

# HIGH SCHOOL

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A Report on Secondary  
Education in America

The Carnegie Foundation for  
the Advancement of Teaching

Ernest L. Boyer

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EDUCATION IN AMERICA

*THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION  
FOR THE ADVANCEMENT  
OF TEACHING*

*Ernest L. Boyer*



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In the Appendix are the names of the educators who spent over 2000 hours in high schools from coast to coast. These scholars observed with care and expressed with great sensitivity their findings and impressions. The performance of these men and women was outstanding. I am especially indebted to Vito Perrone, who was brilliantly effective as leader of this study team, and to Marilyn Cohn, who was always available to us just when her help was needed most.

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To the schools participating in our study I extend a special thanks for welcoming us, for sharing with us your experiences, and your counsel. I hope this report accurately reflects your dreams.

Finally, I wish to express my profound respect for the students, teachers, principals and superintendents who work each day to make the nation's schools succeed. I complete this project with renewed confidence in these dedicated people who shape the lives of future generations.

To Kay, words fail.

E.L.B.

## FOREWORD

BY ERNEST L. BOYER, *President,*  
*The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*

When the Carnegie Foundation first released this report in 1983, we were confident that the time had come for secondary education in America to be renewed. The aim of our study was to stimulate discussion, offer recommendations, and, in the end, reaffirm the nation's historic commitment to the public schools.

Since *High School* appeared, school districts from coast to coast have been assessing the quality of their programs. We are pleased that major themes in our report have been cited frequently by school leaders and have been used at the national, state, and local levels to help focus the debate.

Teachers' salaries have improved, and career patterns have been instituted in selected regions of the country. Many school districts are considering ways to give teachers more time for planning and preparation. The need for teacher recognition and improved working conditions have become focal points in the national debate.

Our definition of the core curriculum has been used by school districts to shape curriculum requirements for all students. And we have been especially gratified by the response to our emphasis on the arts and by our call for a vision that is not only national but global.

The Carnegie commitment to the centrality of language and the development of critical thinking has received widespread attention. We have been reassured by the recognition that language is not just



another subject, but the means by which all other subjects are presented.

Increasingly, educators are giving serious consideration to the Foundation's suggestion that high schools provide opportunities for students to be of service to others, and some districts are including a service component among the requirements for graduation.

A final important Carnegie theme that has drawn attention involves the need for more enlightened ways to introduce high school students to the significance of rapidly developing high technology—without allowing this new emphasis to distort or otherwise interfere with the relationship of teacher and student.

We take satisfaction in these developments; the push for school renewal has been serious and sustained. Still, there is a dark lining to the silver cloud.

I find it troublesome that some public schools in the nation seem to differ from others not just in *degree* but in *kind*. The social pathology at these institutions appears to be so great and problems so complex that the current efforts to improve the schools are not, I fear, an adequate response. America's strategy must be not to abandon students at such institutions, nor to settle for inferior programs there, but to recognize that every school is a connected institution and to acknowledge that education cannot do the job alone.

I worry, too, that we are not adequately confronting emerging demographic patterns nor are we considering the importance these shifts will have on public education. More and more, the students who are going to populate our schools will be precisely those students who have historically been least well served.

In the years immediately ahead, the degree of progress in meeting the needs of this growing minority school population will be the measure of our success with the public schools. Equity and excellence are inextricably linked.

First, I am troubled that many of today's educational reforms seem to focus on "the system," not the school. Reports by national and state commissions highlight problems. State legislators are

defining more precisely teacher requirements and increasing graduation requirements for the students. These are important steps. In the end, however, the struggle for quality will be won or lost in thousands of classrooms, in the quality of the relationship between teachers and students. Schools have less to do with “standards” than with people, and I am disappointed that teachers and students are not yet adequately involved in the push for school reform.

Clearly, last year was a vintage year for educators. Public education moved to the top of the national agenda. Governors, corporate leaders, and college presidents reaffirmed their commitment to public education. Solid progress was made in clarifying goals, shaping the academic core, and giving attention to teachers.

If our progress is to be sustained, we must increase school budgets, work out an appropriate federal role, find better ways to educate the most disadvantaged students and accept into the nation’s life a new generation of Americans who can enrich our culture.

But education of high quality is not just a professional and political concern. It is a citizen concern. In *High School*, we direct our recommendations to students, teachers, and school administrators who are immersed in high school every day; to college professors, who can make a difference in how school issues are resolved; to policy makers on school boards, in state houses, and in Washington, who have inescapable responsibilities for education; and to members of teachers’ and other education organizations in positions of influence. We also direct our recommendations to parents, grandparents, and everyone who cares deeply about the quality and prospects of life in America now and in years to come. Thus, we have quite intentionally prepared this report for a large and diverse audience.

If the priorities in this report prove helpful to those who educate the coming generation, then our study of the American high school will have provided a useful service.

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Chancellor  
University of Missouri, Columbia

*Members of the National High School Panel\**

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Stanford University

BEVERLY JOYCE BIMES  
St. Louis, Missouri

DEREK BOK  
President  
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Commissioner of Education  
Lincoln, Nebraska

JOAN GANZ COONEY  
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WALTER CRONKITE  
CBS News

EMERAL A. CROSBY  
Principal  
Northern High School  
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Vice President  
American Federation of Teachers

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New Rochelle High School  
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RALPH MCGEE  
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Professional Development Program  
Association of California

RAYMA C. PAGE  
President  
National School Boards Association  
and  
Chairman, Lee County School  
Board  
Fort Myers, Florida

\*With titles held as of time of appointment in 1980.

ALAN PIFER  
President Emeritus, Senior  
Consultant  
Carnegie Corporation of New York

LAUREN RESNICK  
Co-Director  
Learning Research & Development  
Center  
University of Pittsburgh

TOMÁS RIVERA  
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University of California, Riverside

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# CONTENTS

*Acknowledgments*, vii

*Foreword*, xi

*Trustees of the Carnegie Foundation for  
the Advancement of Teaching*, xv

*Members of the National High School Panel*, xv

Prologue: The Globe, the Nation, and Our Schools, 1

## PART I: A TROUBLED INSTITUTION

1. A Day at Ridgefield High, 11
2. Report Card: How Schools Are Doing, 19

## PART II: A CLEAR AND VITAL MISSION

3. We Want It All, 43
4. Four Essential Goals, 58

## PART III: WHAT EVERY STUDENT SHOULD LEARN

5. Something for Everyone, 71
6. Literacy: The Essential Tool, 85
7. The Curriculum Has a Core, 94
8. Transition: To Work and Learning, 118

## PART IV: THE HEART OF THE MATTER

- 9. Instruction: A Time to Learn, 141
- 10. Teachers: Renewing the Profession, 154
- 11. Technology: Extending the Teacher's Reach, 186
- 12. Service: The New Carnegie Unit, 202

## PART V: A SCHOOL THAT WORKS

- 13. The Principal as Leader, 219
- 14. Flexibility: Patterns to Fit Purpose, 230

## PART VI: CONNECTIONS BEYOND THE SCHOOL

- 15. The College Connection, 251
- 16. Classrooms and Corporations, 268
- 17. Excellence: The Public Commitment, 281
- 18. High School: An Agenda for Action, 301

### Appendix A

The Fifteen High Schools in the Study, 321

### Appendix B

Observers for The Carnegie Foundation High School Studies, 325

### Appendix C

Table 24 Total Population and Percentage of Population of School Age, by State: 1972 and 1982, 327

Table 25 Public Elementary/Secondary School Enrollment, Number of Teachers, Average Teacher Salary and Per-Pupil Expenditure, by State: 1982-83, 329

Table 26 Enrollments in Public Secondary Schools and Percentage Change, by State: 1972-73 to 1982-83, 330

Notes, 332

Index, 355

## PROLOGUE: THE GLOBE, THE NATION, AND OUR SCHOOLS

Educational is in the headlines once again. After years of shameful neglect, educators and politicians have taken the pulse of the public school and found it faint. Concern for the health of public education, stirred by a spate of new studies, offers fresh hope that in the years ahead we'll be able to adopt a serious, coherent plan for school reform. Getting the public's attention always has been the first step in the march toward progress in our nation.

This Carnegie report on the American high school begins with the conviction that the time for renewing education has arrived. We believe that today America has the best opportunity it will have in this century to improve the schools. There is a growing national consensus that our future depends on public education. There is a spreading awareness that every mind is a precious resource we cannot afford to waste. There is an eagerness to move beyond the alarming headlines; to begin to rebuild, with confidence, the public schools. As in the past, a new and more compelling vision of education is required to meet this challenge. And if we do not seize this special moment, we will fail the coming generation and the nation.

In 1957, the Soviets hurled a 184-pound satellite into space. America was stunned. Our confidence was shaken. Our very survival seemed threatened. This nation was determined to recapture its leadership and pride. And, of all the steps we took, the one most



hotly debated and most vigorously pursued, the one most revealing of our national character, was our renewed commitment to public education.

President Dwight Eisenhower, in his call for a national response to *Sputnik*, said that there is a compelling national need for federal action now to help meet emergency needs in American education. In his statesmanlike message to Congress, the president concluded: American education faces new responsibilities in the cause of freedom, and if we are to maintain our leadership, we must see to it that today's young people are prepared to contribute the maximum to our future progress.<sup>1</sup>

If the challenge symbolized by *Sputnik* was enough to alarm Americans and generate a national response, consider the vastly greater challenge represented by conditions in the world today. Since *Sputnik* circled the earth in its solitary orbit, more than 40 astronauts and 50 cosmonauts have logged over 7 years in space.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 5,000 objects are now orbiting the earth; more than 3,400 of them are officially listed as debris.<sup>3</sup> The space shuttle *Columbia* can carry a 65,000-pound payload, 353 times the weight of *Sputnik*.<sup>4</sup>

On the continents below, the number of human beings has dramatically increased. In 1957, there were 2.8 billion people on earth.<sup>5</sup> By 1981, the number had grown to about 4.5 billion, with prospects of doubling again in less than forty years.<sup>6</sup> In the world's most populated nation, China, forty-five babies are born every minute.<sup>7</sup>

Since World War II, political boundaries of the earth have been transformed. Students who entered high school twenty-five years ago found that twenty-eight new independent nations had been created before they were given their diplomas four years later: Algeria, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, Cyprus, Dahomey, Gabon, the Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Kuwait, the Malagasy Republic, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tanzania,