

Renewing our Schools,  
Securing our Future



## OVERVIEW

*Renewing Our Schools, Securing Our Future:  
A National Task Force on Public Education*

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



Robert L. Borosage  
President  
1025 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 205  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 955-5665  
[www.ourfuture.org](http://www.ourfuture.org)



John D. Podesta  
President and CEO  
1333 H Street, NW, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 682-1611  
[www.americanprogress.org](http://www.americanprogress.org)

# **OVERVIEW**

## **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: A National Task Force on Public Education** 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 disciplines to create a new agenda for investing in our public schools. It is Co-Chaired by the Honorable Janet Napolitano, Governor, State of Arizona; Philip D. Murphy, Senior Director, The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc.; and Roger Wilkins, Professor, History and American Culture, George Mason University.

The Task Force will examine strategies that work, including "home-grown" initiatives of proven effectiveness and successful approaches to address inequities and ensure that our public education system responds to the demands of the new century. We will engage Americans in this effort through a series of public forums in different regions around the country, and by publishing op-eds, papers and articles. The project will conclude with a series of concrete recommendations for modernizing and renewing public education in the United States – reforms we believe essential to the nation's future economic and civic well-being.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

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."

Evidence shows that while many public schools are working, others are not, which leads 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**

The Project will strive to "think outside the box" in identifying innovative strategies. The Task Force begins with the recognition that the current scope of the universally available public system is too limited for the future. 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") and demand that all students be fully prepared for advanced learning.

We will investigate creative strategies for structuring K-12 schools. We will examine a wide range of approaches including small classes, charter schools, opportunities for teacher collaboration, small schools, and schools that use alternative models for grade structures. In addition, we will look at strategies that go beyond the traditional school day and beyond schools to community partners, including parents and families.

We will consider ways to meet the huge challenge presented by aging, dilapidated facilities and growing student populations so that all children have access to a safe learning environment. We will examine 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.

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, provide them with the support they need to meet the challenges they face, and assign them equitably among 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.

## ***HEARING DATES, LOCATIONS AND TOPICS***

Portland, Oregon	Community Schools: Working Together to Address the Needs of All Children August 27, 2004
Columbus, Ohio	Early Childhood Education: An Investment in Our Future September 9, 2004
Albuquerque, New Mexico	Workforce Development: Ensuring Students Have the Tools to Succeed September 28, 2004
St. Louis, Missouri	Postsecondary Education: Ensuring Access for All October 20, 2004
Phoenix, Arizona	A High Quality Teacher for Every Classroom: Hiring, Supporting, Retaining and Assigning Them Equitably November 19, 2004
New York, NY	Redesigning Schools for the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century: Promising Innovations December 10, 2004

## ***TASK FORCE MEMBERS***

**The Honorable Janet Napolitano – Co-Chair**  
Governor, State of Arizona

**Philip D. Murphy – Co-Chair**  
Senior Director, The Goldman Sachs Group, Inc.

**Roger Wilkins – Co-Chair**  
Professor, History and American Culture  
George Mason University

**John H. Buchanan**  
Former Member of Congress

**Louis Caldera**  
President, University of New Mexico

**Charita L. Crockrom**  
Principal, John F. Kennedy High School  
Cleveland, Ohio

**Judith A. McHale**  
President and Chief Executive Officer, Discovery Communications, Inc.

**Margaret A. McKenna**  
President, Lesley University

**Delia Pompa**  
Principle, DMP Associates and former Director of the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs, United States Department of Education

**James Pughsley**  
Superintendent, Charlotte-Mecklenberg Public Schools  
Charlotte, North Carolina

**Wendy D. Puriefoy**  
President, Public Education Network

**Chauncey Veatch**  
2002 National Teacher of the Year, Coachella Valley High School  
Thermal, California

## ***SPONSORS***

**Robert L. Borosage**  
President, Institute for America's Future

**John D. Podesta**  
President and Chief Executive Officer, Center for American Progress  
Former Chief of Staff to President William J. Clinton

## ***PROJECT DIRECTOR***

**Cynthia G. Brown**  
Director, Renewing Our Schools, Securing Our Future: A National Task Force on Public Education

[cbrown@americanprogress.org](mailto:cbrown@americanprogress.org)