

A New Educational Imperative for a New Global Century



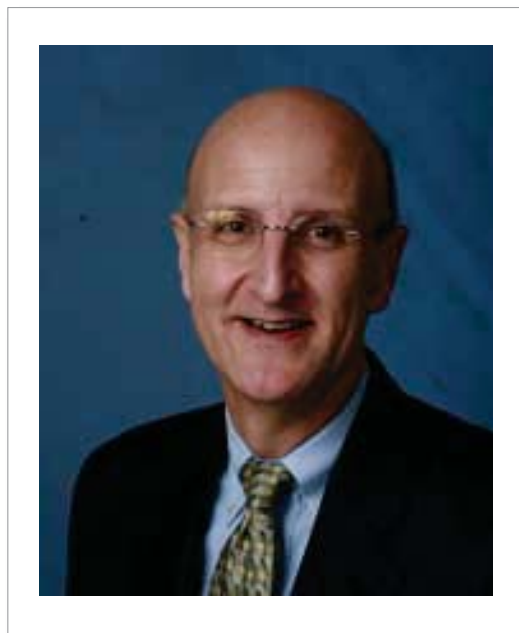
Today our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant, and to face the challenge of change.

Martin Luther King, 1967

We live in a time of extraordinary ferment – one might even say turmoil. The narrative of the 21st Century presents us with two central challenges: can our educational systems prepare our students for a new world that is more competitive economically and more complex politically? Can we effectively educate all students for this new world, advancing a universalist access agenda that is as daunting as it is essential?

These challenges will require the collective efforts of governments, businesses, philanthropies, communities, and individuals. What follows is a strategic direction to engage the shared energies of all in pursuit of this new educational imperative.

At the core of the United States' concern about its world position is the extent to which its educational system, as currently constructed, will address the demands of the new global century. A seemingly endless flurry of reports attests to the startling improvement of student outcomes throughout the EU as well as China and India, in contrast to the relatively flat performance of students in the USA. Even in higher education – where the United States still possesses an advantage – there is concern over a “BA degree gap.” Currently, several groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in higher education have significantly lower degree attainment rates. Moreover, there is a continuing need for remedial education. Conservative estimates indicate that 40 percent of all college entrants have to complete at least one remedial course.



Ronald A. Williams and
Stephen J. Handel, The College
Board, USA

To create schools that are authentic representations of this country's egalitarian ideals, we must prepare many more students for postsecondary success — strengthening K-12 and higher education in transformative ways. Our current educational pathways find too many students without a map, often leaving the road altogether. Recent reports indicate that as many as three out of ten high school students depart high school without completing a diploma. Moreover, while the United States can be proud of the number of students who enter higher education, many never complete a certificate or degree.

One recent report predicts that the USA will need to raise degree completion rates by as much as 40 percent to meet our future workforce needs - needs that will be realised only if we substantially increase the completion rates of students who have been underrepresented in higher education.

An Imperative for Education Renewal

We have no margin morally or economically for the educational failure of any student. The dynamics of the 21st Century demand that we do a better job of providing educational opportunities for all. Thus, our response cannot be shortsighted or scattershot. We know what is important. Research is unequivocal about the overarching value of a rigorous secondary education and good teaching. Students from all backgrounds respond to high standards. They want to work hard - and do, especially if guided by effective teachers in successful schools.

Furthermore, our educational renewal must be inclusive—a long-term commitment to students providing them with multiple opportunities to succeed. And it must be flexible enough to

accommodate students who enter this system possessing a variety of skills and coming from a diversity of backgrounds.

Advancing Excellence for All

Understanding that our future cannot be secured without a renewed and sustained commitment to education, the College Board, a membership organisation of more than 5,300 schools and colleges worldwide, is working to strengthen students' preparation for higher education and to provide access to those who might not otherwise be able earn a postsecondary credential or degree.

The College Board is best known for its assessments, such as the SAT®, but the organisation is moving far beyond its traditional boundaries to help shape and level the educational playing field. While assessments provide valuable information to students, families and educators, they alone cannot drive educational reform. Thus, the College Board is working to chart students' academic progress in multiple ways, believing that such a strategy better responds to the challenges students face.

But a single organisation, however well intentioned, cannot level the educational playing field overnight or alone. That is why the College Board is collaborating with leaders in education, philanthropy, and business to develop a three-part strategy designed to: 1) influence national and state education policy; 2) construct model educational reform structures; and 3) democratise access to educational excellence.

1) **Advocacy:** Identifying issues that reflect directly on our nation's educational challenges is the first step toward reform. Recent College Board reports have documented:

- the centrality of writing in the curriculum and its importance for shaping sharp thinkers and creating efficient communicators;
- the need for better-trained and compensated teachers in K-12 who can advance an agenda for education that encompasses all students;
- the value and necessity of enrolling many more students from low-income backgrounds in our colleges and universities and
- the often-overlooked importance of America's community colleges as pivotal institutions in expanding access to higher education and in training new cadres of workers in 21st Century technologies.

Upcoming reports will describe the declining academic performance of males in American postsecondary education; the need for reform in the federal financial aid system; and the challenge of providing authentic access and equity in higher education institutions.

Each of these reports has a specific advocacy agenda attached through which the College Board is affecting policy at the federal and state levels.

2) Model Educational Reform Structures:

The College Board is investing in an ambitious plan of action called the College Readiness System. The elements of the system – curricula, instruction, teacher professional development, and assessment – have been designed in tandem to help schools, colleges, and families collectively promote student success through:

- **A Common Curriculum** Focusing on College Readiness – The College Board's *Standards for College Success*[™] represents an array of knowledge, skills, and abilities that help high school students prepare for

college. *SpringBoard*[®], an innovative middle school curriculum in mathematics and English provides students with the tools they will need to challenge themselves in rigorous high school courses.

- **Advanced Placement[®] for All** – *AP*[®] is a college preparatory curriculum that provides students with stimulating and rigorous courses (for which they earn college credit) and professional development for teachers. Through a determined effort to broaden access to a stronger preparatory track, AP participation has nearly doubled in the past 8 years, with many more educationally disadvantaged students gaining admission to these courses. The College Board has also developed *AP Potential*[™], a research-based tool that helps teachers identify students with the potential for success in AP courses.

- **Whole School Reform** – In 2006, the College Board created *EXCEerator*[™] High Schools in selected urban areas to provide low-income and minority students with an authentic opportunity to prepare for college. This past year, 90 percent of the graduating class earned a diploma and 80 percent are prepared for college admission. Building on this success, the College Board established "College Board Schools" for grades 6–12.

3) **Democratisation of Excellence:** Establishing strong schools will take significant and long-term investments by federal, state, and local governments. This investment is well within our reach and utterly essential for the challenges ahead. We have the tools; we need simply the will to work them.

Still, cost can be a barrier—especially for families unaccustomed to understanding the resources needed to prepare their sons and daughters for college. For example, one of the issues the College Board has had to confront is that many students cannot afford its test fees. As a result, the organization has moved aggressively to aid students by spending \$27 million a year in fee waivers to low-income students who take the College Board's tests. This has allowed many more students to gain access to one of the strongest curricula in the country.

The Next 100 Years

These collaborative and strategic efforts demonstrate that connecting students to college success and opportunity is indeed possible. A well-educated citizenry – an essential element of any democracy – is central to the world's continued prosperity.

While there is a great deal more to do, we hope the College Board's advocacy and programmatic initiatives, in partnership with K-12 schools and colleges and universities, will serve as a model as nations strive to expand opportunities for students, families, and educators in ways that advance the educational imperatives of the New Global Century.