
Foreword

America's public education system is critical to our economy and is also the foundation of our democratic rights and freedoms. A quality education provides children with the knowledge and problem-solving skills necessary to succeed in the workplace, and equally important, provides them with the capacity for sound judgment, self-awareness and critical thinking about the world around them. Our nation's commitment to public education has reinforced our democracy and helped establish America as a global economic superpower. With unprecedented political and economic shifts rapidly reshaping the world today, a renewed investment in and commitment to universal high-quality education will be critical to sustaining America's overall economic health and renewing a strong and vibrant citizenry in the 21st century.

Renewing Our Schools, Securing Our Future: A National Task Force on Public Education was formed to address the challenges facing our education system in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. It began with a simple premise: we have entered the 21st century, but our school systems too often reflect the needs and realities of a bygone era. While the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) brought needed attention to measuring progress and holding schools accountable, it did not address fundamental challenges facing our education system. It is clear that more is needed if we are going to prepare our children for the awesome challenges they will face in this century. Comprised of educators and leaders from a range of disciplines, the Task Force of twelve individuals set out to develop an agenda that could be supported by parents, business leaders, students, educators and political leaders of all persuasions – an agenda that would prepare all of America's students to succeed in the 21st century.

For more than a year, the Task Force has investigated and considered new and innovative strategies to revitalize public education. It has reviewed substantial amounts of material about education in the United States and elsewhere. It has considered social, economic and demographic trends and their relationships to education. It has examined a wide range of approaches to improving education and to expanding how we think about the education system. The Task Force commissioned a number of papers and, during 2004, it held a series of public forums in six cities throughout the United States to examine successful strategies, initiatives and approaches to strengthening the education system. The Task Force investigations, papers and forums have culminated in this report, which outlines a comprehensive plan for closing the learning gap among our own students and with others across the globe.

The Task Force is sponsored by the Center for American Progress and the Institute for America's Future. The Center for American Progress, led by President and CEO John D. Podesta, is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. It works to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems.

The Institute for America's Future, led by President Robert L. Borosage, is a center of nonpartisan research and education. Drawing on a network of scholars, activists and leaders from across the country, IAF develops policy ideas, educational materials and outreach programs. IAF focuses on kitchen-table concerns such as economic security, education, retirement security, health and safety on the job, clean water and safe food.