reforms. Some of them will challenge our capacity for change and some will be costly. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "There is no easy way to create a world ... where all children receive as much education as their minds can absorb. But if such a world can be created in our lifetime, it will be done in the United States ... by people of good will." We believe that our nation can achieve the goal envisioned by Dr. King. Indeed, we cannot afford to fail.

Co-Chair and Co-sponsor Biographies

Co-Chair, Governor Janet Napolitano was sworn into office in January 2003 and has made her mark as an activist governor who moves quickly to approach the biggest problems facing the state. In her first year in office, she won approval of a budget that erased a billion-dollar state budget deficit without raising taxes or cutting funding for public schools or other vital services. Now in her second year as Governor, a centerpiece of her administration is to ensure that all Arizona children will report to first grade safe, healthy and ready to succeed academically. To that end, she is working hard to establish full-day kindergarten and a quality childcare rating system as options available to parents throughout Arizona. She is also working aggressively to redirect Arizona's economy toward high tech industries offering high-skill, high-wage jobs. Prior to being elected Governor of Arizona, she served one term as Arizona Attorney General and four years as U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona. Born in New York City and raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico she is a distinguished alumna of Santa Clara University and the University of Virginia Law School. She has lived in Arizona since 1983, when she moved to Phoenix to practice law.

Co-Chair, Philip D. Murphy is a Senior Director of The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc. He served on Goldman Sachs Management Committee from 1999 until 2003 and co-headed its Investment Management Division from 2001 until 2003. During over 20 years at Goldman Sachs, Mr. Murphy developed some of the firm's most important global client relationships and helped set and execute the strategy for a variety of businesses. He hired and mentored scores of professionals. He chaired a series of firm-wide task forces and committees on topics such as: compliance and reputational judgment, reinvigoration of a client culture, internal communications, and articulation of the firm's public benefit. Mr. Murphy is also very active with a number of public interest organizations such as the NAACP, 2nd Floor Advisory Council, and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, among others. Mr. Murphy is a native of the Boston area and is a graduate of Harvard College and The Wharton School. He lives in New Jersey with his wife Tammy, sons, Josh, Charlie and Sam, and daughter Emma.

Co-Chair, Roger Wilkins, is the Clarence J. Robinson Professor of History and American Culture at George Mason University. During the Johnson administration, Wilkins served as Assistant Attorney General. In a distinguished journalism career, he has written for both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, and he was associate editor of *The Washington Star*. While on the editorial page staff of *The Washington Post*, he shared a Pulitzer Prize in 1972 for Watergate coverage with Woodward, Bernstein and Herblock. He served as past chair of the Board of Trustees of the Africa America Institute and is a member of the Board of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. He is publisher of NAACP's journal *Crisis* and has served on the Board of Trustees of the University of the District of Columbia and on the District of Columbia Board of Education. Wilkins holds a law degree from the University of Michigan. His book *Jefferson's Pillow: The Founding Fathers and the Dilemma of Black Patriotism* was published in 2001 and won the 2002 NAIBA Book Award for Adult Non-Fiction. His current interest is in early childhood education for America's poorest children. He now serves on the Board of the Education Trust and is doing research on a book on education and poverty. He and his wife,

Patricia King, the Carmack Waterhouse Professor of Law, Medicine, Ethics, and Public Policy at the Georgetown University Law Center, live in Washington. Professor Wilkins has three grown children.

Robert L. Borosage is President of the Institute for America's Future, an organization founded to put forth a populist economic agenda for our country's future. Previously, Borosage was the founder and Director of the Campaign for New Priorities, involving over 100 organizations in the call to reinvest in America in the post-Cold War era. Mr. Borosage writes widely on political, economic, and national security issues for publications including the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, the Philadelphia Inquirer, and The Nation. He is a frequent commentator on television and radio, including Fox Morning News, Radio Nation, National Public Radio, C-SPAN, and Pacifica Radio. He has served as an issues advisor to progressive political campaigns, including those of Senators Carol Moseley-Braun, Barbara Boxer, and Paul Wellstone. In 1988, he was Senior Issues Advisor to the presidential campaign of Reverend Jesse L. Jackson.

John Podesta is the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Center for American Progress. Podesta served as Chief of Staff to President William J. Clinton from October 1998 until January 2001, where he was responsible for directing, managing and overseeing all policy development, daily operations, congressional relations, and staff activities of the White House. He coordinated the work of cabinet agencies with a particular emphasis on the development of federal budget and tax policy, and served in the President's Cabinet and as a Principal on the National Security Council. Podesta is currently a Visiting Professor of Law on the faculty of the Georgetown University Law Center, a position he also held from January 1995 to 1997. He has taught courses on technology policy, congressional investigations, legislation, copyright and public interest law. Podesta is considered one of Washington's leading experts in technology policy, and has written a book, several articles and lectured extensively on these issues.

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