

PRESS RELEASE

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“All Over The Map: State Policies to Improve The High School”

“Are state policies helping or hurting high school students?”

June 17, 2002 Washington, DC – A new report by the recently formed National Alliance on the American High School (HS Alliance) examines trends, policy assumptions, and tensions that key state education statutes and board requirements hold for high schools. The state policies considered are divided into three categories:

- **Policies specific to high schools**—such as compulsory schooling, Carnegie Units and curriculum, and General Education Development-GED.
- **Policies that detail opportunities to learn**—such as teacher certification and alternative schools.
- **Policies that are new and in rapid flux**—such as standards and accountability, assessment, and high school exit tests.

The report finds that longstanding policies tie high schools to a firmly entrenched vision that dates back to the early 20th century. Even the new policies designed to graduate well-prepared students have had little impact on the fundamental nature of high schools. The authors conclude that state leaders need to look closely at the state policies that affect high school-aged youth and to evaluate how they can alter the existing policy landscape to better support the goals of educating today’s high school-aged youth.

This report builds on a series of “policy maps” presented at the June 2001 meeting of the National Alliance on the American High School (the HS Alliance). Originally prepared by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), the state-by-state information that forms the core of the report includes data from a variety of sources including ECS, the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Report co-author, Monica Martinez, says, “The policies specific to high schools carry some unpleasant messages about how relatively unchanged high schools have remained during the past two decades, despite unprecedented changes in state education systems.” According to Judy Bray, policy consultant and co-author of the report, “High schools are tugged in many directions in the current policy environment. State policymakers need to

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raise questions about why high school progress is still defined in terms of how many units of time a student accumulates by sitting in classes, or why policies still permit schools to reserve challenging coursework and the best teachers for only a select group of students, despite new policies that assume all students will reach high standards.”

International comparisons and states’ own assessments of progress show that America’s high schools are not improving the skills and knowledge of young people at the rate that many predict is needed for success in the 21st century. A renewed urgency among employers, community members, foundations, and government underscores the nation’s interest in exploring approaches that improve academic and developmental outcomes of high school-aged youth. Since its initial meeting of three organizations in 1999, the HS Alliance has grown to a loose collaborative of 40 organizations. In 2001, the HS Alliance was formed to help capture “lessons learned” from these initiatives and harness this momentum. The HS Alliance’s mission is to mobilize the resources, knowledge, and capacity of individuals and organizations to work collectively in shaping policy, practice, and public engagement that foster high achievement, close the achievement gap, and promote civic and personal growth among all youth in our high schools and communities. Please visit www.hsalliance.org to learn more about the HS Alliance.

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Copies of *All Over the Map: State Policies to Improve The American High School* are available for free by download from the Web site, www.hsalliance.org, or in hard copy from the Institute for Educational Leadership. Orders must be requested in writing by either fax (202) 822-8405 or e-mail: hsalliance@iel.org, or posted mail to the attention of: Publications, IEL, 1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20036.

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