

NASSP Legislative Recommendations for

High School Reform

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Increase Academic Rigor	3
Personalized Learning	4
Adolescent Literacy	6
Low-Performing Students	7
Assessments	9
High Quality School Leaders	10
Highly Qualified Teachers	12
High Schools Identified as “In Need of Improvement”	14
Expected Outcomes	16
Closing	16

1904 Association Drive
Reston, VA 20191-1537
800-253-7747
Fax 703-476-5432
nassp@principals.org
www.principals.org

Cynthia Rudrud, President
David Vodila, President-Elect
Gerald N. Tirozzi, Executive Director
Lenor G. Hersey, Deputy Executive Director
Rosa Aronson, Director of Advocacy and Strategic Alliances
Michael Carr, Associate Director of Public Relations
Stephen DeWitt, Associate Director of Government Relations
Michelle White, Advocacy Manager
Meg LeFevour, Advocacy Specialist

Introduction

Many reports have been issued in the past few years that reveal deep problems with the achievement levels of U.S. high school students as compared to international students. There is also a significant achievement gap along race and income lines as well as low graduation and college attendance rates for low income and minorities. More often than not, these low rates can be traced back to the large numbers of students entering high schools reading below grade level. The vast majority of high schools, to a great degree, have a climate of anonymity where little focus is placed on identifying the personal learning needs of individual students and using such information to foster improved teaching and learning.

Improving education for all students is paramount to strengthening our democracy and preparing our nation to compete in today's global marketplace. To that end, it is quite necessary for the federal government to play an ongoing active and supportive role in improving the nation's schools by encouraging reform and providing adequate resources to supplement improvement efforts at the state and local levels. The role of the federal government in education should be one of partnership with the states and local school districts to improve the overall quality of nation's schools and to ensure equal opportunity for all students. To date, federal resources in support of school improvement have mainly been targeted at the elementary level and to some extent the middle level. And while a great deal more can be done to support real improvement at the middle level, the next and long-overdue stage in the evolution of school reform must be the improvement of the nation's high schools.

It is crucial to recognize that historically high schools have been the stepchild of school reform efforts in this country. For far too long, they have not received an adequate share of funding and other resources—at the federal, state, or local level—to make necessary improvements. There are considerable issues and challenges facing high schools and the students they serve that must be addressed. But even as policymakers have become more aware of these challenges, their new awareness has not resulted in any major policy changes or an increase in resources at the state or federal level. Successful high school reform requires real strategies and significant resources for implementing systemic improvement and raising individual student and schoolwide performance levels.

The federal government has made the investment at the elementary level (\$12 billion allocated to elementary schools from Title I alone); it is now time to do the same at the high school level. The Administration has called for just over \$2 billion to support its high school reform initiative but it will take congressional action to establish a specific and ongoing federal role in improving the nation's high schools. NASSP calls for \$4.8 billion annually to fund a new high school specific initiative. The details of this funding request are outlined in the recommendations contained within this document.

To be fully committed to high school reform, we must systemically reculture and improve the high school. The historical structure and purpose of the U.S. high school is no longer adequate to serve the needs of all of the nation's youth and provide them with the skills necessary to compete in the global marketplace of the 21st century. Significant improvement is needed, but such improvement can only be attained through a substantial change in the structure and culture of the high school. We recommend this be accomplished through support for:

- Increased academic rigor that reflects the integration of curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Personalized instruction and learning that is based on the academic needs of individual students
- Schoolwide initiatives to improve reading and writing literacy skills
- Targeted strategies to raise achievement scores of low-performing students to grade-level proficiency
- Multiple assessments that are aligned with state standards and include performance based measures to provide schools with individual student data to improve teaching
- Collaborative, inclusive leadership and the strategic use of data
- Improved subject area competency and content pedagogy of current and incoming faculty
- Technical assistance provided to high schools identified as "in need of improvement."

These recommendations reflect the reform strategies outlined in NASSP's Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform, a hands-on guide to high school reform designed for principals and their leadership teams. Specific recommendations and rationale follow. They are intended to produce and support high performing high schools in which all students achieve at high levels.

Increase Academic Rigor

Research shows that students who enroll in rigorous courses such as AP and IB are much more likely to attend and be successful in college.

Recommendations:

- Encourage all schools to increase academic rigor for all students by:
 - Increasing the State Scholars program to \$12 million, thereby increasing the number of states who can participate
 - Increasing funding to \$52 million for Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses to encourage more students, particularly low socioeconomic and minority students, to seek more rigorous coursework
 - Supporting dual enrollment programs that encourages students to take college level courses while in high school
 - Encouraging the use of Title II funds for professional development to train more teachers to deliver rigorous coursework such as AP and IB courses

Rationale:

Initiatives that support at-risk students in their efforts to take more rigorous coursework increase the likelihood they will stay in school and be prepared for postsecondary education.

Currently, the State Scholars program supports grants for 12 states to receive assistance to create initiatives to increase academic rigor across the curriculum. This program requires high school students to take at least three years of math and science, three and one-half years of social studies, four years of English, and two years of foreign language courses to be academically prepared for postsecondary education and the workplace.

Research shows that students who enroll in rigorous courses such as AP and IB are much more likely to attend and be successful in college. An increase in funding to \$52 million will support state and local efforts to increase access to advanced placement classes and finance tests for low-income and low-performing students. In addition, such increases will help ensure that teachers in low-income and low-performing schools are well-trained to teach AP and IB courses. It is also crucial that some funding be used to help to cover part or all of the cost of test fees for low-income students enrolled in AP courses. An investment in AP and IB programs may also serve as a mechanism for upgrading the entire high school curriculum.

Creating a supportive environment that cultivates a student's sense of belonging, ownership of learning, and recognition of and ability to make good choices is crucial to the learning experience.

Personalized Learning

Recommendations:

- Restructure the federal Smaller Learning Communities program into a High School Personalization Program and increase the funding to the FY 2004 level of \$174 million. NASSP supports developing a grant program that will help high schools develop personal academic and graduation plans for each student when they enter high school that correspond to his or her academic and future employment goals.
- Provide grants through the new High School Personalization Program to create more robust data systems applicable at the school level to support personalized learning plans and outline:
 - Each student's academic strengths, interests, and needs based on diagnostic assessments when they enter high school
 - Indicators of success and areas in need of improvement as students move from grade 9 toward graduation
 - An up-to-date record of the support provided to the student
 - Postsecondary opportunities, such as 2- and 4-year institutions and career opportunities as well as education financing options
- Encourage state flexibility on grade-level structures and students' high school completion that reflect their personalized academic and graduation plans and are focused on student mastery of subject matter rather than completion of seat time
- Encourage states to develop individual student-growth models that measure student achievement from year to year and progress toward graduation based on diagnostic assessments and measurements of progress
- Fund, through Title II, professional development to train principals and teachers to create personalized learning environments and use data and tracking systems to improve personalized teaching and learning

- Increase funding for the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling program to \$84.5 million. The current El/Sec Counseling Appropriations is \$34.7 million. *(Note: By law, the program must reach \$40 million before any money can be allocated to secondary schools.)*

Rationale:

If high achievement for all students is the goal of reform, then personalization is the key. Creating a supportive environment that cultivates a student's sense of belonging, ownership of learning, and recognition of and ability to make good choices is crucial to the learning experience.

The current Smaller Learning Communities program has been effective in helping school districts reduce the large size of schools; however, personalization practices go further in meeting the direct academic needs of each individual student. A robust data system that supports personalized academic and graduation plans will provide school staff with the information needed to ensure that each student is on-track to graduation.

Counselors can play a key role in personalizing the high school environment for students. However, the current number of counselors in our nation's high schools does not correspond to the number and needs of students at the high school level. The social and academic issues and challenges that high school students face are significant and thus require significant attention from trained counselors.

By increasing the Elementary and Secondary School Counseling program funding from \$34.7 million to \$84.5 million, secondary schools can receive a comparable level of funding as elementary schools. The current level does not meet the funding threshold (by law) necessary to allocate funds to the secondary school level. The increase in funding will help high schools lower the counselor to student ratio to below 250:1 (as recommended by the American Counseling Association and the American School Counselors Association) from the current ratio of slightly above 280:1.

Literacy skills (reading and writing) are the foundation of academic success for every student in every school.

Adolescent Literacy

Recommendations:

- Increase funding for the Striving Readers program to \$1 billion annually. Current appropriations are at \$25 million for the program for FY 2005
- Support schoolwide initiatives to conduct assessments, develop teaching strategies, design interventions, build literacy leadership, support teachers in their new literacy roles and plan professional development programs
- Fund, through Title II, professional development to train principals and teachers to design and deliver literacy instruction as part of and across the curriculum

Rationale:

Literacy skills (reading and writing) are the foundation of academic success for every student in every school.

In 2004, the Reading First programs were funded at approximately \$1.15 billion, and according to the U.S. Department of Education, the program served 1.4 million students. However, there are more than 6 million middle level and high school students who are not currently able to read or write at grade level. While we strongly support the priority given to literacy programs at the pre-K and K-3 levels, it is imperative that this priority be extended beyond the early years to ensure that all students are reading and writing at grade level from grades 4-12. For the most part, current literacy instruction ends at the third-grade level.

It is the lack of grade-level appropriate and remedial literacy programs across the curriculum in middle level and high schools that causes so many students to fall behind in reading comprehension. This results in poor writing skills, a decrease in overall academic performance, an increase in dropouts, and a decrease in graduation rates. Middle level and high schools currently lack the resources and the professional training (i.e., literacy coaches and faculty members trained to teach reading across the curriculum) necessary to implement literacy programs.

Low-Performing Students

High schools currently receive approximately 5% of Title I dollars yet educate 28% of the nation's student population.

Recommendations:

- Provide a new and separate funding stream of \$3.55 billion to address the academic needs of the nation's low-performing high school students. Funds may be used to:
 - Assist low-performing students achieve grade-level proficiency on challenging academic achievement standards established by the local school districts and states
 - Allow schools flexibility to implement research-proven instructional activities to meet the varied learning and cognitive needs of their low-performing students
 - Allow school districts to develop criterion-referenced diagnostic assessments to provide data on low-performing students academic strengths and weaknesses
 - Provide extended instructional time through after-school and summer school programs
 - Provide supplemental after-school services from state-approved providers
 - Provide such support services as guidance, health, nutrition, and social services that affect academic performance

Rationale:

The \$3.55 billion budget request would help states, school districts, and high schools meet the accountability and teacher quality requirements of the individual states and the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The request would support the national goal of leaving no child behind by directing resources to the nation's low-performing high school students whether or not the school they attend is identified as being "in need of improvement."

Although Title I helps millions of our nation's most needy children, it currently focuses the vast majority of its funding, 85%, to elementary schools. The reality is that the challenges faced by the children whom Title I was meant to help do not fade away as they make the transition from

elementary to middle level to high school. High schools currently receive approximately 5% of Title I dollars yet educate 28% of the nation's student population. If Title I was accurately distributed on the basis of student populations and student need, high schools would receive approximately \$3.55 billion of the current Title I allocation. Yet of the \$12.7 billion dollars appropriated for Title I in FY 2005, only approximately \$635 million is allocated to high schools by the states. That allocation falls far short of the \$3.55 billion needed to meet the academic needs of the millions of low-performing students in our nation's high schools.

The achievement results from comparison assessments such as NAEP, TIMSS, and PISA expose the lack of investment at the state and federal levels in our nation's high schools, particularly in activities addressing the needs of low-performing high school students. The correlation is quite clear:

- \$12 billion in Title I to elementary and middle level schools (85% to elementary)
- \$635 million in Title I to high schools
- \$1.15 billion in Reading First to elementary (1.4 million students served)
- \$25 million in Striving Readers for middle level and high schools (6 million students below grade level to be served)

The positive test scores in reading and math on the grade 4 NAEP and TIMSS assessment reflect the investment. The significant drop in test scores at grade 8 and even more drastic at the high school level on NAEP, TIMSS, and PISA just as clearly mirror the lack of state and federal investment in middle level and high schools.

Assessments

The most accurate measures of student performance analyze individual student growth by comparing current assessment results to previous results of the same student.

Recommendations:

- Allow states to use multiple assessments that are aligned with state standards and include performance based measures. NASSP suggests the use of such assessments as:
 - End of course exams
 - Portfolios, performance tasks, and other examples of a student’s accomplishments
 - Standardized tests, including state assessments
 - Comprehensive personal academic and graduation plans
 - Senior projects
 - ACT, PSAT, SAT
- Implement the high school National Assessment of Educational Progress in either grade 10 (spring) or grade 11 (fall)

Rationale:

Multiple measures of assessment are more likely to capture the complete picture of a student’s achievement level. Multiple measures also allow teachers to immediately address a student’s problem areas. The standardized tests currently used by the majority of states have little to do with the diagnostic assessment of individual student needs and helping teachers address those needs.

The most accurate measures of student performance analyze individual student growth by comparing current assessment results to previous results of the same student. To provide truly diagnostic evaluation and thus improve instruction, individual assessment results must be measured.

Holding the high school NAEP assessment in either the grade 10 (spring) or the grade 11 (fall) would allow for a more accurate national indicator of high school success than waiting until grade 12 when the incentive for students is much lower. In addition, this national appraisal would be a more accurate comparison of state achievement levels than looking at 50 sometimes very different individual state assessments.

High Quality School Leaders

Recommendations:

- Provide a dedicated funding stream of \$100 million in Title II of NCLB specifically designated for principals and other leaders within a school. The funds would be used to:
 - Reculture high schools into professional learning communities where school leaders establish the conditions and support system for sustainable change
 - Provide funding for school leaders (principals, teacher leaders, and others) to participate in ongoing, job-embedded professional development
 - Redefine principal, teacher, and staff roles to reflect inclusive leadership practices
 - Call for a leadership team (principals, teacher leaders, and others), led by the principal, to create a vision for the school
 - Establish an action plan that includes the strategic use of data that will result in increased student achievement and in a personalized learning environment for all

Collaborative, inclusive leadership is essential to any reform efforts and requires the development of a professional learning community, wherein leadership throughout the institution refocuses its work on what will successfully support every student in their high school experience.

Rationale:

Collaborative leadership strategies are the building blocks of successful school reform and have proven successful and easily replicable in all types of schools—large, small, urban, suburban, or rural. Researchers now recognize the significant impact that school leadership has on successful school improvement. Leaders help build and sustain a vision and serve as the catalysts of school reform. Collaborative, inclusive leadership is essential to any reform efforts and requires the development of a professional learning community, wherein leadership throughout the institution (including team and teacher leaders) refocuses its work on what will successfully support every student in their high school experience. Of course, reform requires change. Fighting change is often the stumbling block to successful school improvement. Use of collaborative leadership strategies can significantly mitigate the efforts to fight change.

Title II’s “allowable use” of funds for principals’ training has not been effective in ensuring that principals and assistant principals are included in ongoing professional development. In today’s achievement-focused atmosphere, it is imperative that principals be effective instructional leaders and that staff members collaborate with their principals to establish the school’s learning goals. Professional development should incorporate individualized learning plans for every educator (teachers and principals) in a school.

Highly Qualified Teachers

Quality teachers play the crucial role in student learning. It is necessary for secondary school teachers to receive professional training for literacy development.

Recommendations:

- Require high school teachers in core academic subject areas, such as math, English language arts, and science, to be “highly qualified” in subject area competency by demonstrating ability with either a baccalaureate major in the subject or by passing the state approved competency exam (e.g. HOUSSE or PRAXIS)
- Provide teachers with the time and resources (through Title II) necessary for ongoing, job embedded professional development (i.e., common planning, team teaching, interdisciplinary work, and formal education)
- Encourage training in adolescent literacy in higher education teacher prep courses and state-approved competency examinations for all secondary school teachers so that reading and writing literacy skills are incorporated across the curriculum and throughout the school
- Encourage content pedagogy training in higher education teacher prep courses and state-approved competency examinations for all secondary school teachers so that all teachers develop the skills necessary to understand the art of teaching and differentiated learning and are able to apply that knowledge in their classrooms

Rationale:

Quality teachers play the crucial role in student learning. It is necessary for secondary school teachers to receive professional training for literacy development so the improvement of reading and writing skills can be incorporated across the curriculum. Literacy programs for secondary schools should include grade-level and remedial literacy programs implemented across the curriculum in middle level and high schools. It is the lack of such programs that causes many students to fall behind in reading comprehension, which results in poor writing skills, a decrease in overall academic performance, an increase in dropouts, and a decrease in graduation rates.

In addition to subject-area expertise and adolescent literacy teaching skills, highly qualified teachers should acquire a solid understanding of pedagogy. The difference between content and pedagogical knowledge lies in the teacher's comprehension of different learning styles and the ability to apply that wisdom in concert with their subject-area expertise to improve individual student achievement.

High Schools Identified As “In Need Of Improvement”

Recommendations:

- Provide technical assistance to all high schools defined as “in need of improvement” under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This technical assistance will consist of:
 - Analyzing and defining the problems a school is facing
 - Establishing a school leadership team to develop a long-term improvement plan with measurable outcomes
 - Working with the school leadership team to implement the strategies
 - Gathering data to determine the success of the strategies
- Require the school improvement plan to include the following components:
 - Collaborative leadership – Institute structural leadership changes that allow for meaningful involvement in decision making by teachers, students, family members and the community and that support effective communication with these groups
 - Core knowledge – Establish the essential learning a student is required to learn to graduate, and adjust the curriculum and teaching strategies to realize that goal
 - Connections with students – Increase the quantity and improve the quality of interactions between students, teachers, and other school personnel by reducing the number of students for which any adult or group of adults is responsible
 - Personalized planning – Implement a comprehensive advisory program to ensure that each student has frequent and meaningful opportunities to plan and assess his or her academic and social progress with a faculty member

Building the leadership and capacity of low-performing schools is essential to their improvement.

- Adaptation – Ensure that teachers use a variety of instructional strategies and assessments to accommodate individualized learning styles
- Flexible use of time – Implement schedules flexible enough to accommodate teaching strategies consistent with the ways students learn most effectively and to allow for effective teacher teaming and lesson planning
- Continuous professional development – Align comprehensive ongoing professional development programs and individualized professional development plans of staff members with the content knowledge and instructional strategies required to prepare students for graduation

Rationale:

A comprehensive school improvement support initiative that reaches all high schools identified as “in need of improvement” is necessary in order to assess strengths and weaknesses and implement research-proven improvement strategies.

Building the leadership and capacity of low-performing schools is essential to their improvement. Technical assistance, similar to the work performed by some regional educational laboratories, seems to be the best route to providing support to low-performing schools. Some labs dedicate a professional who works with the school on a long-term basis and will become a member of the leadership team, a mentor, and a “critical friend” to promote technical assistance. Such an initiative would help schools assess their strengths and weaknesses, provide leadership development, and implement improvement strategies that will show measurable outcomes.

If These Recommendations Are Fully Implemented, What Outcomes Can Be Expected Over Time?

- Improvements in closing the achievement gap between whites and minorities and between high- and low-income populations
- An increase in the percentage of students passing state exit exams
- An increase in the high school graduation rate
- An increase in the number of students who attend college
- Improvement in NAEP assessment results based on the grade 10 (spring) or grade 11 (fall)

Research tells us that successful education reform takes significant time and, more often than not, results in an initial dip in achievement scores before improvement ensues. Nonetheless, measurable outcomes must be reviewed to determine if implemented strategies to improve high schools are effective and efficient. There is, however, no one determinant for the success of high school reform strategies. We suggest reviewing these multiple measures over a five-year period to determine if there is steady progress.

Closing

NASSP is fully committed to high school reform that systemically recultures the American high school through collaborative, inclusive leadership; the strategic use of data; personalized learning that focuses on the academic needs of students; and increased academic rigor that reflects the integration of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. But these changes will need to be supported by a solid investment and a long-term commitment on the part of state and federal policymakers. The cost of such efforts may seem high to some, but it pales in comparison to the human, social, and economic costs of not investing in improving our nation's high schools.

