

Assuring Student Achievement

Strengthen America through Education Reforms

Hugh B. Price¹

Summary

The quality of education substantially determines the competitiveness of America's workforce and the social mobility of our citizenry. Demographic trends indicate that the U.S. economy will rely increasingly upon minority workers, especially Latinos and African-Americans, who are a steadily growing proportion of the adult workforce. Yet these economically indispensable young people tend to be farthest behind academically. Indeed, an alarmingly high number of schoolchildren from all ethnic backgrounds languish well below grade level, year after year, despite ongoing efforts at standards-based reform, embodied most notably in the federal No Child Left Behind law.

The next President of the United States should focus with laser-like precision and intensity on lifting the achievement levels of our nation's schoolchildren. Specifically, the new President should mount a determined effort, in concert with states and local school districts, to boost the academic performance of low achievers by:

- requiring underperforming public schools that receive federal aid to improve the academic performance of chronic low achievers
- insisting that individual school improvement strategies be derived from sound evidence about what actually works

 $^{^{1}\,}$ The author wishes to thank Oliver Sloman for research assistance.

- joining with states in providing grants for schools to improve the academic performance of low achievers
- penalizing low-performing schools that decline to devise and implement credible school improvement plans by cutting their share of their district's federal Title I grant by 25 percent

The cost of such a program is estimated at approximately \$13 billion, whereas the cost of *not* making this investment is incalculable. As the ultimate shepherd of America's destiny, the federal government should muster the will and the muscle and marshal the wherewithal and the knowledge to equip America's children for success in the demanding world that awaits them.

Context

Intel CEO Craig Barrett, in discussing America's future economic competitiveness, once proclaimed that "the biggest ticking time bomb in the U.S. is the sorry state of our K-12 education system." His statement echoed the trenchant warning issued more than a decade ago by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future:

There has been no previous time in history when the success, indeed the survival, of nations and people has been tied so tightly to their ability to learn. Today's society has little room for those who cannot read, write and compute proficiently; find and use resources; frame and solve problems; and continually learn new technologies, skills, and occupations.

Social mobility likewise hinges to a large degree on how well educated people are. According to Isabel Sawhill, co-director of the Center for Children and Families at the Brookings Institution, the U.S. education system has historically enhanced individual opportunity. But that is no longer so. "At virtually every level," she says, "education in America tends to perpetuate rather than compensate for existing inequalities."

Achievement Gaps Galore

The United States has long been a global economic leader, largely because we produce more college graduates than does any other country. In the future, the U.S. economy will rely increasingly upon minority workers, who are a steadily growing proportion of the adult work force. Yet most minority groups—Latinos, African-Americans, and Native Americans—are least well served at all levels of American education. Meanwhile, the demand for workers with a solid educational background continues to rise: According to ACT, a not-for-profit educational testing and workforce development organization, the reading and math skills needed for success in the workplace now mirror those required for success in the first year of college.

Basic Skills Gap

Unfortunately, a sizable number of American students are far behind the eight ball academically as measured by the nation's report card, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP, which is administered to a sampling of 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students across the country, posits three levels of academic competency:

- Basic—"denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade"
- <u>Proficient</u>—"represents solid academic performance for each grade assessed"
- Advanced—"signifies superior performance"

In actuality, NAEP has an unofficial fourth level of achievement—*Below* Basic, where a dismayingly high proportion of American youngsters have languished for years. Although NAEP indicates that American students, including minorities, have made some headway academically, most encouragingly in math, in 2005, 54 percent of Latinos, 58 percent of African-Americans, and 52 percent of American Indians registered *Below* Basic in reading. For youngsters eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, the result was 54 percent. The results for white and Asian and Pacific Island 4th

graders were much better—24 percent and 27 percent respectively—but hardly reason for schools to rest on their laurels. iii

The imperative of boosting youngsters from Below Basic to Basic and higher transcends ethnicity. White students constitute nearly 38 percent of all youngsters scoring in the lowest NAEP quintile.

Alarming Dropout Rates

Compounding these achievement gaps is the distressingly large number of Latino and African-American youngsters who drop out of high school. According to "Diplomas Count," a special June 2006 *Education Week* supplement, only half of African-American students and roughly 55 percent of Latinos graduate from high school, compared with more than three-quarters of non-Hispanic whites and Asians. Some scholars, like Lawrence Mishel of the Economic Policy Institute, contend that dropout rates this high are exaggerated and that some 75 percent of black students graduate on time. Whether the rate in reality is 25 percent, twice that, or somewhere in between, the loss of human capital costs the dropouts, their eventual families, and the nation's economy dearly.

The dropout phenomenon is concentrated ethnically, socio-economically, and geographically—and getting worse. According to Robert Balfanz and Nettie Legters of Johns Hopkins, nearly half of the nation's African-American and Latino students attend high schools whose student bodies are characterized by high poverty and low graduation rates. Interestingly, only about 15 percent of U.S. high schools produce close to half of the nation's dropouts. Balfanz and Legters brand these 2,000 dysfunctional high schools "dropout factories."

Preparation Gap

Not surprisingly, the large skills gap coupled with the high dropout rate creates a "preparation gap" for many low-income and minority students. This is the gap between what youngsters know and are able to do versus what they need to know and

be able to do, in order to progress successfully through school, function effectively in post-secondary education, land a job with good pay and benefits, and attain a middle-class lifestyle. According to Charles Kolb of the Committee for Economic Development, only 20 percent of black students and 16 percent of Latino students graduate from high school adequately prepared for college—low statistics in which dropouts obviously are not even included.

Higher Education Gap

Achievement deficits shadow minority and low-income young people after high school, too. A study commissioned by city and school officials in Washington, D.C., recently reported that only nine percent of 9th graders in the city's public schools will complete college within five years of high school graduation. The report further asserted that nine out of ten freshmen in the DC schools will be confined to low-paying jobs because they never begin college or else fail to complete it. While the United States still ranks first in the proportion of 35-to-64-year-olds with college degrees, our nation has fallen to seventh place among developed nations in the proportion of 25-to-34-year-olds with college degrees.

Contemporary School Reform: On Target or Off the Mark?

A generation ago, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, appointed by U.S. Secretary of Education Terrell H. Bell, issued the landmark report, *A Nation at Risk*. This 1983 report lambasted American public education, declaring, among other things, that: "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war."

This report triggered a wave of public school reform efforts that persists to this day. The approach that gained the greatest political traction in the ensuing years is "standards-based reform," the latest and most prominent iteration of which is No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal law enacted in 2001 that mandated new testing, accountability, and transparency measures for public schools. This audacious

legislation also decreed that every classroom in a core subject be led by a "highly qualified teacher" by the end of the 2006-2007 school year and that all students be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014.

In addition to NCLB, a potpourri of other, mostly unsynchronized federal, state, and local initiatives in recent years have imposed tougher high school graduation standards, revised state school aid formulas, downsized schools and reduced class sizes, created schools within schools, reformed curricula, expanded quality preschool programs, launched charter schools and other variations of autonomous schools, upgraded the caliber of teachers, and asserted mayoral control over school systems.

What has this generation of school reform wrought, in terms of school effectiveness and student achievement? On the upside, efforts to improve public education have continued when they easily could have dissipated. By shining a spotlight on school performance—and shortcomings—No Child Left Behind has provoked heightened local media coverage of how schools are doing and stoked parental awareness of how their children are faring. For years, schools and educators eluded public scrutiny and accountability, because data on student achievement was opaque, unavailable, and seldom disaggregated by ethnicity and economic status. That no longer is the case, thanks to the federal law, which shows how well individual schools are doing by various categories of students, especially chronic underachievers. NCLB has unquestionably ratcheted up the pressure on public schools to perform.

However, there are only glimmers of progress in student achievement and nothing like the strong gains that are needed. As reported by *Education Week* in "Quality Counts at 10; A Decade of Standards-Based Education," achievement results are both heartening and sobering. Since 1992, 4th graders nationally have improved by nearly two grade levels in math ability, as measured by NAEP. The math gains registered by Latino and African-American pupils are up more than two grade levels. There are bright spots in some urban districts as well, for example, in the urban school systems that belong to the Council of the Great City Schools.

These welcome results notwithstanding, the overall progress in closing stubborn achievement gaps is not satisfactory. It is too little, and it is taking far too long. The sorry fact is that most African-American, Latino, and Native American children lag far behind, whether contrasted with their white and Asian peers or compared with the skills they will need to succeed in college, the workforce, and life. In fact, the trend line in children's academic performance remained essentially flat last year, as measured by NAEP, continuing a pattern dating back three decades. This, despite sustained public attention going back 50 years to the launch of Sputnik and periodically reinforced by reports such as *A Nation at Risk*.

Focus on the Problem of Low Achievers

The next President of the United States should focus school improvement efforts on dramatically boosting the academic achievement of students who are performing *Below* Basic, so that they reach Basic and even higher levels. While the strategies that dominate the school reform scene today have moved the student achievement ball downfield somewhat, they have yet to demonstrate that they can reduce dramatically the academic gaps that afflict the very young people upon whom the U.S. economy will increasingly rely. Opinion among educators, experts, and advocates about what to do now runs the gamut from expanding high quality preschool programs for low-income children to strengthening the teaching profession, from reforming the way public schools are financed to pressing government anew to lift families and children out of poverty.

A persuasive case can be made for each of these strategies. But even if government moved forward on all of these fronts, *underperforming schools require urgent and concerted attention* because of the daily harm being done to the life prospects of poor and minority children. Effective approaches exist for improving the academic performance of low achievers, and they take myriad forms, as described below. Some are nationally recognized; others are known mainly to the local educators who have created them. Some are multifaceted from the outset; others focus on a primary point of entrée, but eventually address related issues that invariably arise. Neither the U.S. Department of Education nor state education agencies possess the wisdom to prescribe

which specific approach will work in which struggling schools. Worse, if a mandated reform fails to achieve the desired outcome, local educators may disclaim responsibility by blaming the method that was imposed instead of their faulty implementation of it. The key to achieving school improvement at scale is for educators in the trenches—in the school districts, buildings, and classrooms—to muster the will, assemble the knowledge, map the strategy, and be given the wherewithal to take ownership of the task of educating and developing all of their youngsters, from the eager beavers to the underachievers.

Whole Schools for Whole Children

Dismayed by policymakers' near-exclusive focus on testing and accountability, professional groups like the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, renowned school reformers like Dr. James Comer, and other respected education experts have begun to insist that addressing the "whole child's" education and development will produce better outcomes both for youngsters who struggle in school and for society writ large. Dr. Comer, the eminent Yale child psychiatrist who founded the nationally-acclaimed School Development Program, has elucidated six developmental pathways along which children mature—physical, cognitive, psychological, language, social, and ethical. Today's schools neglect most of these. Regarding the lack of attention to these developmental issues in teacher preparation and education practice, he says:

Life success in this complex age requires a high level of development. So, almost all students are adversely affected by this situation. But the students who come from families and primary social networks unable to provide them with adequate developmental experiences are hurt the most. Most of them do not do well. And student, staff, and often parental responses to failure—from acting out, to increased control-and-punishment efforts, to withdrawal and apathy—produce difficult relational environments and underachieving schools. In time, this leads to dropping out of school iv

Dr. Comer's multifaceted approach involves all aspects of a school and district—curriculum, teaching, governance, scheduling, professional development, assessment, and family and community involvement. It and other "whole-school models" have been tried in hundreds of schools nationwide, most of which are high poverty and low performing. These initiatives take a coordinated, systematic, research-based approach to raising student achievement.

Scholars at the Johns Hopkins Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, published in 2002, reviewed the research and evaluation literature on the achievement effects of nearly 30 of the most widely implemented school improvement programs considered to be "whole school" or "comprehensive" reforms. Their meta-analysis found that the programs' overall effects are promising and that several of them, such as Success for All and Dr. Comer's School Development Program, indicate that a high-quality education is indeed possible for at-risk students. The overall effects of these comprehensive efforts were statistically significant, meaningful, and appear to be greater than the effects of other interventions designed to serve similar purposes and student and school populations.

Further evidence of the effectiveness of the comprehensive or whole school approach to reform can be found in the experience of the schools spawned by the New York Networks for School Renewal (NYNSR). In 1993, Ambassador Walter Annenberg, the publisher and philanthropist, pledged \$500 million to improve public education, especially urban school systems. New York City qualified as one of the first Annenberg Challenge sites. Through the Annenberg Challenge grant, NYNSR created, restructured, or reorganized nearly 140 New York City schools serving almost 50,000 students. These schools serve a higher percentage of African-American and Latino students than the city system as a whole, along with a comparable percentage of youngsters eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

An evaluation of the initiative found that, although students in the NYNSR schools started out below, and in some instances far below, citywide performance averages, their performance improved so much that they eventually *exceeded* the citywide

average, and maintained this above-average performance (except in elementary school math) until the end of the five-year study period.

Targeted School Improvement Strategies: 3 Case Studies San Jose Unified: Improve All Students' Performance

Some school districts with substantial numbers of low-income and minority students have registered impressive achievement gains utilizing more targeted strategies. For example, San Jose, Calif., where half of the public school pupils are Latino and 40 percent come from poor families, opted to increase academic standards and expectations for *all students*. The school board abolished the two-tiered academic system, under which the college prep and advanced placement courses were taken mostly by white and Asian students, and the basic courses, which prepared students for little beyond high school, were taken by the rest of the school population, much of which was Latino. The district mandated that all high school students take the University of California's minimum subject-area requirements for freshman admission, a series of core academic courses and electives commonly called the "A-G sequence." To help challenged students, it extended the school day by two periods, added Saturday sessions (especially for math studies), and redesigned summer school to be rigorous, not remedial. Since San Jose Unified had no counselors, it enlisted teachers and administrators as the students' advisors.

The tougher curriculum has produced encouraging results. The graduation rate has held steady despite fears it would plummet. In 2003, 45 percent of San Jose Unified's Latino graduates satisfied the A-G coursework with grades of C or better. That completion rate almost tripled the rate of Glendale Unified (17 percent), previously the highest performing urban district in southern California in this respect.

However, in the early days of the program, even though 64 percent of San Jose's graduates successfully completed the A-G courses, the proportion of students applying to four-year colleges remained stuck at roughly 24 percent. Recognizing again that it takes more than tough standards to produce desired outcomes, the school district teamed up with College Summit, a nonprofit organization that works to increase

college enrollment among academically mid-tier—2.0 to 3.0 grade point average—students from poor families. By connecting low-income applicants with thoughtful counseling services, writing tutors, and assistance with every aspect of their applications, College Summit mitigates procedural hurdles that keep many qualified but disadvantaged students from successfully applying to college. In San Jose, as in other cities throughout the country, these efforts have paid off: More than 75 percent of San Jose Unified's seniors slated to graduate in 2006 applied to two- and four-year colleges.

Hamilton County, Tenn.: Give Educators Incentives

In Chattanooga, Tenn., the Hamilton County school district's superintendent zeroed in on removing nine troubled inner-city schools from the state's list of worst-performing schools. The primary strategy focused on improving and stabilizing the faculty at these schools by, among other things, using an annual \$5,000 bonus for three years, in order to induce strong teachers to transfer to weak schools. Teachers and principals in the target schools also could earn hefty annual bonuses if classroom and school-wide achievement reached a specified level. Other unusual and attractive incentives included mortgage assistance and free tuition to pursue master's degrees in urban education. A labor agreement hammered out with the teachers' union made it easier for principals to reconstitute the faculty by luring newcomers and removing poorly performing teachers. And, the schools intensified professional development and mentoring for unseasoned principals and teachers.

The strategy worked. As recently as 2003, just over half of 3rd graders in the nine target schools were reading at the "proficient" or "advanced" levels. Last year, 74 percent were. In fact, over a three-year period, the target schools made greater gains than 90 percent of the state's other elementary schools.

Mount Vernon, N.Y.: The Three R's - Reading, Reading, Reading

Mount Vernon, a suburb just north of New York City, trained its sights almost exclusively on literacy. The district's student population is 78 percent African-

American, 14 percent Latino, and 7 percent white. Fifty-six percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. For years, black children in particular fared badly in Mount Vernon's public schools. A newly elected school board hired an aggressive superintendent who focused every elementary school on reading and literacy.

The superintendent and his team analyzed the state reading exam to determine what skills were required to pass and exactly where the schools were falling short, classroom by classroom, teacher by teacher. The district instituted professional development for principals and teachers, and reading specialists visited every 4th grade classroom every day. All elementary schools established a daily "literacy block"— 90 consecutive minutes of reading silently or aloud. They offered after-school tutorials. In addition, each pupil in the 1st through 4th grades was required to take home a book every night, and to get an adult to affirm that someone had read with the child that night for at least 30 minutes. To spur extracurricular reading, the superintendent challenged the pupils to read at least 50 books in a year and write book reports about what they read. Parents and teachers had to verify that the children actually had done the reading. Nearly 170 students read at least 50 books. Another 570 read between 40 and 49 books; and more than 1,600 youngsters read 25 or more books that year.

This concerted effort produced a striking increase in reading scores: In 1999, only 35 percent of Mount Vernon's 4th graders passed the New York State language arts exam; in 2000, 48 percent did; in 2001, 74 percent did; and, by 2005, 87 percent passed.

Commit to Lifting Student Achievement

If the sluggish pace of progress thus far is any harbinger of the future, public school reform will continue to proceed by fits and starts, in those locales with unusually inspired and inspiring leadership, but, overall, woefully short on will and wherewithal. That is why our next President should invoke the urgency of *A Nation at Risk* and

charge the federal Department of Education with spearheading a no-nonsense campaign to ensure that schools with substantial numbers of low achievers devise improvement strategies that are likely to succeed and then receive the resources they need to prepare these economically indispensable young people for productive and successful adulthood. Clearly, *not* making these investments is no savings; unproductive, disconnected members of society come at a high cost, not only in lost potential, but in hard dollars that must be spent on a wide variety of social and safety net programs, not to mention the criminal justice system.

Provide Federal Financial Incentives and Penalties

Tradition and practice tell us that education is a local responsibility. However the collateral damage that will be caused if Intel CEO Craig Barrett's "ticking time bomb" detonates will transcend state and local borders. In the spirit of No Child Left Behind, it is incumbent on the federal government to provide the leadership and pressure, the impetus and incentives, the resources and direction to galvanize the attention of state governments and local districts. To spur the improvement of underperforming schools, the federal government should:

- (1) Require that all underperforming public schools receiving federal Title I aid undertake to improve the academic performance of students who are ranked equivalent to *Below* Basic (underperforming might be defined as one-third or more of students in the school scoring *Below* Basic in reading and mathematics according NAEP).
- (2) Join with states in providing matching grants for underperforming schools to design improvement plans derived from sound research and practice about what works.
- (3) Penalize schools that decline to devise and implement credible improvement plans by cutting their share of their school district's federal Title I grant by 25 percent.
- (4) Require that recipient schools utilize consistent national student assessment measures to report their achievement results.

- (5) Provide \$13 billion more annually, which states must match, in order to implement the school improvement plans.
- (6) Continue funding the plans if the schools meet performance benchmarks or, alternatively, reduce or rescind the school improvement grants if student achievement consistently falls short.

Require State Coordination and Accountability

State governments have the primary constitutional responsibility for public education and should have the principal responsibility and authority for orchestrating and overseeing low-performing schools in their jurisdictions. Federal matching grants for school improvement should be funneled through the states, which should be obliged to match the federal commitment dollar-for-dollar. In addition to securing matching funds from their state legislatures, state education agencies should:

- (1) Work directly with local school districts to ensure that they identify underperforming schools.
- (2) Allocate grants to school districts for creation of individual school improvement plans.
- (3) Appraise the feasibility and promise of the strategies that individual schools devise and determine whether they are derived from sound research and practice.
- (4) Determine which school improvement plans should receive implementation grants, subject to federal agreement.
- (5) Determine whether Title I funding should be suspended or reduced because of a school's failure to mount an improvement initiative, again subject to federal signoff.
- (6) Provide any waivers needed to facilitate implementation of the improvement plans.
 - (7) Monitor plan implementation.
- (8) In concert with the federal Department of Education, determine whether to continue, suspend, or terminate improvement grants based on the schools' performance in meeting student achievement benchmarks.

Enable Local School District Leadership

Ultimately, the only school reform action that matters is local, and *school districts must take the lead locally in improving their flagging schools.* Under these recommendations, school districts would:

- (1) Identify underperforming schools and assemble school-based teams to devise thoughtful improvement plans shaped by sound research and practice.
- (2) Ensure that educators in the schools embrace the plan and authorize the principal to remove those who do not.
- (3) Determine the degree of flexibility and autonomy that school principals and faculty may exercise over such matters as curriculum, resource allocation, and class size.
 - (4) Seek and disburse improvement grants.
 - (5) Oversee and evaluate implementation of the school improvement plans.

Concerns and Considerations

This proposal triggers many questions about political, financial and operational feasibility. To begin with, will the robust tradition of local control of public education tolerate the level of federal leadership and leverage, pressure and accountability, contemplated by this proposal? Would cuts in federal aid of any type put the pupils of low-performing schools at even greater academic risk?

The \$13 billion price tag poses another issue. Given the acute pressures on the federal budget from other sources, can the federal government afford a new outlay of this size? But, can America afford *not* to make this investment?

Lastly, schools that enjoy strong surges in student performance often owe their gains to heroic efforts by highly committed educators. Is it realistic to believe that "typical" principals and teachers can improve underperforming schools to the point that most of their pupils have Basic or higher skills?

Concluding Observations

The academic skills and habits of mind required to succeed in post-secondary education, the workforce, and modern life have converged in the 21st century. Yet the persistence of yawning academic and preparation gaps virtually guarantees that yet another generation of chronic underachievers will be left behind. This will be to the nation's lasting detriment, as well as a profound disservice to the individuals themselves.

Out next President must commit to accelerating the pace of progress in improving school and student performance before the situation becomes untenable. Timid measures will not suffice; excessive deference to localism no longer serves the national interest; and trying to improve underperforming schools and underachieving students on the cheap is a fool's errand. As the ultimate shepherd of America's destiny, the federal government, led by our President, must advocate, enable, and assure—through every means possible—that all America's children are equipped for success in the demanding world that awaits them.

About the Author and the Project

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Hugh B. Price is a Brookings senior fellow. He is an expert on education; civil rights and equal opportunity; and criminal justice. Before joining Brookings, Price served as president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League. Price's 40-year career spans journalism, philanthropy, the law, and social advocacy. He was the first executive director of the Black Coalition of New Haven and a member of the editorial board of The New York Times.

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Opportunity 08 aims to help 2008 presidential candidates and the public focus on critical issues facing the nation, presenting policy ideas on a wide array of domestic

and foreign policy questions. The project is committed to providing both policy solutions and comprehensive background material on issues of concern to voters.

Additional Resources

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For the work of College Summit, www.collegesummit.org/.

For information on the Mt. Vernon experience, <u>www.greatschools.net/cgibin/ny/district_profile/423</u>

For reports on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the National Assessment Governing Board, www.nagb.org.

For the work of Dr. James Comer and the School Development Program, see www.med.yale.edu/comer/.

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ⁱ "What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future," (New York: National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 2006), p. 3.

ii National Assessment Governing Board, accessed November 2006, at www.nagb.org.

iii National Center for Education Statistics (http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/ [November 2006]).

^{iv}Comer, James. "Our Mission: It Takes More Than Tests to Prepare the Young for Success in Life," in "Quality Counts at 10." *Education Week*, January 5, 2006.

^v Recommending how much more the federal government should spend to spur the improvement of underperforming schools is challenging because well-informed estimates of how much money is needed by schools with large numbers of low achievers vary widely. Those in Congress who charge that the Bush administration has never fully funded the No Child Left Behind law contend that the gap between what schools need and what they got was nearly \$10 billion in the 2005 fiscal year and another \$13.2 billion in FY 2006 (House Committee on Education and the Workforce, "Bush's Broken Promise to America's Students," *Full History of the ESEA Effort*,

http://edworkforce.house.gov/democrats/eseainfo.html [November 2006]). The latter figure is used in this paper. The Education Trust calculates that overall the lowest-poverty school districts have \$1,438 more revenue per pupil per annum than the highest-poverty districts ("The Funding Gap 2005: Low-Income and Minority Students Shortchanged by Most States," (Washington: Education Trust, 2005), p. 5). If one multiplies this amount by our estimate that there are 14 million students who are performing *Below Basic* in reading, the resource gap comes to at least \$20 billion. Other estimates range from vastly more than this amount, namely as high as nearly \$150 billion more (William J. Mathis, "No Child Left Behind: Costs and Benefits," *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 84, Number 9, May 2003, p. 4.), to virtually nothing, the position held by advocates of school vouchers who contend that more competition, not more money, is the solution to what ails low-performing schools.