

An Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools

To ensure that all high school graduates are prepared for postsecondary education and work, governors and business and education leaders must develop a comprehensive plan for their states to:

- Restore value to the high school diploma by revising academic standards, upgrading curricula and coursework, and developing assessments that align with the expectations of college and the workplace.
- Redesign the American high school to provide all students with the higher-level knowledge and skills, educational options, and support they must have to succeed.
- Give high school students the excellent teachers and principals they need by ensuring teachers and principals have the necessary knowledge and skills and by offering incentives to attract and retain the best and brightest to the neediest schools and subjects.
- Hold high schools and colleges accountable for student success by setting meaningful benchmarks, intervening in low-performing schools and demanding increased accountability of postsecondary institutions.
- Streamline educational governance so that the K–12 and postsecondary systems work more closely together.

Honor States Grant Program Non-Negotiables

All Phase One states are required to implement a number of core activities that will help build the political and public will for high school redesign. These “non-negotiables” include:

1. Set 10-year performance goals for improving the high school graduation and college readiness rates (disaggregated by student race/ethnicity and family income), and publicly report the goals along with baseline and improvement data.
2. Commit to adopting a longitudinal, 4-year cohort high school graduation measure that tracks individual students and permits valid comparisons among states. An NGA Center task force is developing a recommendation for a graduation rate definition that governors should adopt. The recommendation and accompanying Issue Brief will be released at the NGA Annual Meeting in July 2005.
3. Demonstrate an on-going commitment to an aligned governance structure for P-16 education. This entity should have gubernatorial leadership, or leadership accountable to the governor, and should have explicit responsibility for a discrete number of objectives.
4. Commit to actively participate in the National Education Data Partnership initiative, including use of the SchoolMatters.com website, sponsored by Standard & Poors, and other secondary data sources to complement the state’s information system for high schools. Describe how the state will make use of the available data to inform The NGA Center for Best Practices Honor States Grant Program and related high school reform efforts.
5. Create and execute a communications plan to build and sustain public will for high school redesign. States will finalize their plans after participation in an NGA-sponsored communications workshop, where common messages learned from national research will be shared.

Phase Two states committed to implementing all of the above except for setting 10-year performance goals.