

Unlocking the Potential that Lies Within Every Child

BY GEOFFREY CANADA

I have spent the past 40 years working with poor children, and spent the prior 20 being one. So when I say that all children can learn, it is not just an academic theory for me. It is a belief based on decades of personal and professional experience.

In the 1960s I saw my own brother—a bright and thoughtful kid—labeled as “slow” and placed on the low-expectations track at our local public school in the Bronx. I watched as he battled against those expectations and eventually became a nuclear engineer. This past June I watched 17-year-old Morgan, outfitted in cap and gown, march with my charter school’s first graduating class of high school seniors having entered as a sixth grader labeled as a “bad boy” by five different elementary schools.

My belief that every child can learn inspires me every day and gives me an urgent sense of responsibility—to unlock the potential that I know lies within every child. It’s a belief that is all the more passionate because I have seen the harm done by adults who don’t believe all children can learn. What makes my belief controversial—and even dangerous to some—is the corollary that schools can be the key to the extent that they give primacy to children’s needs rather than the needs of adults.

Though a school can turn around a poor child’s odds of success, our country’s definition of “education” needs to broaden. Education—as a national policy—must start prior to kindergarten and extend beyond the walls of the classroom. These are areas where government has been reluctant to go, but where it must go if public education is to succeed for the

massive number of underprivileged children on the scale that is necessary. The return on these investments is simply too great to ignore.

While there are many programs and teachers who have accomplished what I call the “superhero” work of turning around teenagers lagging behind, we need to start much earlier to get at-risk children on track. Research shows that something as simple as talking more to an infant can enrich the neural architecture of the child’s brain, strengthening it for later learning. This is the kind of science that we need to share with parents to help produce big gains in our poorest, most disenfranchised communities.

Any teacher in America can tell you about a student whose life outside the classroom creates problems inside the classroom. There are “the squinters”—children with poor vision whose parents can’t afford glasses. Maybe it’s hunger pains interfering with a child’s ability to concentrate. Or sometimes it’s the fear of violence on the way home—or even at home—that’s distracting a child.

That said, it’s no secret that what’s going on inside many of our schools is horribly inadequate, particularly in low-income neighborhoods. Likewise, the solution, too, is no secret for anyone willing to really look. The solution resides in plain sight amid the many successful schools in middle-class neighborhoods. For these children, going to college is simply in the air around them. In these schools, if a child needs glasses, she gets them. If a student is struggling in math, he gets a tutor. These children have

safe, enriching afterschool activities, and for the most part don’t have to worry about whether they will get dinner after school or get shot on their way home. What we see among these schools is that there are a set of givens that allow educators, by and large, to succeed at the long, hard process of educating large numbers of children. Also implicit is that there is no time during a child’s development when we can simply drop our vigilance and assume he or she will be fine; our support system must run from birth through college.



In the debate about improving public education, some simply blame the parents. It is absolutely true that negative parenting can cripple a child's ability to learn, but I believe it is my responsibility as an educator to educate every child—even if the parent is uncooperative. I can't and won't give up on a child because she or he has a toxic parent—and neither can we as a society.

Others blame teachers—another easy target. Anyone who has stood in front of a classroom of students knows it is a herculean job. Unfortunately, the profession never gets the respect it deserves, which is just stunning when you consider the unparalleled role teachers play in building our future. Teachers should be treated and paid as the skilled professionals they are, and the great ones should be rewarded as such.

I believe, however, that the other side of that coin must be holding school staff accountable. We need to train and pay teachers more, but those who are demonstrated failures should not be routinely allowed to ruin the chances of children year after year. Certainly, failing teachers need support and training, but if they still cannot do the job, they cannot be allowed to continue on the job.

I wish I could say reforming our education system can be done without spending more money, but we cannot do this on the cheap. What I will say, and confidently so, is that smart investments in education, particularly done early in a child's life, will be more than offset by the reduction of societal costs. A high-quality prekindergarten program is a more humane and markedly less-expensive option than a high-security prison.

Children who are readied for the high-skills job market simply don't have the time or inclination to drift into antisocial behavior. Even if we don't want to look at the moral imperative, spending on education is a smart investment in our country's future. College graduates earn much more over their lifetime than high school dropouts. And, of course, those higher earnings bring in commensurate taxes for the country.

If we are going to stay competitive in the global marketplace, we cannot ignore the potential of all of our children—the future stewards of America. How can we not do everything humanly possible to make sure our children will continue to write the story of this country's incredible legacy? ■

CHAPTER SIX

**Education
and Job
Readiness for
a Prosperous
America**

BY MELISSA LAZARÍN



Ensuring that tomorrow's workers—and today's—are equipped with the education and skills needed to excel as employees, entrepreneurs, and leaders is critical to building an All-In Nation. By some international measures, however, it appears that the United States is losing the global race in education competitiveness. According to the Organisation for Economic

Co-operation and Development, or OECD, the United States "is the only country where attainment levels among those just entering the labor market (25-34 year olds) do not exceed those about to leave the labor market (55- to 65-year olds)."⁷ America's students are falling behind at every level—early, primary, secondary, and postsecondary education—and educational attainment gaps between students of color and their white counterparts are particularly disheartening.

Economic benefits of reducing education and training disparities

- Reducing the high school dropout rate by half would result in \$45 billion per year in economic benefits.¹
- Closing the achievement gap between black and Latino students and white students would have increased U.S. GDP in 2008 by as much as \$525 billion, or 2 percent to 4 percent, with rising benefits as demographics continue to shift.
- Closing achievement gaps experienced by low-income students would have increased U.S. GDP in 2008 by as much as \$670 billion, or 3 percent to 5 percent.
- A recent National Institutes of Health study of Chicago's preschool program projected that it will generate up to "\$11 of economic benefits over a child's lifetime for every dollar spent initially on the program."
- Postsecondary education results in significant benefits including earnings advantages of 9 percent greater for two-year college attendees and 23 percent greater earnings for four-year college attendees than for high school graduates.⁵
- Low-income workers who participate in sector-focused workforce training increase their earnings by 29 percent.⁶

On international high school assessments, 15-year-old students in the United States rank 17th in science and 25th in math out of the OECD's 34 member countries.⁸ Rather than being on par with students in countries that are relevant competitors for high-skill jobs, such as South Korea, Japan, Germany, Canada, and the Netherlands, American students rank similarly to students in the Czech Republic and Portugal.⁹

A closer examination reveals a familiar story. The average reading scores of white and Asian students in the United States are much higher than the overall U.S. average and are similar to the reading scores of students in Korea, Finland, and Canada.¹⁰ Black and Latino students in the United States, however, have average reading scores that place them at the bottom of the pack—in the same ranks as students in Turkey and Chile.¹¹

In short, the United States is losing its competitive edge globally. But it is not because the education system is failing all American students. Instead it is because our schools are failing a sizable group of students, specifically those of color. If the desired goal is to have a world-class workforce—one that is prepared for the future—then improving educational outcomes for communities of color, especially black and Latino students, is an essential step. This is especially true as our nation's schools and colleges become more diverse. Another critical step is upgrading the skills of today's workers, including workers of color.

Clearly, if the United States is to regain its global competitive edge, there are significant hurdles to



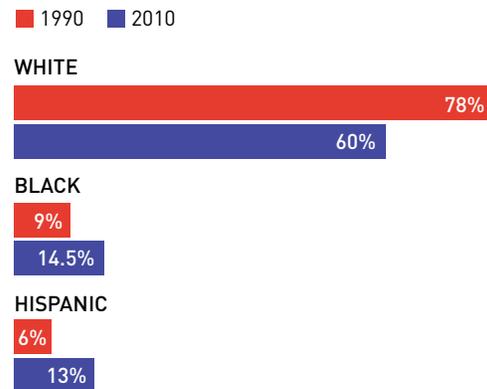
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overcome. The lack of high standards for all students, insufficient learning time, and paucity of excellent teachers are just a few of the challenges we face as a country. There is also a lack of political courage to fund our schools fairly and retool our traditional notions of schooling to effectively educate today's students. And access to college and other postsecondary education and training opportunities remains a challenge for low-income people and people of color.

This chapter explains these important missed opportunities to improve student outcomes, describes innovative approaches that successfully reach the youth of color who are disproportionately falling behind academically, and presents policy recommendations to ensure all students are ready to be tomorrow's workers and leaders. It also addresses the education and job-training

needs that occur outside of the traditional pre-K-12 school system, including college access, career technical education, and workforce training.

Figure 1
College enrollment by race/ethnicity, 1990 and 2010¹⁴



Source: National Center for Education Statistics.

Changing student demographics

In 2010 white students made up 54 percent of the national pre-K-12 student population, a decrease from 67 percent in 1990.¹² Meanwhile the Hispanic student population has more than doubled in the same period.¹³ A similar trend is occurring at the postsecondary level.

A recent report by the Pew Hispanic Center finds that Hispanic students have reached a record 16.5 percent of all college enrollments.¹⁵ Black and Hispanic students, however, continue to lag behind their white counterparts in attainment of college degrees, as white students earn 71 percent of bachelor's degrees and 65 percent of associate's degrees.¹⁶

The significance of high expectations

Former President George W. Bush called the notion that a certain segment of our population lacks the ability to excel due to a variety of disadvantages the “soft bigotry of low expectations.”¹⁷ This lowering of the bar is exacerbated by our nation’s fragmented school-governance structure, which largely entrusts the responsibility of educating our children and young adults to states and local communities. This decentralized system of governance has historically meant that place matters—namely, students in the United States, depending on where they happen to live, are working toward different expectations or standards of academic success. Comparing states using a common test to measure student academic attainment, such as the National Assessment for Educational Progress, reveals that most of the states with math and reading proficiency rates that are lower than the national average are located in the South, Southwest, and far West, and have a disproportionately larger share of low-income, nonwhite, and English-language-learner, or ELL, students.¹⁸

While federal law requires states to demonstrate that they have “adopted challenging academic content standards and challenging student achievement standards,”¹⁹ states have had enormous flexibility in determining those standards. The thinking goes that students residing in states that have set high academic standards are more likely to excel academically as a consequence of having to reach those higher standards. On the other hand, students

attending schools in states that have weak standards may not reach their academic potential because the performance bar is set too low.

Take Massachusetts as an example. Experts generally agree that Massachusetts has long had some of the strongest math and English-language-arts standards.²⁰ Massachusetts students in the eighth grade on average perform significantly higher in mathematics than most students in the United States and just as well as their counterparts in Japan.²¹

But Massachusetts is not representative of other U.S. states. Fortunately, a majority of states have begun taking some important steps toward achieving state parity in setting academic standards. Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core State Standards—a single set of K-12 standards for English language arts and mathematics that states have jointly developed and may voluntarily adopt.²² A common set of assessments that are aligned to the standards will accompany the standards in 2014-15. Similarly, 26 states have partnered to develop common K-12 science standards,²³ while 32 states and the District of Columbia have adopted a common set of K-12 English-language development standards and assessments to support English-language instruction for English language learners.²⁴

High standards by themselves cannot improve student achievement, but they are a necessary ingredient, along with robust assessments and strong accountability. These three elements should work

Needed: A cradle-to-college approach

On a spring morning in 2004, Francesca Silfa and Mark Frazier set out in search of potential college recruits. Knocking on many doors in central Harlem, they weren't combing the neighborhood to find high school seniors. Instead, they were seeking parents—specifically, parents of babies and toddlers. Silfa and Frazier, both outreach workers for the Harlem Children's Zone, were recruiting for Baby College, a nine-week parenting program. The pair was seeking to enroll parents in the college's innovative parenting program covering topics such as brain development in children, discipline, immunization, asthma, lead poisoning, parental stress, and parent-child bonding.

The Harlem Children's Zone aims to impact the lives of children by targeting not one but all of the issues that influence a child's development. The organization provides a network of services to address the many problems facing children living in tough neighborhoods, from crime to schools to health care to housing, offering constant and consistent support to children as they grow from birth all the way through college.

During the 2007-08 school year alone, the Baby College program dramatically improved the rates of storybook reading, increased the number of functioning home smoke detectors and window guards, and increased childhood immunization rates among participating families. Children enrolled in the Harlem Children's Zone's Harlem Gems preschool program showed marked improvement in their school-readiness scores, and students in the Harlem Children's Zone public charter school outperformed peers not just across that school district but also across New York City and even New York state. What's more, nearly all of the 281 high school students participating in the Harlem Children's Zone employment center continued on in school the following school year, resulting in a remarkable 99 percent student-retention rate.

The Harlem Children's Zone inspired the federal Promise Neighborhoods Initiative, which was launched in 2010. As of early 2013 a total of 49 communities are developing coordinated Promise Neighborhoods plans to provide children with the education, health, and social supports that will successfully guide them from cradle to college to career. If the success of the Harlem Children's Zone is an indicator of progress, these communities will be at the forefront of eliminating gaps in educational attainment across race and income.

hand-in-hand—standards provide the framework, assessments measure student progress toward the standards, and accountability mechanisms help foster a culture of responsibility for supporting the success of all students.

Time matters

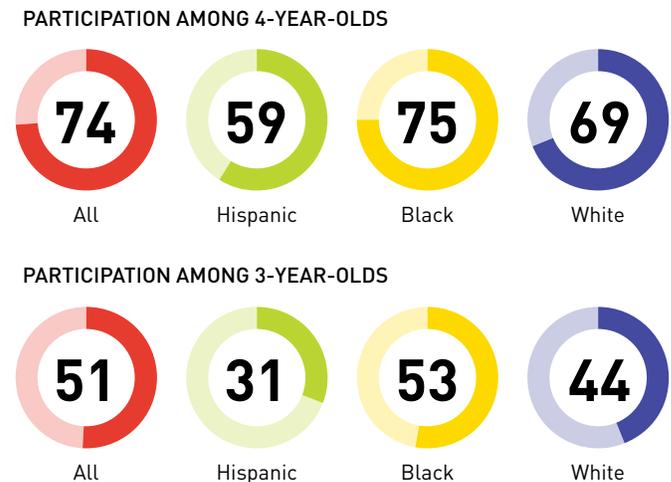
Many low-income students, English language learners, and students of color are already behind from the first moment they step through the schoolhouse door. At age 3 children from high-poverty families have a vocabulary of approximately 500 words compared to the 1,100-word vocabulary of children from wealthier families.²⁵ And many achievement gaps get progressively larger as children advance from grade to grade. By the first grade there is a full one-year reading gap between English language learners and native-English speakers, which grows to a two-year gap by the fifth grade.²⁶

Increasing learning time on the front end—during the preschool years—appears to carry some of the greatest benefits. Studies of high-quality preschool programs, such as Chicago’s Child-Parent Centers, suggest that such programs can have important long-lasting effects on a child’s academic achievement outcomes and later life experiences. What’s more, these effects appear greatest for traditionally underperforming groups of students, such as Latino, black, low-income, and English-language-learner children—all of these students are more likely to perform better later on in primary school if they attend

early education programs.²⁷ The early gains that children make in preschool appear to really pay off when early education is paired with high-quality education opportunities in grades K-3.²⁸ This educational pairing ensures that the early gains that children make in preschool are supported and enhanced as they transition to kindergarten and to the early primary grades.

Unfortunately, participation in preschool programs is far from the norm in the United States. Nearly 50 percent of 3-year-old children and a quarter of 4-year-old children do not attend a public or private prekindergarten program.²⁹ Participation rates are

Figure 2
Preschool enrollment by race/ethnicity, 2011



Sources: Enrollment of children ages 3 and 4 for the “all” group is from W. Steven Barnett and others, “The State of Preschool 2011” (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2012), p. 6. Enrollment data for ethnic groups is from W. Steven Barnett and Donald J. Yarosz, “Who Goes to Preschool and Why Does it Matter?” (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2007).

lowest among some of the very groups who could benefit the most, including Latino children and low-income children who are less likely to participate.³⁰ Ideally, enrollment in preschool would be as universally available as kindergarten.

Research suggests that high-quality preschool is one of the smartest investments our country can make for its future. Studies show that improved student academic outcomes and other lifelong benefits can save the public between \$4 and \$10 for every \$1 spent on high-quality early childhood education.³¹

Increasing learning time at school can also help prepare students of color for higher education and careers. While attending preschool is not the norm for many students, the traditional school day and year is nearly identical for today's students as it was for students 100 years ago. Students in the United States currently attend school an average of 6.6 hours a day, 180 days a year,³² which traces back to the nation's agrarian past; a conventional school calendar of nine months, followed by a three-month summer vacation, allowed many children to help their families harvest crops. But faced with persistent academic achievement gaps and growing expectations for students, approximately 1,000 public schools have instituted a longer school day or year.³³ A third of these schools are schools where at least 99 percent of the student body is of color.³⁴

Until a few years ago, students at Clarence Edwards Middle School, a public school in Boston's Charlestown neighborhood in which a majority of the pupils are students of color, ended their school day at 1:30

p.m. each afternoon. The seemingly early dismissal was typical of middle schools in the district. Edwards' low student performance and enrollment numbers were so low, however, that the school was on the verge of being shut down. School and district staff worked together to redesign and lengthen the school day to focus more instructional time on math and reading and fold typical afterschool activities, such as athletics and the arts, into the formal school day. The school day for Edwards' students now starts at 7:20 a.m. and the last period bell doesn't sound until 4:15 p.m., Monday through Thursday, with a shorter day on Friday. Since these changes were instituted in 2006, enrollment has skyrocketed and the school is one of the district's strongest-performing schools.³⁵

Some communities are taking this approach of a lengthened school day or expanded school calendar districtwide. The Balz Elementary School District in Phoenix, Arizona—a five-elementary-school district where approximately 71 percent of the students are Latino and 15 percent are African American³⁶—increased its school year from 180 days to 200 days in 2009. As a result, in 2012, third-grade and fourth-grade reading scores increased by 19 percent, and fifth-grade and sixth-grade reading scores went up by an astounding 43 percent.³⁷ Likewise, Colorado, Connecticut, New York, and Tennessee are following Massachusetts's lead and taking a systematic approach to redesigning and expanding learning time in targeted districts in their states.³⁸

Additional learning time gives all students, including those at risk of falling behind, more time on task. Using



$$d = \sqrt{(x_2 - x_1)^2 + (y_2 - y_1)^2}$$
$$r^2 = (x - h)^2 + (y - k)^2$$



Teacher Crystal Kirch, center, talks to her students in her pre-calculus class at Segerstrom High School in Santa Ana, Calif., Wednesday, Jan. 16, 2013.

AP PHOTO/JAE C. HONG

data to identify achievement gaps and student needs, educators can target the added time for classroom instruction in a targeted, focused manner. Schools that expand learning time can close enrichment gaps by formally incorporating traditional out-of-school activities—such as the arts and service opportunities—into the official school calendar so that all students, including those living in the highest poverty, have access. Expanding the school calendar gives teachers more time to plan lessons that reinforce the learning concepts being taught in other classes and provides additional time for professional development.

Good teachers make a difference

Research indicates that the quality and effectiveness of the teacher workforce is the single-most-important in-school factor affecting student achievement.³⁹ Yet low-income students and those of color are much less likely to be taught by some of our nation's best teachers compared to their high-income and white peers.⁴⁰ Take the Los Angeles Unified School District as an example: Latino and black students are half as likely as white or Asian students to be assigned to the district's strongest English-language-arts teachers.⁴¹ As a consequence, low-income students and those of color, who are more likely to face hurdles to student achievement, are further hobbled by being taught by less-than-effective teachers.

Increasing the number of effective teachers is the only surefire way to ensure that all students,

including poor students and students of color, have access to a great teacher. But this is no easy task. This requires bold, comprehensive reforms that address the shortcomings in the way we prepare, recruit, support, and pay teachers.

One persistent challenge is antiquated methods of teacher preparation and recruitment. Schools of education have been churning out new teachers for decades with little knowledge of how well they are preparing them for the classroom, and most states have done little to encourage closer scrutiny of program quality.⁴² Nearly half of all states do not measure the impact of new graduates on student learning when evaluating the quality of teacher-preparation programs in their state.⁴³

States and the federal government need to do a better job to ensure that prospective teachers receive the training they need to be effective in the classroom and improve the quality of teacher-education programs based on teacher performance in the classroom. Better evaluation systems are needed to inform teacher compensation and rewards for performance and decisions to remove chronically ineffective teachers, as well as the on-the-job support individual teachers receive to improve their instruction. Research suggests that teacher effectiveness can be reliably measured by a balanced approach that takes into account classroom observations, student surveys, and student achievement gains.⁴⁴

We should also tap new teaching talent by supporting high-quality alternative pathways to teaching.

Graduates of alternative certification programs, on average, perform at the same level as traditionally prepared teachers who work in similar schools.⁴⁵ Some of these programs are also helping to diversify the teacher workforce. Teach Tomorrow in Oakland, for example, is increasing the supply of effective and culturally diverse teachers who are committed to the Oakland community by recruiting candidates who have lived in the city for at least five years.⁴⁶ Participants receive support to earn a teaching credential and find a position in Oakland's school district in exchange for a five-year employment commitment. The program's participants are diverse—44 percent are African American, 15 percent are Latino, and approximately 23 percent are of mixed race.⁴⁷

We must explore new ways to compensate teachers to help retain our strongest and ensure that they're teaching in the classrooms and schools that need them the most. Most school systems use a single-salary schedule to compensate teachers—a system that fails to recognize or reward differences, or the market demand for teachers with key knowledge and skills. More often than not, teacher salaries are based on two measures: years on the job and advanced degree attainment. The effectiveness of these classroom instructors in teaching students, however, is less-frequently considered. Our strongest teachers should be rewarded with higher compensation. Teachers who assume greater responsibilities in the school, such as master educators who support other teachers, and highly effective teachers who work in hard-to-staff schools or classrooms, should also be compensated accordingly.

Some school districts have taken steps toward sensibly differentiating teachers' pay. The Mission Possible program in the Guilford County School System in Greensboro, North Carolina, is one such district. The Guilford County district has been experimenting with a comprehensive compensation-reform effort that operates in 30 high-need schools.⁴⁸ In addition to professional development and support, teachers are offered recruitment or retention bonuses to work in hard-to-staff schools and become eligible for performance bonuses that are based on student achievement.

Money matters

The gap between the haves and have-nots is perhaps no clearer than in the manner in which schools in the United States are funded. States and districts across the country spend \$334 less per year on every nonwhite student than on each white student.⁴⁹ The funding gaps can add up quickly for schools serving predominately students of color. Consider public schools in California: Schools in the Golden State serving 90 percent or more nonwhite students receive \$191 less per pupil than all other schools, and \$4,380 less than schools serving 90 percent or more white students.⁵⁰

The federal investment in the Title I program, which provides \$14.5 billion per year, is intended to narrow the funding (and the achievement) gap between poor schools serving mainly students of color and more affluent schools. Its impact, however, is hindered by the nonsensical way federal lawmakers

have meddled with the formula since it was first developed in 1965. Instead of moving funds to districts with large concentrations of children in poverty, the Title I formula pushes funding to school districts with low concentrations of children in poverty, to school districts in wealthy states, and to very large school districts.

Take the Michigan school districts of Flint and Detroit as an example.⁵¹ In fiscal year 2009 Flint and Detroit served roughly the same concentration of children in poverty—38 percent and 39 percent, respectively. But each low-income student in Flint’s school district generated \$1,984 in Title I funds while those in Detroit drew \$2,266. Detroit’s student-funding advantage comes purely from its size, where the district serves 80,000 students compared to Flint’s 9,600 students. A more equitable funding formula would focus on concentrations of children in low-income families.

There is also a great deal of inequity between schools within the same district boundaries. The ability of Title I dollars to equalize school funding is further undermined by a common practice that allows districts to use average teacher-salary figures and teacher-to-student ratios in their school-budget allocations, instead of basing budgeting on actual school-level expenditures. Because teachers’ salaries are primarily pegged to years of experience and the fact that veteran teachers tend to cluster in low-need schools while low-earning novice teachers are clustered in high-need schools, district funding decisions that overlook the actual amount spent

on salaries result in fewer state and local dollars for high-need schools.

The longstanding disparities in school funding are not solely responsible for the academic achievement gap between white and nonwhite students. To be sure, there are high-achieving, high-poverty schools of color.⁵² But these schools are the exception and far from the rule.

Challenge our traditional concept of schooling

Like the school calendar, the basic methods of schooling has changed surprisingly little in more than a century. The expectations we place on our schools, meanwhile, have increased in number and difficulty. In today’s workforce a high school diploma is the floor academically, not the ceiling. Yet half of Latino and African American students drop out of school before graduating high school, leaving these students at a particular disadvantage in the future economy. There is a high school dropout crisis in tribal communities as well. The Native American high school graduation rate was just more than 50 percent in the 2004-05 school year, compared to 77.6 percent for white students that year.⁵³

Dropout prevention is critical, but what exactly does that mean and how is it accomplished? For many students, having highly effective teachers, high expectations, and adequate resources and support



In this Thursday, Feb. 10, 2011 picture, middle school students play in a class at the Poplar Middle School on the Fort Peck reservation in Poplar, Mont.

AP PHOTO/MICHAEL ALBANS

makes all the difference in the world. But schooling can and must change, too.

A study tracking approximately 4,000 freshmen in San Bernardino City Unified School District through their expected graduation from high school reveals an interesting trend. One-third of the district's dropouts eventually re-enrolled in high school, indicating that dropping out of school was not a permanent event for a substantial proportion of students.⁵⁴ Yet half of the re-enrollees in San Bernardino's school district returned to school for only one year or less, with many students citing school factors such as academic struggles and falling behind in the required number of course credits, as well as out-of-school factors such as homelessness, pregnancy, work, and gang pressures.⁵⁵

Clearly, we must reinvent some of our schools, especially our high schools, to better meet the need of today's students. Seat-time policies that define course content mastery based on the amount of time a student has spent learning rather than on actual competency are ultimately a disservice to students and our workforce. And schools, especially those located in impoverished communities, must be prepared to meet students' needs, both inside and outside the classroom.

Policy recommendations

America's public schools are best positioned to equalize the playing field and address opportunity and achievement gaps. For our schools to

accomplish their mission, however, we must arm them with a dependable pipeline of effective teachers, sufficient funding and time, and college-ready standards to successfully achieve these weighty goals. In order to adequately reform our education system so it serves the needs of individual students and meets the needs of the larger society, CAP and PolicyLink recommend the following priorities.

Support a common set of standards, assessments, and shared accountability to support college and career readiness

Equity in academic achievement begins with setting high expectations for all students. Rigorous academic standards, paired with valid and reliable assessments and system of accountability, can help ensure that all students graduate from high school ready for college and career.

- States should ensure that their academic standards are sufficiently challenging and internationally benchmarked to ensure that all students graduate from high school college and career ready.
- States should ensure that their standards for English language development for English-language-learner, or ELL, students correspond to their academic standards for their other students and support ELL students in reaching those standards.
- States should strive to make sure their academic standards are consistent or comparable with

college-ready standards in other states to support public transparency and equity nationwide and to reflect our increasingly mobile society.

- Districts and schools should ensure that students who are at risk of not reaching a state's higher standards receive the support necessary to meet these new standards.
- The federal government should continue to support state longitudinal data systems that provide meaningful information on the performance of the educational system at the state, district, and school levels.

Increase access to high-quality preschool opportunities for all children

The fact that low-income children are participating in preschool at roughly the same rates as some middle-income children is largely due to the successful efforts of government-funded early education programs such as Head Start that target low-income children. The federal government should build on and grow these efforts by improving the quality of existing preschool programs and expanding access to families of all means.

- The federal government, in partnership with states, should offer every 3-year-old and 4-year-old child voluntary access to full-day preschool.
- The federal government should ensure preschool expansion is paired with robust reforms

to grades K-3 to ensure that the early gains that children make in preschool are supported and enhanced as they transition to kindergarten and the early primary grades.

Increase learning time in high-poverty schools

Along with effective teaching and school leadership, time spent in school has also been identified as a key factor leading to academic success in high-performing schools.⁵⁶ And the federal government has encouraged states and districts to incorporate increased learning time as part of a comprehensive school-improvement strategy.⁵⁷

- The federal government should encourage and support investments to expand the evidence base on the significant impact that increased learning time has on student performance.
- States and districts, with federal and state investments, should increase learning time among targeted high-poverty schools as part of a coordinated and comprehensive school-improvement strategy. Under such a strategy, schools would ideally increase the school day or year by 30 percent, or approximately 300 additional school hours a year, for all students.

Improve the effectiveness of teachers

Students who attend high-poverty schools are short-changed when it comes to teacher quality. States and

Building a 21st-Century Workforce and Education System

BY RUBÉN LIZARDO, POLICYLINK

Reforming America's public schools is essential to ensure today's youth can succeed in the workforce—but it is not enough. As presented in “America's Future Workforce,” education and training that goes beyond a high school degree is more important than ever for securing a good job that leads to a career. Yet communities of color still lag behind when it comes to obtaining the kind of postsecondary education and training that leads to well-paid jobs.

To catch them up, policymakers need to help everyone—especially those who are disconnected from the economy or at the bottom rungs of the economic ladder—obtain the skills, experience, and credentials they need to move up in the world of work. A 21st-century workforce and education system would reach people wherever they are and provide a comprehensive set of supports to enable them to realize their full economic potential.

Such a system would create workforce training onramps for workers who are at different starting points, whether they are disconnected youth, adults with low literacy and education levels, low-wage workers, transitional and dislocated workers, or others. It would ensure that high-quality postsecondary education and training opportunities—including two- and four-year college degrees and certificates, job-training programs, and union apprenticeships—are affordable and accessible for all, including low-income students and low-wage workers. It would provide today's high school students with opportunities to obtain skills and experiences that lead directly to good jobs or job-training programs. And it would foster a “high-road” economy, one in which employers pay family-supporting wages and offer benefits and opportunities for advancement.

But several roadblocks stand in the way of creating an effective and integrated workforce and education system that meets the needs of communities of color. One is the skyrocketing cost of higher education, which disproportionately affects students of color because they are more likely to come from low-income families. Diminished funding for workforce training is another.⁵⁹ Relatedly, workers with lower levels of education have far less access to employer-sponsored job-training programs compared to college-educated workers.⁶⁰ Limited funding for workforce-training programs has led to the challenge of scale within this policy arena: There are many excellent job-training programs that have measurably improved earnings for low-wage and vulnerable workers, but they are too small to reach enough workers to significantly change worker outcomes in the aggregate. The lack of alignment of workforce development with the needs of employers in high-growth sectors and the economic development strategies being undertaken to grow jobs in regions is an additional challenge.

To address these challenges and equip America's workers with the skills and education needed by current and future employers, the federal government should pursue the following policy goals:

Secure and expand the Pell Grant program. Pell Grants are the federal government’s most significant contribution to increasing access to higher education for poor students and students of color. This essential program is at risk due to underfunding. Congress must take action to secure the funding needed to sustain the program and increase its maximum award to account for the increasing cost of a college education.⁶¹

Expand job-training programs for underrepresented workers. Federal workforce development and job-training programs for low-income adults and youth decrease unemployment and boost earnings, yet funding for these programs has declined over the past three decades.⁶² Sectoral workforce-training partnerships (including employers, unions, and education and training providers), apprenticeships in high-growth industries, and programs that blend basic skills instruction and occupational training should be expanded and integrated into the Workforce Investment Act. Congress should also pass a version of the SECTORS Act of 2011, which would provide grants for sectoral partnerships, that targets underserved workers.⁶³ Access to federal investments in these sector and regional revitalization strategies should be conditioned on the commitment of grant applicants to connect low-income adults and disconnected youth to these opportunities.

Strengthen the community college system. The nation’s 1,100-plus community colleges are a critical gateway to higher education and careers for low-income students, students of color, and first-generation college-goers, but they can only succeed if they have the resources to provide students with the supports they need to complete a degree and deliver curriculum that links them to good-paying jobs. Federal policy should support proven strategies, including career pathway approaches and community college-employer partnerships, such as those that would be supported by the Community College to Career Fund proposed in the president’s 2013 budget to train 2 million workers for well-paid jobs in high-demand sectors.⁶⁴

Support the “linked learning” model of preparing youth for careers and expand career technical education.

Workforce-development strategies need to begin early, to help high school students as well as dropouts get the exposure and training they need to connect to good-paying jobs and careers. The upcoming reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Carl D. Perkins Act, Higher Education Act, and Workforce Investment Act should foster greater connections (linked learning) between the skills needed by industry and high school curriculum and career technical education.

Ensure fair hiring of formerly incarcerated people. For the estimated one in four adults who have a criminal record (who are disproportionately people of color), finding a job can be an insurmountable challenge.⁶⁵ The federal government should pass “Ban the Box” legislation to prohibit employers from asking about criminal convictions until the final steps of a job application process, and create incentives and supports for employers who hire former prisoners.



In this photo taken Wednesday, Feb. 6, 2013, Malachi Stewart, right, high-fives educational assistant Addison Hawk as Ahmed Omar continues with his work in their kindergarten classroom at Campbell Hill Elementary in Renton, Wash.

AP PHOTO/ELAINE THOMPSON

districts need to use a variety of tools and strategies to recruit and retain effective teachers in all schools, including high-poverty schools.

- The federal government and states should ensure that evaluation systems, which inform compensation, professional development, and retention, measure the impact teachers make on student learning. Teacher performance should be measured in multiple, objective, and valid ways that at a minimum include measures of student achievement, classroom observations, and student feedback.
- States and districts should reform teacher-compensation systems to pay teachers based on their levels of effectiveness, their roles and responsibilities, and service in high-demand subjects and hard-to-staff schools.
- The federal government and states in tandem should develop feedback mechanisms between teacher-preparation programs and pre-K-12 schools on student-learning outcomes. The federal government and states should also strengthen accountability for both traditional and alternative teacher-preparation programs

by establishing a common set of standards for teacher-education programs and enforcing an accountability system that factors in student learning, teaching-persistence rates, and feedback surveys from program graduates and employers.

- The federal government should fund the development and expansion of high-quality alternative certification programs. Congress should authorize competitive state grants for increasing high-quality alternate teacher-certification programs that are conditioned on the implementation of policies that ensure quality measured through student learning, teacher placement and persistence rates, and feedback surveys from program graduates and employers.

Improve school-funding fairness and equity

Schools are grossly inequitably funded largely due to an outdated school governance structure that leaves schools at the mercy of local and state taxpayers. We must revisit school-funding mechanisms at every level of government—from the federal government down to the district level.

- Congress should simplify the Title I funding formula, from four formulas into one that is more transparent, more equitable, and less complex. The goal of this reform is to restore Title I to its original purpose: providing additional resources to districts serving concentrations of children from low-income families. A more equitable funding formula would focus on concentrations of children

in low-income families, look at the extent to which a state uses its own resources to finance public schools, and use a standardized method for calculating regional differences in education costs.

- Congress should require districts to demonstrate at least equal per-pupil distribution of state and local education funds between Title I and non-Title I schools, and require public reporting of the actual amount spent on teachers, other employees, and activities at each school, before federal Title I dollars are distributed. It should close the so-called comparability loophole that allows districts to mask funding inequalities by reporting districtwide averages for teachers' salaries instead of the actual amount spent on salaries.
- States should implement student-based budgeting systems, also known as weighted-student funding systems, that allocate dollars based on the extra educational needs of certain groups of students such as students from low-income families, English language learners, and students with disabilities.

Develop and implement innovative, flexible forms of schooling to meet students' needs

While all students should be held to the same high academic standards, the delivery of schooling must become more personalized and flexible to meet students' diverse needs, both inside and outside of school.

- The federal government and states should support the continued development of community schools and other strategies that address place-based barriers to learning. Community schools are equipped to tackle some of the greatest challenges related to poverty, including inadequate health and social services, and foster family and community engagement.

- The federal government and states should follow the lead of the U.S. Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods program and augment place-based strategies by building a complete continuum of cradle-through-college-to-career solutions of both education programs and family and community supports with great schools at the center. Such efforts must be:
 - Interdisciplinary—to address the interconnected problems in distressed neighborhoods
 - Coordinated—to align the requirements of federal programs so that local communities can more readily braid together different funding streams
 - Place based—to leverage investments by geographically targeting resources and drawing on the compounding effect of well-coordinated action
 - Data and results driven—to facilitate program monitoring and evaluation, to guide action needed to make adjustments in policy or programming, and to learn what works and develop best practices
 - Flexible—to adapt to changing conditions on the ground⁵⁸

- The federal government and states should support fast-track programs, such as early-college high schools (which allow students to earn college credits as they obtain a high school diploma), to help students stay on the track to high school graduation as they are exposed to the rigors of college coursework and earn free college credit.

Conclusion

To build the human capital needed to regain our competitive edge in the global economy, we need to make smart investments in education and in workforce development. And in order to make sure that the youth populations who are growing the fastest—our communities of color—are not left behind, we must make sure that our reforms are targeted in ways that allow us to measure their impact on our most underserved populations.

Providing the education necessary to secure a prosperous future for all our children should not be up for debate—it's the right thing to do. But there is also new economic urgency to the matter—unless we start to close these attainment gaps and expand opportunities to all of our children, no matter what they look like or where they live, we will endanger our entire nation's economic future. Likewise, we must connect today's workers—and tomorrow's—with the education and training they need to succeed in an ever-changing economy. As the Baby Boomer generation retires in droves, every worker's ingenuity and creativity will be needed to power our economy forward. ■

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QUICK VIEW

Education and Job Readiness for a Prosperous America



Human capital is the key to succeeding in the global economy, but America is currently falling behind when it comes to educating our children and training our workers. This is due in large part to our failure to adequately educate black and Latino students. In the coming decade people of color will leave schools and enter a workforce in which two-thirds of jobs will require some form of postsecondary education. Yet students of color often attend schools that lack high standards, sufficient learning time, and high-quality teachers. As a result, black and Latino students

lag behind whites in education attainment. Additionally, at a time when employers require ever-higher levels of skills, communities of color are not sufficiently obtaining the kind of postsecondary education and training that leads to well-paid jobs.

Equipping tomorrow's diverse workers—and today's—with the education and training needed to excel as employees, entrepreneurs, and leaders in the 21st-century economy is critical to building an All-In Nation. ■

Facts at a glance

- **\$45 billion:** The amount of economic benefit per year to the United States of decreasing the number of high school dropouts by half¹
- **\$310 billion to \$525 billion:** The estimated amount of increase to U.S. GDP in 2008 if there had been no gap between black and Latino student performance compared to white student performance²
- **69 percent:** The share of Hispanic 3-year-old children who do not attend pre-K, compared to 49 percent of 3-year-olds and 26 percent of 4-year-olds nationwide³
- **\$334:** The additional amount that states across the country spend on white students annually compared to nonwhite students⁴
- **\$4,380:** The additional amount that California schools serving 90 percent or more white students receive per pupil annually, compared to schools with 90 percent or more nonwhite students⁵
- **29 percent:** Increased annual earnings to low-income workers who participate in sector-focused workforce-training programs⁶

Call to action

Congress, the administration, and states should act immediately to improve education and training opportunities to keep up with the demands and needs of today's employers and meet those of tomorrow's. Education and workforce-development policies must level the playing field and ensure all children and workers can access education and training that leads to good jobs and careers. We recommend the following actions:

- **Support a common set of standards and assessments to ensure college and career readiness.** The federal government should provide support for state longitudinal data systems to track and measure how well all schools prepare students for college and careers
- **Increase access to high-quality preschool.** The federal government, in partnership with states, should offer full-day early education to every 3- and 4-year-old
- **Increase learning time in high-poverty schools.** With federal and state investments, states and districts should be incentivized to increase learning time among targeted high-poverty schools
- **Improve the effectiveness of teachers.** States and districts should improve teacher evaluation systems and reform teacher compensation and rewards to recruit and retain effective teachers in all schools, including high-poverty schools
- **Improve school-funding fairness and equity.** Congress should simplify the Title I funding formula to be more transparent and equitable
- **Implement innovative, flexible school structures.** The federal and state governments should support the further development of community schools and neighborhood-based, "cradle-to-career" education models such as the Promise Neighborhoods Program
- **Secure and expand the Pell Grant program.** Congress should secure the funding needed to sustain this critical program to ensure college access for poor students and students of color
- **Expand job-training programs for under-represented workers.** Congress should support sectoral workforce-training partnerships and pass a version of the SECTORS Act of 2011
- **Strengthen the community college system.** Federal policy should support proven strategies, including career pathway approaches and community college-employer partnerships
- **Support the "linked learning" model of preparing youth for careers and expand career technical education.** The upcoming reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Carl D. Perkins Act, Higher Education Act, and Workforce Investment Act should foster greater

connections (linked learning) between the skills needed by industry and high school curricula and career technical education

- **Ensure fair hiring of formerly incarcerated people.** The federal government should pass “Ban the Box” legislation to prohibit employers from asking about criminal convictions until

the final steps of a job application process, and create incentives and supports for employers who hire former prisoners via down-payment assistance and other programs. Lastly, Congress should capitalize the National Housing Trust Fund to develop, preserve, and operate affordable rental housing and continue funding for the Second Chance Act

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