

CALL FOR A SUMMIT ON NEW YORK EDUCATION

The issues before us are stark and urgent. New York's educational system confronts two critical problems: First, we face a great divide in achievement along lines of income, race and ethnicity, language, and disability. Second, New York and the nation are not keeping up with growing demands for still more knowledge and skill in the face of increasing competition in a changing global economy. We must meet these two great challenges together.

The achievement gap – from kindergarten through college and beyond – is now well-known. Too many children begin life disadvantaged, attend poor schools, learn little, drop out in school or in college, and wind up at the margins in low skill, low paying jobs. We have made progress in closing the gap, but not enough. Some people still think this situation is impossible to change. Some even believe we need to have a lower track for people “who really can't make it.” Some believe there will never be enough high-level jobs to go around. This is wrong. Both research and our progress so far show that people can achieve at much higher levels.

Global competition, while in the news, is not well-understood. Many see it simply as a problem of global out-sourcing to countries that will do the job cheaply. But that is only part of the story. Other nations compete not only with lower costs but also higher quality. The United States educates too few people through high school, college and postsecondary technical programs to achieve the skills they will need – skills in mathematics, health care, the social and natural sciences, technology, the arts, and many other fields. At current rates, experts estimate that by 2020 Americans will be unable to fill 14 million of the most skilled, highest-paying jobs because there won't be enough qualified people.¹ Already many states, including New York, are facing critical shortages in many of the licensed professions, including those that provide vital health and safety services.

Too few people will have the knowledge and skills our nation needs. This is unacceptable. Only if we act together can we correct this problem now.

We have met and overcome similar challenges before. We bring huge advantages to this challenge, and we will use them. America is still the leader in research and innovation² and has a greater percentage of college graduates than virtually any other nation.³ Recent academic gains in New York offer promise of more to come. We have many distinguished educational and cultural institutions which together form the University of the State of New York. Schools and BOCES, colleges and

¹ Carnevale, Anthony P. and Donna M. Desrochers, *Standards for What: The Economic Roots of K-16 Reform*, 2003, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J., p. 48.

² Council on Competitiveness. *Innovate America: National Innovation Initiative Report*. 2004, p. 10.

³ Carnevale, p. 68. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance 2002-2005*.

universities, libraries, museums, archives, public broadcasting, and the professions in New York, and in no other state, are all under the care of one board – the Board of Regents. The University of the State of New York, in its capacity to add to the economic and civic vitality of our state, is one of our greatest advantages.

What shall we do? See the challenges clearly, mobilize the capacity of the University, determine the vital few actions needed, and act together. That is why we will come together in a **Summit on New York Education**.

What is the gap and what causes it?

It begins with poverty and continues in schools that are under-funded and ill-equipped, with large classes and a weak curriculum, keeping many people from entering and completing college. This represents a fundamental lack of opportunity and of access for many hundreds of thousands of children.

The facts tell the story:

- About 40% of children in New York live in low-income families below or near the poverty line. And poor children often face inadequate nutrition, environmental hazards, lower quality childcare, and unsafe neighborhoods.⁴
- By 4th grade, about 55% of Black and Hispanic students reach the standards in reading and writing vs. almost 80% of white students.⁵
- Only about half of high school students in our big cities pass their courses and graduate in four years vs. 80% or more in middle class and wealthy schools.⁶
- Fewer than half of students with disabilities who complete high school plan to go to college.⁷
- Many people who enroll in college never finish because they entered ill-prepared to do the work and never receive the support they need. In New York State, despite improvements, only 43% of Black and Hispanic students who enroll in a four-year college get a bachelor's degree in 6 years vs. 65% of white students. Neither result is good enough.⁸

⁴ National Center for Children in Poverty. http://www.nccp.org/cat_8.html

⁵ New York State Education Department. <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/press-release/20050518/home.htm>

⁶ NYSED. <http://emsc32.nysed.gov/irts/press-release/20050714/home.html>

⁷ New York State Board of Regents, *Statewide Plan for Higher Education*, 2005, New York State Education Department, Albany, N.Y. p. 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

Global competition: Can we educate everyone to fill the jobs available and compete with the rest of the world?

America is producing high-skilled, higher-paying jobs that require education beyond high school. Yet at current rates of college-going, America seems ready to produce only about 4 percent more people with some postsecondary education by 2020 – leading to the conclusion that 14 million higher-paying, high skilled jobs will go unfilled (or go off shore) because there are not enough well-educated people to fill them.⁹

Again, the facts tell the story about job growth:

- Higher-paying white-collar office, education, health care, and technology jobs now account for over 60% of all jobs, and these sectors are growing the most.¹⁰
- Jobs that require an associate's degree will grow by a third through 2010. Jobs requiring a bachelor's degree will grow by 24%.¹¹
- Higher-paying factory jobs shrank from 32 to 17% of all jobs between 1959 and 2001.¹²
- Low-wage service jobs are stagnant at 20% of all jobs.¹³
- Jobs requiring at least some college continue to pay more. In 1979, they paid 43% more than jobs requiring only a high school diploma. By 2001, they paid 62% more.¹⁴
- And jobs requiring a bachelor's degree now pay 76% more.¹⁵

And America faces great competition from abroad where people are getting ready to fill those jobs.

- America is still No. 1 in productive innovation– near the top rank of countries measured by research and development as a percentage of gross domestic product.¹⁶ **But:**
- American employers report that too many job applicants lack skills in writing, problem solving, and creative thinking, as well as specific occupational competencies.
- Foreign owned companies and foreign-born inventors hold nearly half of new U.S. patents, with Japan, Korea, and Taiwan accounting for more than one-fourth.¹⁷

⁹ Carnevale, pp. 47-48.

¹⁰ Carnevale, pp.17-20.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 35.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁶ Council on Competitiveness, *Innovate America: National Innovation Initiative Report*, 2004, p. 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

- Federal investment in fundamental research has declined and is only half its mid-1960s peak of 2 percent of GDP.¹⁸
- The United States has recently been equaled or surpassed by six other nations, including Japan and Korea, in the percentage of young people who are earning college degrees.¹⁹
- By 2010, if current trends continue, more than 90% of all scientists and engineers in the world will live in Asia.²⁰
- The U.S. is 17th in the production of scientists and engineers; several decades ago we were third. The number of U.S. degrees granted in science and engineering (except biology) has stayed flat or declined since 1985.²¹

Can the gap be closed?

Yes. Many argue that disadvantaged people are not able to reach the standards demanded in education. Research shows they can. And improving achievement gives reason for optimism:

- Low-income and disadvantaged students who are placed in more challenging courses frequently are more successful and achieve more than those who are placed in low-level courses.²²
- Children of color have often made the biggest gains. In elementary school, more than half of Black and Hispanic students now meet the English standards, up from a quarter six years ago. Three-fourths meet the math standards, up from less than 45% six years ago.²³
- There has been a dramatic rise in the number of students taking and passing Regents and Advanced Placement exams over the period from 1996 to 2004.²⁴
- The number of students graduating from high school has increased, even with higher standards.²⁵

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12

¹⁹ OECD, *Education at a Glance 2005, OECD Briefing Note for United States*, p. 5.

²⁰ Business Roundtable, et al., *Tapping America's Potential: the Education for Innovation Initiative*, 2005, Washington D.C., p. 1.

²¹ Council on Competitiveness, p. 23.

²² Cooney, Sandra and Gene Bottoms, *Middle Grades to High School: Mending a Weak Link*, 2002, Southern Regional Education Board, Atlanta, Ga., pp. 7-10.

²³ New York State Education Department. <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/press-release/20050518/home.htm> and <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/irts/press-release/20050922/home.htm>

²⁴ NYSED. <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/repcrd2004/home.shtml>
College Board, *Advanced Placement Report to the Nation: New York State Supplement*, 2005, Washington D.C., pp. 2-6.

²⁵ NYSED. <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/repcrd2004/home.shtml>

- More Black and Hispanic students are graduating from college. More students with disabilities are going to college and graduating. But more need to do so.²⁶

Why does closing the gap matter?

When some are left behind, all of us ultimately suffer – from a failure to compete with other countries that educate their citizens to higher standards, from the failure of America’s classic commitment to opportunity for all, and from a society in greater stress. We must eliminate the gap and raise achievement overall to secure our economic and civic vitality.

What are our joint aims?

At a series of regional meetings held around the State in preparation for the Summit, leaders generally approved the following aims to help us close the gap and improve achievement overall:

Every child will get a good start. This implies, for example, prenatal care, child health care, family literacy through libraries and other institutions, pre-school programs and full-day kindergarten for all. And these programs have to work together.

Every child will read by the second grade. We know enough now to do this. It implies systems to spread that knowledge to all teachers of young children and parents, and continued research to extend what we know. It implies screening programs and reading strategies based on scientific knowledge. It implies leadership from colleges, universities and schools that prepare teachers, and joint effort between schools and libraries.

Everyone will complete middle level education ready for high school. This implies a combination of leadership, instruction, support, and connections with families to enable all children to grow both academically and as caring people. In concrete terms, it means eliminating the problems of low academic achievement by the end of 8th grade.

Everyone will graduate from high school ready for work, higher education, and citizenship. This implies consistent expectations from higher education, schools, employers, parents, teachers and others, and clear communication with students. It implies help from cultural, professional, and community groups to foster literacy; a focus on students in danger of dropping out and on schools with low graduation rates; action to boost attendance; individual attention for young people with weak skills; and connecting student interests with a rigorous curriculum that includes career and technical education. In the long run, this also implies that we will redesign high school.

²⁶ New York State Board of Regents, *Statewide Plan for Higher Education*, 2005, New York State Education Department, Albany, N.Y. p. 37, 47.

People who begin higher education will complete their programs. Graduates will be well-prepared for careers and possibly the professions, and ready for participation in public life and a fulfilling life in general. This implies that colleges and cultural, professional, and community groups will support strategies already proven in higher education opportunity programs: academic support, guidance, and tutoring. It implies financial commitment to stronger institutions and tuition assistance to keep college affordable. It implies investing in our capacity in mathematics, science, the arts, and the other disciplines.

People of all ages who seek more knowledge and skill will have the fullest opportunity to continue their education. New York must encourage people to take full advantage of our educational and cultural institutions (not only schools and colleges but also libraries, museums, archives and public broadcasting) and ensure they can accommodate all who want to use them. We must strengthen existing connections among these institutions and schools and colleges.

What did we learn about how to achieve our aims?

- 1. Joint venture will get us there.** Each aim seems at first glance to fall within one part of the educational system. For example, “Every child will learn to read by the second grade” appears to belong to early elementary school. But at the regional meetings we saw that achieving this aim also depends on university preparation of teachers, family literacy, summer reading programs, and all the health, social, and related actions needed from birth to give each child a good start.
- 2. Finding institutional self-interest in joint venture is critically important.** As one college president said, we of necessity spend our time thinking about our own institutions. Joint venture becomes a rational strategy when we discover that the interests of our own institution match those of another in pursuit of a particular goal.
- 3. When we concentrate on a few key actions, hard effort will produce better results.** We need to think together in unconventional ways. We should focus on transition points from level to level in the K-16 education system, the connections between that system and cultural institutions and the professions, and how to create a culture that sends and receives messages of expectation up and down the line.

What are a few key actions where we can work together to achieve our aims?

At the regional meetings, we saw three points where joint effort could produce significant results:

1. Support parents and expose all children to early education. Build a USNY coalition, together with health and other human service organizations, to give every child a good start in school and in life.

Children who enter kindergarten with delays in language, literacy, and socialization skills are at risk for future academic failure. From Reading First data, we know with 88% reliability that how children read at the end of 1st grade predicts their reading mastery at the end of 3rd grade.²⁷ The research also shows that high quality instruction and parent involvement increase achievement for young children. Yet New York's Universal Pre-K program serves fewer than 25% of eligible four year olds.²⁸ What can you do to increase support to parents, expand access for young children to rich oral and written language experiences, and maximize the availability and coordination of resources among schools, colleges, libraries, museums, and health and human resource organizations?

- **Ensure children begin school ready to read by increasing participation in literacy and educational programs through libraries, public television, museums, and other organizations.**
- **Make pre-kindergarten opportunities universal throughout the State.**

2. Reform high school to enable all students to graduate ready for work, higher education, and citizenship.

New York has built the foundation for success through high standards, accountability, stronger curriculum and the like. It is critical now that we transform high school to ensure that students achieve the skills they will need for higher education. The data show we are only moderately successful in reaching this goal. As many as a third of students enter many high schools ill-prepared. Statewide, only two-thirds of students graduate from high school in 4 years.²⁹ To get the last third to graduate from high school, we need these additional steps:

²⁷ Whitehurst, Grover J., *Much Too Late*, *Education Next*, Summer 2001.
www.educationnext.org/20012/8whitehurst.html

²⁸ NYSED, "Policy Review of Early Childhood Education," March 2003.
<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/2005Meetings/March2005/0305emscvesidd3.htm>

²⁹ NYSED, *Assessment: Data on Student Performance on Regents Exams*.
<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/2004Meetings/December2004/1204emscvesidd3.htm>

- **Commit to achieving higher graduation rates, and raise those targets periodically.**
- **Focus now on the high schools with graduation rates below 70%. (Currently, there are 136 such schools.)**

In those schools, support actions that have been shown to improve graduation, including helping students transition from middle school; expanding proven career-technical education models; making sure every school can provide students with a quality school library and access to cultural resources; and giving intensive help to students with disabilities and English language learners to improve achievement and complete high school.

- **Provide students with the challenging courses they need to succeed in college.**
- **Broadly engage citizens, parents and students in a statewide discussion about how to reform high schools that don't graduate their students with the skills needed for higher education and work.**

3. Ensure that higher education is affordable and of high quality and that all students receive academic support to enter and complete college.

Other nations have recently equaled or surpassed the United States in the percentage of young people who are earning a postsecondary degree.³⁰ Thirty percent of Americans who attempt a bachelor's degree don't graduate within six years. That number is closer to 60% for minority students. The Statewide Plan for Higher Education, the work of many people, points the way to a solution. How will you help more students prepare for higher education and make a smooth transition from high school to quality postsecondary programs, especially those from underrepresented groups?

- **Provide academic support to increase graduation rates, especially among underrepresented groups.**
- **Make college more affordable.**
- **Increase the number of graduates in critical academic majors and professions.**
- **Increase investment in faculty, infrastructure, and research.**

³⁰ OECD, *Education at a Glance 2005, OECD Briefing Note for United States*, p. 5.

What are the important questions for the Summit?

To take action and achieve our aims, we should ask some critical questions at the Summit:

- **Do you support the joint aims?**
- **Do you agree that current achievement levels are insufficient?**
- **Are these the essential actions we will take together to accomplish our aims?**
- **What will you and your organization do?**
- **What must we do to enable joint venture? What will get in our way? What will we do to overcome the problem?**



**THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT**
