Legislative Agenda
We are educators. We know what works.
Together we can make a difference. *ASCD*

The problem: Our high school students face significant challenges.

- More than two-thirds of new jobs now require some form of postsecondary education, and that percentage is growing rapidly (Barton, 2006).

- Almost one-third of college freshmen enroll in at least one remedial course (NCES, 2004).

- In 2003, 3.5 million young people ages 16-26 did not have a high school diploma and were not enrolled in school (Bridgeland, 2006).

- America has a steady high school dropout rate of nearly 30 percent, and the rate is significantly higher for Latinos and African Americans (Barton, 2005; Thornburg, 2006).

- Researchers estimate that dropouts are far more likely to become incarcerated, suffer poor health, and have shorter life spans than high school graduates. (Martin & Halperin 2006).

- One economist estimated that if graduation rates were just one percent higher, crimes would drop by 100,000 per year, with an associated cost savings to society of $1.4 billion per year. (Moretti, 2005).

The solution: the ASCD High School Reform Proposal

It's no secret that American high schools face significant challenges. The graduation rate hovers below 70 percent and leaders across all fields worry that even students who do complete high school are not adequately prepared for higher education or work success.

Recognizing the importance of this issue, ASCD has developed a High School Reform Proposal to help the U.S. Congress foster the innovative reform that is needed to fully support our nation's high school students.

The ASCD High School Reform Proposal is not mandatory, but participatory; it will provide educational options and resources for school systems or states. This is not an add-on or alternative to No Child Left Behind, but new legislation that goes beyond NCLB. Participating high schools must incorporate transparency and accountability, and must illustrate success.

This voluntary program is guided by the knowledge that today's high school needs greater innovation, increased student engagement, and a rich and rigorous curriculum that is more educationally meaningful for students. It is flexible to ensure that schools have the choice to participate, and that those that do participate will receive additional resources to support these efforts. *It is not a mandate.*

Above all, the ASCD High School Reform Proposal places top priority on high academic achievement while ensuring what's good for the students. For each student to succeed, we must focus on the learning goals we want that student to achieve, with greater flexibility to allow students and schools to reach those challenging goals in the best way possible.

Improving a 100-year-old, largely unchanged education system is no small task. But in concert, the elements we propose will ensure the students of today are prepared to become the innovators and leaders of tomorrow.

ASCD Recommendations

Multiple Assessments

The ASCD High School Reform Proposal calls for multiple measures of assessment because measuring student learning is an essential tool when done properly. Unfortunately, NCLB places too much emphasis on single assessments that fail to help teachers improve their instruction and are inadequate for measuring the full breadth of student learning.

It is crucial that we develop a more sophisticated assessment system that incorporates more meaningful assessment data at the school level, such as portfolio assessments, demonstrations, oral presentations, and applied projects.

Such a system will ensure not only that important account-ability decisions are based on the best possible data, but also that educators can use the data to determine which students are struggling, what strategies are working, and how teachers should adjust their instruction to ensure that each child succeeds.

Personalized Learning

The ASCD High School Reform Proposal calls for personalized learning to ensure that students assume ownership for connecting their learning with future goals. This enables students to work with educational mentors and career coaches within the school building to not only to see greater relevance in their schoolwork, but also to grow increasingly engaged in school, connected to adults, and prepared for graduation and future success.

Research has shown that students who do not believe their schoolwork is relevant and who are not engaged are at a much higher risk of dropping out. Engaged students not only attend school more, but are also likely to get more out of their time in school because they approach learning more eagerly, seek greater opportunities, and persist in the face of difficulty (Voke, 2002).

Flexible Use of Time and Structure

The ASCD High School Reform Proposal calls for flexible use of time and structure because many schools are hindered by inflexible graduation, time and attendance requirements, such as the 100-year-old Carnegie Unit, that do not reflect contemporary knowledge of best practices.

Where the Carnegie unit tries to force student learning to fit outdated instructional schedules, we must instead organize learning according to each students' needs in mastering an academic subject. This may mean that some students complete high school in fewer or more than the traditional four years. What counts is not the time spent in the school building, but the learning that the student masters.

We must give schools the opportunity to explore the best structures and environments to promote student learning—including connecting students to beneficial learning opportunities not only within the school, but also through internships, online instruction, and independent study.

Professional Development

To fully support students in new kinds of learning, we must first support teachers and school leaders in gaining the knowledge, time, and resources to educate in new, innovative ways. The ASCD High School Reform Proposal calls for flexibility, innovation and greater resources for professional development.

Business and Community Engagement

The key to helping students succeed is focusing on the best opportunities for students to master learning objectives, whether those opportunities take place inside a classroom or at a nearby business or other location in the community.

Schools, in collaboration with local businesses, should be able to provide learning opportunities outside the classroom that harness the relevance and needs of business with the academic rigor of the school curriculum. This increases both business support and student engagement.

Studies have shown that combining academic rigor with career or technical learning, work-based learning, and mentoring designed to help the student move toward postsecondary goals, not only improves graduation rates, but also helps boost scores in reading, math, and science (Bottoms, 2003).

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