

standards-based approach to school improvement. It must energize itself also to ensure that all students acquire a solid academic foundation that will prepare them for success after high school.

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## What Students Need to Succeed: An Agenda for Change

The Education Trust

For today's young people, success in work and in college begins on the same curricular path in high school. Establishing this new common curriculum and providing it to all students will take meaningful K-16 efforts in which K-12, higher education, business and policymakers all have roles to play.

### Start with your data

Regardless of whether these K-16 action plans are formed at the local, state or national level, they should be driven by data. Indeed, the first task for K-16 partners is to collect and analyze their own data. They should look at enrollments, achievement and attainment of their students both in high school and college, and examine how resources, including qualified teachers, are distributed. If possible, they should track student high school course-taking and test scores, and compare these to their performance in college and the workplace.

With data in hand, policymakers, educators and communities can make sure students have the curriculum they deserve by providing the following:

#### *High school courses aligned to postsecondary requirements*

It may sound obvious, but it needs to be said: students cannot learn what they have not

been taught. Algebra, for example, is foundational to later success. But students will never even see algebra in courses like "Contemporary Mathematics."

**States and districts need a rigorous "default" high school curriculum.** The best data we have show that students enrolled in the college-preparatory track in high school are more successful whatever they do after high school. An immediate action, then, is to make this sequence the recommended or "default" curriculum for rising ninth-graders, at the very least for courses in English language arts and mathematics. The only way high-schoolers can be enrolled in something less rigorous is if students and their parents sign themselves out of the high-level courses.

Like Texas, states and districts should take the additional step of refusing to award high school credit for courses such as "Correlated Language Arts," "Fundamentals of Mathematics," and other low-level substitutes for learning English and mathematics.

**Higher education needs to agree on a common definition of the skills students need to begin credit-bearing courses.** As important as it is for K-12 to get its ducks in a row, aligning the system works two ways. For its part, higher education needs to be clear about the level of reading, writing and

mathematics skills incoming freshmen need to begin credit-bearing work. Different admissions requirements are fine. But consistent placement policies that include two- and four-year institutions will give high schools the clear target they need to prepare their graduates. Colleges will benefit, too, when they can staunch the current flow of resources into remediation and channel them back into their academic programs.

#### *Good teachers and instruction*

Once students get into high-level courses, they need knowledgeable teachers who can provide instruction equal to the quality of content. While we acknowledge that staffing presents a huge challenge for some districts—especially those serving large numbers of low-income students and students of color—there are things policymakers can do to help:

**States and districts should examine their employment practices.** Richard Ingersoll of the University of Pennsylvania has found that restrictive state and district policies about recruitment, hiring and class size often keep qualified teachers from the students who need them most. In addition, he shows that schools are being drained by a constant "revolving door" in teaching—a

menon that hits low-income schools the hardest (Jerald, 2002). More support from principals can go a long way toward keeping good teachers.

**Policymakers should look to new sources to attract knowledgeable individuals into the classroom.** Several alternate route initiatives have been very successful at attracting lawyers, engineers, and other professionals into teaching. The New Teacher Project, for example, has recruited thousands of talented professionals and trained them to fill hard-to-staff teaching positions in New York and other urban districts.

And don't forget local colleges and universities. There are plenty of college faculty who are currently teaching high school level content in remedial courses. If at least some of them could teach that content at local high schools, they could help make sure that students get it right the first time around. Likewise, students who are ready for Advanced Placement courses or mathematics beyond Algebra 2 could take these courses on local college campuses, earning both high school and college credit and relieving some of the staffing pressures on high schools.

**Policymakers should provide resources for substantial, subject-based professional development to support teachers in their efforts to teach rigorous content to all students.** Research shows that professional development can have a profound impact on student achievement when it is school-based, ongoing and focused on high-level curriculum.

**Higher education needs to align teacher preparation programs and certification policies to reflect the content of the new common curriculum.** Perhaps the most important

contribution higher ed can make is to help make sure there is a sufficient supply of teachers qualified to teach all students to high levels of performance. Colleges of arts and sciences and two-year institutions should work alongside the schools of education because they all have a role in the preparation of teachers.

**States and districts should allocate resources for the development of new high school courses.** Every day we continue to learn more about the knowledge and skills that students need to succeed after high school. With appropriate resources, teams of college and high school faculty—perhaps with the participation of business—could develop exciting new courses that will more effectively engage students with high-level content.

#### *Time and support for students to learn challenging content*

While we know that all students can handle a rigorous high school curriculum, this is not to say that they will learn it in the same ways and on the same schedule. Some students will move along quickly, as they do now. Others will need extra time, support and even different instructional methods in order to reach high standards.

**Time.** It is easy to say that some students need more time to master certain content, but many administrators already look at a cramped school day and wonder if more is added in one area, what will have to come out. But it turns out that there is a lot of wasted time in the school schedule that could make room for more instruction.

A thorough analysis of master schedules can reveal where time can be recovered to make room for extended instruction for students who need it and plan-

ning time for teachers' continuing professional development.

**Support for students.** As we have shown, most students will rise to the occasion when given access to high-level courses, good instruction and sometimes a little extra help when they need it. But there are also some students who will need significant support in order to reach higher levels of performance.

Regardless of how well students are prepared for high school level work, schools cannot lose sight of where students must be when they graduate. States and districts must provide whatever time and support students need to get there including support for teachers to make sure they succeed.

#### **The federal government has a role, too**

Federal policymakers can do a lot to help make sure all high school students have the benefit of high-level curriculum. They can:

- Send a clear, consistent message that the federal government's primary goal in supporting high schools is to promote high-level academic achievement for all students. High school programs that support separate academic tracks for work-bound and college-bound students should not be supported with federal funds.
- Require states receiving federal funds for secondary education to document and publicly report disaggregated data on the course-taking patterns and corresponding achievement levels of high school students.
- Limit support for high school career and vocational programs to programs that prepare students for postsecondary educational opportuni-

ties. Some of these opportunities will take the form of certificate or degree programs, while others might be apprenticeships or on-the-job training programs. But all federally funded career and vocational programs should prepare high school graduates for further education so that they can advance their careers.

- Require states receiving federal funds for postsecondary

education to analyze and publicly report disaggregated data regarding the correlation between course-taking patterns in high school and college access and success. Specifically, states should be required to report the relationship between course-taking in high school and: (1) college admission; (2) the need for remedial coursework in college, and; (3) college graduation for all students enrolled

in publicly supported institutions of higher education in the state.

## Reference

Jerald, C. T. (2002, August). *All talk, no action: Putting an end to out-of-field teaching*. Washington, DC: The Education Trust.

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## News You Can Use

John Gugerty, Column Editor

*The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition has several publications available for downloading at <http://www.ncset.org/publications/>*

### *Increasing Rates of School Completion: Moving from Policy and Research to Practice*

This cutting-edge manual for educators, administrators and policymakers describes eleven proven interventions for increasing school completion among youth with disabilities. The interventions selected are only those that include research or evaluation designs and were published between 1988 and 2003. Also included are handouts containing current statistics and information on dropout, a concise literature review, and information on related Web sites, journal articles, publications, and organizations.

### *In Their Own Words: Employer Perspectives on Youth with Disabilities in the Workplace*

Eleven employers from various fields write about how they became involved in providing work experiences for youth with disabilities, what made it work, and what they recommend to individuals and organizations representing youth.

### *Youth with Disabilities and the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, NCSET Policy Update • Volume 1 , Issue 2*

This brief contains an overview of the Workforce Investment Act, workforce investment system management structures, and the One-Stop service system. It focuses on youth programs within WIA, and includes information about (a) funding structures and eligibility for youth activities, (b) Youth Opportunities Grants, (c) youth services and activities, (d) performance accountability, and (e) non-discrimination. This brief discusses implications for youth with disabilities in transition from school to work, and the wider benefits to workforce investment systems of effectively serving youth with disabilities.

### *Increasing School Completion: Learning from Research-Based Practices that Work, NCSET Research to Practice Brief • Volume 3 , Issue 3*

This brief identifies and describes five research-based practices proven effective in increasing rates of school completion. The practices utilized random samples or comparison groups and had statistically significant results for the treatment group on the variable of enrollment status.

### *Supplemental Security Income : Your Right to Appeal, NCSET Parent Brief*

This brief guides parents through the Supplemental Security Income appeals process, providing information about why many applications are denied, how the decisions are made, and how applicants can respond effectively. The brief provides detailed information about the four levels of appeal and discusses three case studies.