

## Education

### Assuring Student Achievement

#### Strengthen America through Education Reforms

##### Background

The quality of education substantially determines the competitiveness of America's workforce and the social mobility of our citizenry. 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.

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.

##### Recommendations

Our next President must commit to accelerating the pace of progress in improving school and student performance. The next president should focus with laser-like precision and intensity on lifting the achievement levels of our nation's schoolchildren who perform below grade level year after year. 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 and best practice about what actually works
- 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

## Key Facts

- in 2005, 54 percent of Latinos, 58 percent of African-Americans, and 52 percent of American Indians registered below "basic" in 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading
- 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
- approximately 15 percent of U.S. high schools produce close to half of the nation's dropouts
- the United States still ranks first in the proportion of 35- to 64-year-olds with college degrees, but our nation has fallen to seventh place among developed nations in the proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds with college degrees

A full version of this proposal, as well as supporting background material, is available at [www.opportunity08.org](http://www.opportunity08.org)

## About the Author and the Project

### Hugh B. Price

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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