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**Better and Faster:  
Accelerating Advancement in School and Work**

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It is a pleasure to be here with you today. I want to add my compliments on the passage of the landmark “Leave No Child Behind” legislation, and on your having the foresight to realize that we still have important issues to deal with regarding high school reform. You would be justified in taking a rest! Yet it is good that you are not. “Leave No Child Behind” does little to address the challenges facing the American high school and, in fact, may distract attention from them by focusing so closely on grades 3-8. It is time to change that. America’s high schools are in a quiet crisis that, left untended, will undercut the very goals that the act is meant to advance.

My job today is to talk about how to achieve the goal of preparing today's students for work and education after high school. I want to start with a story that illustrates some of the challenges in doing so. It has a happy—but incomplete—ending: Damari Roman is one of the lucky ones who found a school that helped her succeed.

Damari was born in Puerto Rico and came to Boston with her family when she was eight years old. She learned English quickly, did well in elementary and middle school, but hit hard times in high school. She failed tenth grade, dropped out, enrolled in an alternative school, was expelled twice, and finally moved to New Jersey, where she entered and dropped out of another high school and began working to support herself. Three years later and back in Boston, Damari now wanted a GED, but she learned about something better: Diploma Plus—a program that let her combine high school courses, an internship, and the chance to take college courses. Her internship, in a physical therapy office, extended into

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a part-time job and she earned A's in two college classes at Bunker Hill Community College. High school diploma in hand, Damari is now a physical therapy assistant *and* in her first year of a college degree program in physical therapy.

As I said, Damari is one of the lucky ones. She negotiated “the system,” despite enormous obstacles. I will talk today about how to make those obstacles easier to overcome for large numbers of young people.

I have four key points to make:

- *First, efforts to improve high school have to focus on where students go when they leave—that is, on their transition to postsecondary education and work.* Specifically, we must acknowledge the new reality that all young people will need education beyond high school if they are to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy. I do not mean to imply that all students will or should go directly from high school to college, nor that preparation for work is unimportant. Indeed, one of the key attributes of the knowledge economy is that work and college require the same kinds of skills.
- *Second, if education beyond high school is the goal for all students, high school reform alone will not get us there.* We have to do more than raise academic standards, strengthen the quality of the academic curriculum, break large schools into smaller units, and attract and retain better quality teachers. Our high schools must be “reinvented,” not reformed.
- *Third, the task is to create multiple pathways to and through the second year of college, not to reform the “one-size-fits-all” comprehensive high school.* We need new institutions to bridge the gap between high school and college, and new ways of dividing up the

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school years, particularly between eleventh grade and the second year of college. I will talk more about what this means later.

- *Fourth, Congress has a key leadership role to play in addressing these challenges, and now is the right time to do so.* I cannot stress this enough. Too many of our young people are not completing college at a time when American parents have become convinced that education beyond high school is necessary for their children to succeed. Given the current cost structures of higher education and the nation's patterns of demographic growth, we are on a collision course with the public unless we fundamentally rethink and restructure our system for a 21<sup>st</sup> century education. As I will discuss later, the train has already left the station on this issue: it is not a question of *if* we deal with it, but *when* and *how*.

### **1. The Nature and Scope of the Challenge: To Improve the Transition to Postsecondary Education and Work**

At a time when high schools should be a pathway to opportunity for all young people, they are routes to nowhere for many. Too many young people leave high school ill-prepared for the demands of adulthood in an increasingly complex economy and spend their next decade drifting in and out of postsecondary education and low-end jobs. If the goal of school is to launch young people effectively into adulthood, so that they are employed in family-supporting jobs by the time they reach their mid-twenties and are ready to start and support families of their own, then we can ill afford the wastefulness of the current transition.

We all know the reality: education beyond high school is more critical than ever, and yet too few youth make it to or through postsecondary education. The numbers are familiar:

- A college graduate earns 70 percent more than a high school graduate, and the growing income disparity in the U.S. is closely

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related to educational attainment. Even one year of postsecondary education increases lifetime earnings (Carnevale 2001a).

- The unemployment rate for high school dropouts is four times the rate for college graduates (Sum et al. 2001). Moreover, having a low level of educational attainment sets up a persistent pattern of under-investment that makes it difficult, if not impossible, for a person to catch up. (Among the many barriers, employers are much more likely to provide additional training to workers who already have postsecondary education, and little financial aid is available for low-income students who must work full-time and attend school part-time.)

While three-fourths of high school graduates now go to college, over half fail to complete a degree, and one-third never even see their sophomore year. This number does not even include the unacceptably large, and growing, number of young people who drop out before graduating from high school: we have 5.4 million out-of-school youth in America.

College completion rates are especially problematic for low-income and minority youth. Young people whose family income is under \$25,000 have less than a 6 percent chance of earning a four-year college degree (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance 2001). This is true even for those who are academically strong. Indeed, a national study of the factors determining college success found that while three-fourths of upper-income students who scored in the top 20 percent on a basic skills test earned four-year degrees, only 36 percent of low-income students *who achieved the same high test scores* earned a degree (Sum et al. 2001).

The statistics are equally dismaying for young people of color. Nearly 29 percent of Hispanic youth and 12.6 percent of black youth aged 16-24 have dropped out of school, compared to 7.3 percent of whites (National Commission on the High School Senior Year 2001). The Education Trust reports that African-American and Latino 17-year-olds read at the same level as white 13-year-olds. As you

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heard last year, Marta Tienda's longitudinal study found that only 6 percent of youth from these groups complete a four-year college degree (Tienda 2001). Six percent. This is a national scandal.

We must do better, and quickly, given the changing demographics of America. By 2015, the traditional college population (18 to 24 years old) will increase by over 4 million. White youth are projected to remain the majority, growing by 800,000, or 4 percent, but minority youth are expected to grow by 3.5 million, or 40 percent. Hispanic youth alone will account for about half the coming boom in this age group (Carnevale 2001a). If current education attainment levels persist, a large percentage of minority youth will not complete a postsecondary credential—at a huge loss to themselves, our economy, and our democracy.

We know that the final years of high school and the first two years of postsecondary education—grades 11 through 14—constitute a key developmental period that should launch students through early adulthood and on to further education and work.

*Why are we doing so badly, and what can we do about it?*

One reason, without doubt, is the design of American high schools. Our large, one-size-fits-all high schools and under-financed “second-chance” programs are ill-equipped to deal with the diverse needs and circumstances of high school age youth. This so-called “system” has to serve, among others, ninth graders reading below the sixth-grade level and needing accelerated literacy acquisition, low-performing youth taking general track courses that don’t prepare them for college or work, “average” students, out-of-school youth, like Damari, needing a way to get into college and onto career paths, students who desire advanced technical education, and students of all income groups ready for more advanced academic challenges.

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It is unrealistic and impractical to presume that one kind of institution can serve the different needs of all young people well. Nor—with today’s technologies and the ability to create customized learning environments—is it necessary.

Another reason we do so badly at ensuring the successful transition of young Americans from high school to postsecondary education and work is that the transition takes too long. Young people are stuck in an education system built on the assumption of “seat-time” measured out in Carnegie Units—four years of high school leading to two or four years of college, which we assume they will complete sequentially. This is problematic for both low *and* high-performing youth. For example, if a young person like Damari drops out before graduating from high school, she essentially loses access to some or all public funding for her education. If she re-enrolls in an alternative school or a GED program, she often must do so at her own expense, at education centers that are desperately under-resourced compared to the public schools, and her progress is likely to be painfully slow. Worse still, our second chance system does not act as a feeder into our postsecondary institutions; the two are totally disconnected.

At the other end of the spectrum, the transition time is also too slow for students who are on track in school and can now achieve high school exit level competence in the tenth grade, the year when most states first administer the assessments that determine high school graduation. The fastest growing part of the last two years of high school is advanced placement and dual-enrollment courses, while the fastest growing part of the first two years of college is “developmental” (remedial) education.

Inadvertently, we have created a twilight zone between eleventh grade and the second year of college.

## **2. Why Current Reform Won’t Get Us There**

So how are we going to raise student achievement and improve the transition to postsecondary education and work? Let me summarize the strengths and

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limitations of four different approaches for how to meet this challenge before outlining a framework that might work better.

- *Improve high school performance so students graduate without needing remediation by raising standards, instituting exit exams, and restructuring into smaller schools (or schools within schools) and/or creating new schools:* The assumption here is that the problem is high school: if you improve high school performance, the rest will take care of itself, and kids will succeed. The limits to this assumption include: 1) the implementation of high school reform (and standards) is early, uneven, and slow; 2) looking at high schools alone won't solve the problem of transition to postsecondary; and 3) presuming success is wishful thinking for current high school students, who have not had the benefit of standards-based elementary and middle schools and for whom our "early warning" and support systems are inadequate.

- *Improve financial aid for low-income students as the primary way to increase the numbers who will attend college:* The assumption here is that since the late 1980s it has become even harder for low-income youth to enter and complete college because the value of financial aid has decreased even as the costs of tuition have risen. As a result, students either can not access higher education because of the cost or they leave college with unacceptably large debts. As a recent Lumina Foundation report demonstrates, there is dramatically "unequal opportunity" across the nation in the accessibility and affordability of higher education for low-income students.

In fact, improved access to financial aid is urgently needed, yet this approach also has limitations. For example, the likelihood of staying in college and completing a degree is greatly influenced by such factors as the amount of remediation the student requires and the lack of support systems for students who must blend work and school. In other words, financial aid is necessary but not sufficient.

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- *Improve the alignment between high school exit requirements and the requirements for success in college and work:* The assumption here is that aligning the practices of, and relationships among, education institutions at various levels will expand the numbers, qualifications, and diversity of those who go on to college. The Education Trust, Achieve, and others are doing important work to link high school exit exams with the assessments and entry requirements for college-level work and to introduce high school students to college campuses while they are still in high school.

This is a key building-block strategy—and it has limitations. It relies heavily on coordination between secondary and postsecondary institutions and thus is very difficult, complex, and slow to implement. The process can stall without directly affecting the experience of the students.

- *Improve the coherence and quality of the student experience:* This is the least developed dimension of current reforms yet in some ways the most important. It says that the other strategies are necessary but insufficient if your goal is not simply going to college but staying to complete a degree. The emphasis here shares much with the youth development field, assuming that the student's experiences must be designed to meet their developmental needs—particularly for strong relationships with caring adults who know them well. Innovations like learning communities at the college level, which group students together over a period of years so they benefit from peer support, are a step in the right direction.

What are the limitations to this approach? The primary one is that neither our large high schools nor postsecondary institutions are set up to do this well. Moreover, nothing in our current funding or accountability structures rewards schools for doing so within their own boundaries, let alone across them.

### **3. Creating a new framework that works better**

What can we do for young people in high school to make it more likely they will get a postsecondary credential, not just enter college? We must build on all these



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strategies—and go beyond them to address the *structure* of what students experience and how we divide up the years young people now spend in high school and college.

I suggest that two overarching principles should underlie for public policy:

- ***Create a high-performing system of multiple pathways:*** This system would *presume* that all students will learn to a set of commonly agreed upon high standards—but through different institutional arrangements, different pedagogical approaches, and in different amounts of time. It would create deliberate variability in order to create much higher levels and greater consistency in the results.
- ***Aim to accelerate advancement through high school and the first two years of college,*** especially for young people who are poor and of color: At a minimum, this means ensuring that the transition happens ***better*** (fewer youth fall through the cracks and more enter and complete postsecondary education) and helping the progression happen ***faster***—so that most young people, especially those who are poor or of color, have completed a first postsecondary credential by age 26.

What are some examples of high-performing multiple pathways to high achievement for young people? There are many. Some are high schools run by community-based organizations, like YouthBuild or the El Puente Academy of Peace and Justice, that extend the school day by involving youth in community-development activities. Others are "flex" schools like Horizonte, which serves high school students, young parents, adults, and ESL students on a school schedule that runs for 12 months a year, day and evening, with open entry and exit, advisory groups, and structured group activities to help students learn decision-making and teamwork skills. Others are innovative new schools like the Met, a regional vo-tech school without walls in which students pursue their interests through internships and self-paced research projects under the

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supervision of teacher/coaches. Some are virtual schools like Florida Virtual School, an on-line high school serving high schools in all of Florida's school districts, as well as students who are home-schooled. Students can enroll in FVS full-time, or they can take classes in a traditional school for half the day and the remaining classes at FVS.

What about accelerated advancement? The assumption here is that many young people have the ability and desire to accelerate their progress through high school and college, perhaps completing both a high school diploma and an Associates degree when they finish high school or within the next year.

This is not a pipe dream. Georgia and Maryland, for example, are redefining their education policies to encourage every student to complete 14 years of school. Many states and some districts already enable students to enroll simultaneously in high school and college courses and to receive credit for both; many are also expanding advanced placement offerings. Such programs save college dollars for families and reward students who meet performance standards. New York, Washington, and Utah have extensive “postsecondary-option” programs. For example, Utah’s New Century scholarship program offers a 75 percent scholarship to a four-year state college or university to students who graduate from high school with an Associate degree.

All over the country, distance learning is playing an increasing role in giving students access to courses from new on-line universities. According to the Futures Project at Brown University, as of the year 2000, there were about 1,500 virtual universities, including collaborations between community colleges and four-year colleges. Coming on top of the 3,400 higher education institutions in the country today, that represents a huge increase in capacity—and its impact is only beginning to be felt, let alone addressed by public policy.

Data from these dual-enrollment programs so far suggest two things. First, dual enrollment does not necessarily accelerate *degree completion*. Young people who can earn college credit while in high school still have to make sense of a

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confusing array of courses at both the high school and college levels, and often the credits they earn do not transfer fully. Second, dual-enrollment programs appear to benefit primarily students from rigorous high schools and from middle- to upper-middle-class families. Yet accelerated advancement may have the greatest economic and educational benefit for the students for whom it is least accessible.

Now some of you may be thinking: “How will this ‘accelerated advancement’ stuff help students who enter high school with weak academic skills? Don’t they need remediation rather than acceleration?” The answer is we have to learn to accelerate as we remediate.

Indeed, one of the surprising things reformers are learning is that part of the problem, particularly with youth who are seriously alienated from school, may be that we *underchallenge* them. The American Youth Policy Forum has just conducted an extensive review of a number of programs that have succeeded in closing the achievement gap between races. Three of the most common characteristics of successful programs are that they: provide students with small, personal learning communities; demand rigorous, high-quality work; *and* give students extensive supports. Programs like High Schools That Work and Talent Development High School, with its emphasis on accelerated literacy acquisition, are designed around these premises. Another good example is AVID, which targets underachieving young people with grades of C or below for participation in advanced placement courses, providing them with study skills, tutoring support, and role models. AVID has grown from 32 students in one high school to more than 65,000 students in over 1,200 schools in 21 states and 14 foreign countries. Over 92 percent of its students enroll in college, a figure nearly one-third higher than national averages.

The over 30 Middle Colleges around the country are another example. These are small high schools, situated on community college campuses, that target low-performing youth and offer, among other things, a combination of rigorous course

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work, extensive supports and personalization, and internships in the community. Or consider the Bard Early College High School in New York City, which has restructured the four high school years and its curriculum so that every student can graduate with a two-year Associate degree in liberal arts.

At these schools, there *is* no transition between high school and college. Students can earn the Associates degree within the same small institution in which they do high school work.

There are also strategies that accelerate young people's progression from high school into high-paying career jobs by blending school and work. For example, Year-Up in Boston essentially adds a fifth year to high school, using the extra time to give students intensive training in information technology, coupled with internships at high-tech firms. Graduates move on to career jobs that offer good pay and possibilities for further education.

Efforts like these have embraced the concepts of multiple pathways and accelerated advancement. They are leveraging learning resources available in the wider community and experimenting with using time outside of school, through lengthening the school day and school year. These are important trends. They demonstrate that it *is* possible to accelerate advancement, and they are blurring the boundaries between secondary and postsecondary institutions—creating a new “space” for experimentation. They are cost-effective, and they are effective in getting results.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation plans to build upon accelerated advancement models through its new Early College Initiative, which will seed the development of fifty Early Colleges over the next five years. The Carnegie/Gates Schools for a New Society initiative goes even further, partnering with seven cities to reinvent the high school experience for more than 140,000 students in over 100 schools.

Congress too has an important leadership opportunity.

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#### **4. How Congress can help make it happen**

As you know better than anyone, the United States faces challenges that make it unlikely that it will pay attention to the crisis in the American high school. Yet now is the moment to address the challenge of successful transitions to further education and work. Why? And what can you do?

Let me start with the reasons why I believe this is such an important window of opportunity. While the inertia and institutional barriers involved in improving high schools and the transition to further education and work are as big as they always have been, several important things are different now than in earlier periods:

*First, two key mega-trends will force change, whether we want it or not. These are:*

- *The destiny of demography:* By 2050, the United States will be “majority minority”—we are experiencing the biggest demographic shift in any country’s history. With some education beyond high school now the ticket to family-supporting jobs, we continue to ignore gaps in achievement by income and race at risk to our democratic way of life.
- *The cost and waste of the current system:* Add this to rising public demand for higher education and the limited resources available to finance its large-scale expansion, and taxpayers and students will insist upon change.

*Second, our educational institutions are changing, whether we try to influence this change or not:*

- As I described earlier, we are already seeing the growth of new kinds of high schools, along with the blurring of traditional boundaries between high schools and postsecondary institutions. This makes the

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ideal of multiple pathways and accelerated advancement more achievable and more likely, and it heightens issues of equity.

*Finally—and not to be underestimated—the American people support the goal of leaving no child behind. They resonate strongly with the themes articulated in ESEA.*

This is an urgent national priority, and you have to help raise its profile on the public agenda. There is enough momentum for us to expect that targeted federal resources could make a big difference. And, despite the limited federal role in education, the issue of successful transitions from high school to work and further education falls squarely within the traditional federal emphasis on equity, access, and quality.

**My recommendations are that, in the short term, you:**

- *Pay attention to the need for resources to support increased student achievement at the high school level.* Congress should fully fund Title 1 at the amounts specified in the authorization of the Leave No Child Behind Act so that it can reach all grade levels, including at-risk high school students. The President's budget falls more than \$4 billion below the level set for this year in the act, and it zeros out funding for the Small Schools and Comprehensive School Design grants, as well as the Drop-Out Prevention program.
- *Reauthorize the Carl Perkins Act as a high school reinvention initiative targeted to at-risk students:* Perkins provides one of the few flexible pots of money for innovative educators who want to improve high school education and postsecondary transitions. Yet it could be leveraged more effectively. The Department of Education is starting its own work on the reauthorization with an analysis of what is needed to improve high schools, and then considering the Perkins reauthorization in this context. Congress should do the same.

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In this, as in other upcoming reauthorizations, you should move as much as you can away from formula-funding and towards competitive grants. For example, these can give states incentives for leveraging Perkins dollars to create small, focused technical high schools or career academies; contextual literacy approaches for ninth grade accelerated literacy acquisition; and integrated courses of study that bridge secondary and postsecondary education and work experience.

- *Use the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act to advance the “leave no child behind” agenda:* Specifically, encourage better alignment between high schools and college, improve teacher preparation programs to incorporate what we have learned about effective instructional approaches for older adolescents, and finally open up the use of student aid for part-time students.
- *Consider specific legislation targeted at high school improvement,* given the limitations of ESEA for addressing the needs of high schools. This could either be legislation that provides seed money to states, on a competitive basis, to develop and implement comprehensive high school reform strategies that link secondary and postsecondary education (and include the creation of new forms of school), or targeted Obey-Porter-like incentive grants. These could be structured to encourage either the development of schools (grades 11 through 14 or 8 through 14) or of community initiatives that couple together resources to support multiple pathways for youth to postsecondary success. In light of deep proposed cuts in job training for youth, an effort that provides out-of-school youth with the academic preparation, supports, and opportunities to access and succeed in postsecondary education is especially needed.

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**In the longer term:**

The biggest problem for you is that we are on a collision course with the American public, unless we fundamentally rethink and restructure the system for a 21<sup>st</sup> century education. The public believes that education beyond high school is necessary today. Yet given the current cost structures of higher education and our demographic growth, this is an expectation we will be hard-pressed to meet: the costs are simply too great.

So my final recommendation is that you appoint a Congressional Commission or study group to develop a “big vision” for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education System—and to then think about how best to move the vision forward, including how to plug aspects of it into upcoming reauthorizations.

Indeed, it would be shortsighted to enter these reauthorizations without asking the larger question of whether the structure we have for preparing young people for adult life is really the structure we need, given the importance to our national economy of a strong seamless learning system. Despite the hard battles over consolidating different funding streams through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), responsibility for youth is still spread across the Departments of Education, Labor, and Justice. Even if Congress decides to pass on the challenge of reorganizing our departmental structures, the United States could and should have a set of unifying principles for all programs that serve youth—starting with common, high standards and deliberately building multiple pathways that allow young people to take different routes to the same end goal.

This commission or study group should be formed this year so it can inform 2003 deliberations on Perkins, the Higher Education Act, and WIA—even if full implementation of its recommendations takes much longer.

In closing, let me return to Damari’s story and contrast it with the experience of tens of thousands of students in New York City who are engaged in the College Now Program, a partnership between the public schools and the City University



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of New York. The CUNY system gives its placement exams for credit-bearing courses to eleventh graders in schools participating in the program. Students who pass those exams can immediately enter a dual-enrollment program and start to take credit-bearing courses in any CUNY institution. As a result, they leave high school much further along, reducing the time and money they're going to spend getting a postsecondary degree. Eleventh graders who take those exams and fail know it at the beginning of eleventh grade, And they can immediately start taking developmental, or remedial, education courses. And they can take those course not just in their high schools, which may not have very good resources and obviously haven't done very well by them so far, but at the college level through the CUNY system. All 17 CUNY campuses and all 161 high schools in the city are participating. College Now is reaching 13,000 students, of whom over 10,000 are registered for dual-credit courses.

In addition, New York City is deliberately fostering new forms of high school, like the New Vision schools and middle colleges like LaGuardia, Bard Early College high school, and others. Damari had to do it alone, but in New York City the *system* is making connections between high school and postsecondary education on behalf of students and creating a range of high-quality learning environments in which young people can excel.

This is the challenge—not just reforming high school but creating a system of multiple pathways and accelerated advancement that meets the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Congressional leadership can make a difference in building this system—faster and with greater coherence and equity than possibly could happen otherwise.

Around the world, we are learning the terrible price nations pay when young people cannot see a path to achieving their dreams. The young people in our high schools today will be this country's leaders during one of the most challenging times in our history. We cannot afford to lose this generation while

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we fix the schools for those coming behind them. Your leadership now to improve America's high schools could not be more important.

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