



NATIONAL
HIGH SCHOOL
ALLIANCE

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THE AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL IN CRISIS

New Report Captures and Shares Insights for Possible Remedies

"As a crucial link in the K-16 pipeline, the American High School is leaking with the magnitude of the catastrophic Valdez spill."

May 14, 2004 – Washington, DC – Students encounter high school at two critical transition points in the educational pipeline—exiting middle school and entering postsecondary and/or work world—but, currently, high schools are failing to support the academic success of large proportions of students. The nation's leaders, however, have yet to raise public awareness about this crisis and the fact that it affects high schools in all communities—not only those in high poverty, urban schools. Students from a range of socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds are disengaging from and/or dropping out of school each day. A new report from the National High School Alliance looks at how leaders are beginning to transform America's traditional, comprehensive high school in ways that make it responsive to the needs of all students.

"Powerful voices are backing the proposition that the time has come to re-think and reinvent the American high school," as stated in the executive summary of this new report. **Crisis or Possibility? Conversations About the American High School** "keeps us focused on the urgency of this crisis and reminds us that we cannot afford to let the American high school fall from the nation's radar screen," says Hillary Pennington, Chief Executive Officer and Vice Chairman, Jobs for the Future. "By drawing our attention to the questions that remain, and the stakeholders who must be at the table, this report moves us forcefully into the next set of conversations and actions that must be undertaken. We cannot wait another generation to repair the disjointed education pipeline that creates obstacles to academic success for too many of our nation's youth."

What does the crisis look like? Authors, James Harvey and Naomi Housman, point out that the national graduation rate today is 70%, but in urban districts that percentage is closer to 50%. Of those who graduate, only 36% have taken the courses they need to be prepared for college. The gains made at the early grades during the past twenty years of school reform threaten to be lost unless the traditional, comprehensive high school is also transformed.

Crisis or Possibility is intended to ensure that the energy and knowledge generated in the fall of 2003, when high schools emerged on the national agenda, is captured and used to move the nation's leaders forward in transforming the traditional American high school. Based on proceedings from this series of conferences, the report identifies seven "key levers for change," and exposes the gaps and challenges that remain. As this report points out, the conversation has just begun, and much work yet remains to be done, in advance of the public outcry that will surely erupt when the urgency of this crisis hits home.

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The National High School Alliance (HS Alliance), established in 2002, is a partnership of over forty organizations whose leaders share a vision for a nationwide commitment to fostering high achievement, closing the achievement gap, and promoting civic and personal growth among all youth in our high schools and communities. These partner organizations have committed to work together to achieve this vision by individually and collectively informing policy, practice, research, and promoting public engagement and awareness. For more information about the HS Alliance, visit the Web site: www.hsalliance.org. The HS Alliance is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and is housed and staffed by the Institute for Educational Leadership, Washington, DC.

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