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AMERICA'S HIGH SCHOOLS

Ignoring Decades of Warnings

Sudden and dramatic catastrophes have always evoked a massive and comprehensive response from a united American population. The public and its leaders rally to confront the wars, terrorist attacks, floods, and natural disasters that threaten what we hold dear. But can this nation respond similarly to the type of crisis that equally challenges our way of life by affecting a large percentage of successive generations, year after year, only in insidious silence?

Fifty years ago (within the lifetime of many readers of this book), the entire United States of America found itself, overnight, stunned. Having lulled itself into believing it was the global technological leader, the nation awoke to the news on October 4, 1957, that the Soviet Union had launched *Sputnik I,* the first-ever unmanned satellite successfully launched to orbit the earth. Vice President of the United States Richard Nixon declared the development a "grim and timely reminder" that the Russians were on to something big and bold, while administration critics wondered how American dominance on the world stage could have fallen so quickly. Looking into the mirror that morning, Americans were forced to admit they had been fooling themselves about their technological prowess and world dominance. But American pride didn't allow the country's ego to stay wounded for very long. The national embarrassment promptly propelled the nation into the space race. NASA would be created by the end of the decade and federal funding for defense research and development would reach unprecedented levels. Federal support for scientific research also moved to the forefront of the nation's policy agenda. Funding for the National Science Foundation quadrupled

in the year following the Russian launch, and it continued on a significantly upward trajectory through the end of the next decade. Calls went out through the American education system for stronger math and science instruction, so the nation would never again fall behind in the race against its Communist foes. Congress responded by passing the National Defense Education Act of 1958, a bill to improve math, science, and foreign language instruction in public schools, with special emphasis on subject matter reform at the high school level. For the first time, the federal government linked education to national security.

Seemingly overnight Americans realized they were no longer dominant in science; indeed, their own military security seemed at stake. Most important, America's leaders responded with alacrity to this perceived national crisis. They embraced education reform, along with other measures, as being central to the effort to regain international preeminence. Looking back, we see now that the nation chose to define itself by a strong response to the problem, rather than by the problem itself.

The launch of *Sputnik* created an immediate federal response. Fifty years later, could we expect a similar response to a news article such as this one?

> 7,000 Young Americans Disappear in Single Day
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> Washington, DC: Federal officials today confirmed that 7,000 teenagers vanished yesterday in broad daylight. Early reports indicate that no part of the country was spared loss; more than one-half of the missing are minority group members. "We don't know what happened to them," one urban official declared. "Yesterday they were here; this afternoon, they are gone."

Have you seen any such article in your newspaper or heard it blaring every three minutes on cable news? Yet this could be the startling headline every single school day in our nation. Before the last school bus pulls away from the westernmost school in Hawaii, almost seven thousand students will have dropped out of

high school, effectively disappearing into a social and economic netherworld where there are few good opportunities and many bad outcomes. While *Sputnik* blazed across the national consciousness the disappearance of these young people—approximately 1.2 million annually—has gone unnoticed even though it poses an even more serious challenge to the continued economic and national security of our nation.

Fifty years after the onset of the *Sputnik*-inspired sense of urgency, America once again finds itself with an opportunity to both save and define itself in a rapidly changing world. Unlike *Sputnik*, which smacked the country hard and fast, America's struggling middle and high schools have slowly backed the nation into a corner. On the domestic front—our nation's ability to provide meaningful life opportunities for all of its citizens, regardless of demography—and in our ability to remain dominant in the evolving global economy, this country has arrived at an important turning point. How we choose to respond as a nation will determine whether we survive as a dominant global power, and whether our most disadvantaged members of society will have the ability and the chance to achieve anything resembling the American dream.

Unlike *Sputnik*, it is not as if we didn't know what was coming. The influential 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*[1] warned Americans about a "rising tide of mediocrity" in our public schools that, once again as in 1957, was deemed to threaten the nation's economic standing. I was a member of Congress when the report came out and recall the uproar it generated in the House of Representatives. The Congress considered and subsequently enacted numerous reforms, most aimed at improving education in prekindergarten and early elementary grades. The national goal was to make sure every child could read by third grade, so that learning to read in the early years would naturally prepare the way for reading to learn in the secondary years.

The underlying selling point in the report was that greater investment in the early years of the education system would

inevitably lead to improvement in outcomes in the later years, with fewer children falling into the abyss of illiteracy and more completing high school and college. But more than two decades after the warning of *A Nation at Risk*, the overwhelming evidence shows that the theory of focusing on the front end and leaving the back end to take care of itself simply isn't working as well as we optimistically imagined. Even though the nation has seen improvements in elementary school performance in the following years, inadequate middle and high schools continue to jeopardize the future of too many students—and more crucially, the nation at large. The truth is that the majority of America's middle and high schools are failing dismally to educate all of their students well and prepare them for the rapidly evolving challenges and opportunities that await them when they leave school. Hundreds of thousands of current high school students can barely read at grade level on the eve of their high school graduation. Rather than highly engaging institutions of learning that serve as a stepping stone to success, many of our secondary schools have become warehouses of student failure. The American high school is in crisis.

The Crisis in America's High Schools

The problem isn't that our middle schools and high schools have changed. It is specifically that they *haven't* changed, at a time when the world around them and expectations for schooling are nothing like they used to be. The system that was designed for an earlier era has broken down under the strains of trying to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive society and a rapidly changing global economy.

Every year, more than one million students in this country drop out of high school without a diploma, leaving them unprepared for either meaningful work or postsecondary education. The nation cannot afford to allow this trend to continue. The opportunities these young people will miss throughout their lives have cumulative costs for them as individuals and also represent

a significant loss for the country. Even if we don't have children in a neighborhood high school, this issue has a profound impact on the community and larger world we inhabit. Each of us needs to pay attention to the growing problems surrounding our secondary education system. Just about every social or economic issue in our nation intersects at some point with our education system—particularly our high schools—and too many of our high schools clearly are not up to the task.

A critical lack of investment in secondary school education is contributing to the social, political, and economic breakdown of generations of young Americans while at the same time undermining U.S. global competitiveness. Like watching a tornado relentlessly move toward us, we have stood largely transfixed for years and failed to take sufficient steps to protect our American way of life. At stake is not only our national economy, and whether or not our "two Americas" of haves and have-nots will continue to grow apart, but the future of the cherished democratic principles that require an educated and engaged citizenry. It is very difficult to vote if one cannot read the ballot. A legal system that requires a jury of peers to judge defendants cannot dispense justice if these jurors cannot understand basic legal concepts.

Currently, only about 70 percent of all American high school students graduate in the expected four years. The figures are even bleaker for students of color, as only 58 percent of Hispanic, 53 percent of African American, and 49 percent of Native American students graduate on time, compared to 76 percent of white students. As racial and ethnic minorities become a larger proportion of the American public, and if their low graduation rates remain the same, the national graduation rate will soon begin to fall as a growing number of minority students are left behind.

The results of those tragic figures are staring us in the face as a nation. Some of our largest employers are looking at long-term hiring projections and wondering if they can even survive within the current climate. This nation has historically thrived economically thanks to the talents and work ethic of its citizenry.

But what allowed us to thrive a generation ago is no longer good enough.

The achievement gap is already having an impact in terms of how we stack up internationally. Let's use a sports analogy. This proud country places high expectations on its Olympic athletes. When the United States men's basketball team won only the bronze medal in the 2004 Summer Olympics, newspaper articles called the team's performance a "humbling two weeks in Athens" and an "Olympic low point for U.S. men's basketball." Stu Jackson, the chairman of the U.S. Senior Men's National Committee, wasn't as critical, saying that the "rest of the world is getting better."[2] The same is true in education. However, while USA basketball has completely retooled its methodology for selecting players for the team in an effort to stay competitive, the nation still allows our high school students to be surpassed by much of the industrialized world in academics. International comparisons rank the United States a stunningly unimpressive eighteenth for high school graduation rates, a lackluster ranking of fifteenth for high school reading assessments among fifteen-year-olds in developed countries,[3] and an embarrassing twenty-fifth for high school math.[4] Were academic performance an Olympic competition, the United States would not even make it into the stadium.

It is worth noting that these rankings for high schoolers reflect average performance. Among countries examined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), America finds itself with one of the largest gaps in the world between highest- and lowest-performing students.[5] This unacceptable performance gap will not be closed until we pay much more attention to the institutions that educate our nation's teenagers.

It isn't just about being able to compete, but whether or not American students will be able to survive and thrive at a time when education and skills mean more than ever in the emerging global workforce. Currently, a third of the nation's high school students will not graduate with a diploma; only about half of minority students will graduate. These students, who certainly face a doubtful

future, have to go somewhere. Unfortunately, far too many end up unemployed, on welfare rolls, or even in prison. We cannot as a nation continue in this way.

Closing the gap is still possible, but our efforts must include renewed focus on how we meet the needs of modern-day high school students. This requires commitment, time, and perseverance. The solutions are not simple, and there is no silver bullet. Consider a few sobering facts:

- According to the Nation's Report Card (from the National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP, a national, voluntary measure of academic performance assessed periodically in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades, providing a rigorous assessment of student achievement at the national, state, and local levels), less than one-third of eighth graders read at a proficient level. The figure is even more shocking for low-income eighth graders, of which just 15 percent read at a proficient level.[6] Millions of students will end up unprepared for college, work, or the many demands of adulthood.
- In a typical high-poverty urban high school, approximately half of incoming ninth grade students read at a fifth or sixth grade level.[7] By twelfth grade, average African American and Hispanic students read at the same level as white eighth grade students.[8]
- At America's four-year public colleges, nearly 20 percent of all entering students are required to take at least one remedial reading course.[9] Only about one-third of such students are likely to graduate within eight years.[10]

In short, all of the evidence indicates the United States is now in the midst of an "ongoing and silent Sputnik" moment, yet our political leaders and the nation remain mostly inattentive to the growing crisis. As has happened in similarly challenging periods, we must return to intensive education reforms—particularly

centered on high schools—to ensure that the current international achievement gap does not become an insurmountable chasm. Although parts of this book contain facts and figures that can make the problem seem hopeless, I want to state emphatically that it is not too late for us to change our approach in ways that pay off for both our students and our society. High school is also not too late to prepare all our young people for the world that awaits them. Not only can proper reform and investment in our high schools protect and enhance our previous investment in the early grades but ample evidence exists that children can make important academic advances at any age, provided they are given the proper support. In short, it is not too late to do the right thing.

The good news is that we know a lot about how to renew and revitalize the country's middle and high schools, and to effectively reinvent how students are educated. Many schools and programs in communities scattered across the nation are successful at keeping children in school, raising their achievement level, and graduating them prepared for success. We know what needs to be done, but we must build the political will to make it happen.

High Schools and the Need for Twenty-First-Century Skills

When I was in high school in Kanawha County, West Virginia, my father owned a 1965 Chevrolet convertible. It was a wonderful piece of machinery, and when I close my eyes I can vividly remember what it was like to sit in the driver's seat with the top down as I pushed my way down the highway, mile after mile. I can remember the smell of the interior, the sound of the engine, and the feel of the wheel. At the time, it was a great car.

You can buy that same car today (which I did several years ago) and invest thousands of dollars to restore it to its glory. But aside from sentimental value as a showpiece, the vehicle would be considered useless by modern-day standards. The 1960s engine will be grossly inefficient, with more cylinders but less horsepower

than today's version. Getting the car to pass vehicle emission tests would be a challenge. What are now commonplace fixtures, such as air conditioning, were virtually unavailable on the original model. The car will not only lack seat belts and air bags to protect its riders but will still have a rigid steering column that could fatally pin the driver on impact. Finding 1960s' commonplace leaded gas at the pump will now be impossible, and it goes without saying that Chevrolets of that era tended not to be outfitted with six-CD changers, cup holders, or DVD players to sedate the children on long road trips.

Like the American high school, that sexy old Chevy was a great vehicle for the era in which it was designed. But times have changed, along with the expertise and specifications, not to mention customer expectations, necessary to keep the car relevant in the marketplace. Likewise, any serious attempt to tackle today's education achievement gap must acknowledge the reality that our high schools themselves are antiquated. Arguably the nation's high schools actually are performing very well—for the era they were created to serve. Unfortunately, high schools in this country were created to meet the needs of an agrarian and emerging industrial society in *1907*, not a digital and information-age economy of 2007. Despite a whirlwind of change in the last hundred years, for example, the structure of our middle and high schools has changed very little from a century ago, when only 10 percent of the population received a high school diploma.

If anything, my automobile analogy vastly understates how out-of-date our high schools have become. Essentially, we're still driving an antique vehicle that is far more at home in today's museum of automotive history than on a modern highway. The school calendar is designed around the agricultural life of yesteryear, and the expectations for students are stuck in an era when decent-paying factory jobs awaited even the lowest-performing students.

After World War II, there was still little change in our middle and high schools. As the Cold War escalated and *Sputnik* triggered

the nation's newfound awareness that it needed to produce more scientists and mathematicians, schools developed tracking mechanisms to prepare the top 20 percent or so of students for college, and others were steered into the general (or increasingly vocational) track. That model of preparing the majority of students for the good jobs in manufacturing and other trades that were available for high school graduates, and even for dropouts, worked relatively well. But think back to my experiences with the steel mill or the chemical plant. Those jobs have gradually disappeared while the education level required to succeed in today's workforce has risen sharply.

Microsoft founder and philanthropist Bill Gates used the words "ashamed" and "appalled" when he discussed the state of America's high schools with the nation's governors in 2005. "When I compare our high schools to what I see when I'm traveling abroad, I am terrified for our work force of tomorrow," Gates said in his widely covered speech. "The key problem is political will."[11]

Our increasingly connected, globalized world of work has led to a significant shift in expectations for workers' skills and knowledge. Worries about outsourcing are no longer only about low-wage, low-skill workers. Accountants, medical technicians, insurance agents, and financial analysts' jobs are moving overseas or being taken over by increasingly powerful computer automation.[12]

A high school diploma is the very minimum credential that a worker needs these days. An increasing share of the ten million Americans who since 1971 earned a GED—by passing the General Educational Development test, which shows a person understands basic concepts and skills taught in high school—are finding that their failure to obtain an actual high school diploma has closed doors for them in the job market. The GED simply does not have the same economic return as the high school diploma. Students who obtain a GED may have a leg up on the average dropout in the workforce, but there are no guarantees, especially as expectations in the workplace rise.

The GED's main value is in providing the necessary credential to take the next academic step, which is usually entering community

college. The discouraging reality is that the community college retention rate is much lower for GED recipients than for students with a high school diploma.

Obviously someone who has dropped out of high school should be encouraged to take every opportunity to resume his or her education, including earning a GED. But educators and policymakers must make keeping the student in school to earn a high school diploma the highest priority; any rationalization that tacitly supports students dropping out because they can earn a GED in the future is educational fool's gold.

One could compare having a high school diploma or GED to having a license to go deer hunting; it permits you to enter the forest but hardly guarantees you will get yourself a ten-point buck. You still have to go out and do the work. Unfortunately, "doing the work" with just a GED is growing increasingly difficult.

Experts predict that almost 90 percent of the fastest-growing high-wage jobs of the future will require some postsecondary education or advanced training.[13] By one estimate, the twenty-five fastest-growing professions have far-greater-than-average literacy demands, while the fastest-declining professions have lower-than-average literacy demands.[14] Even jobs that the previous generation of young workers considered basic, such as plant technician or auto mechanic, now require many of the advanced skills traditionally associated with a college-bound curriculum. Think of the last time you took your car in for servicing. In even a basic back-alley garage, the first act is to connect your car to a computer for a diagnostic check. The once self-described "mechanic" is now called a "service technician" and requires the higher level literacy, numeracy, and computer skills suggested by the title change.

In 1973, for example, 36 percent of Americans in skilled blue-collar and related careers finished high school; just 17 percent had some college experience or a degree. By 1998, 89 percent finished high school, while 48 percent of such workers had some college or a degree. The trend is similar in clerical and related professions. In a quarter century, the percentage of such workers not completing high

school dropped from 14 percent to 4 percent, while the percentage with some college or a degree rose from 25 percent to 44 percent. Clearly, today's good jobs require high skill levels, a large and diverse knowledge base, and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Today's modern military, where high-tech computer skills are essential, dramatically demonstrates how far the needs have shifted over time. Armies have sought a technological edge from the dawn of time—evolving from the spear to the GPS-guided, nuclear-tipped cruise missile—but the U.S. war-fighting strategy over the last fifty years has recognized that the basic military survival of our nation depends on always maintaining technological superiority to counter a growing gap in manpower. U.S. strategists recognized that constantly superior technology was the only way to prevail against a seemingly endless supply of attacking Chinese army troops in the Korean War or face-off with countless Russian-designed MiG jet fighter planes over Eastern Europe. What the United States can not match one on one in numbers it must overwhelm with sophisticated technology, from "smart" bombs to computer-assisted infantry operations. But to have one U.S. soldier technologically equipped to take on five less-prepared foreign soldiers presumes one vital requirement: a military with the high skill demanded to operate in this increasingly complex environment. Even the U.S. armed forces have moved away from being the employer of last resort for the able-bodied uneducated to accepting few individuals who do not possess a high school diploma. Recently the manpower needs of the extended war in Iraq forced the U.S. Army to lower standards to permit more dropouts to enlist. No one questions the commitment or bravery of these new soldiers, but the lack of availability of qualified individuals demonstrates another reason to be concerned about the quality of our educational system.

This connection between education and national security was illustrated in 2002 in New York City when students at Brooklyn's Bushwick High School were surprised by the local naval recruiter's reaction to protests of a provision of the recently passed No Child Left Behind law that gave military recruiters access to

high school campuses. Commander Edward Gehrke, in a letter to the editor that was printed in the *New York Daily News*, said Bushwick students needn't worry about recruiters because they likely couldn't pass the U.S. Navy's entrance exam and have "too many drug and/or police issues."[15] Gehrke took considerable heat for airing his comments publicly; however, military officials at the time said it reflected a growing concern about the pool of qualified applicants for military jobs. Bushwick High School has since closed and reopened in a partnership with the nonprofit Institute for Student Achievement as several smaller schools with specific academic themes.

The point is that this is a technological army, and the military requires men and women capable of being thoroughly trained to use technology correctly and efficiently. Unquestionably the skill level required for most military positions has risen considerably in recent years.

For both manufacturing and the military, competition in the final decades of the twentieth century pitted the basic strategy of more people and less technology against that of fewer people using greater technology. The United States began hemorrhaging jobs in the textile, apparel, and shoe industries to Mexico and developing Asian nations, where low wages meant several low-skilled workers could do the work of one much more highly paid though probably low-skilled U.S. worker. For some domestic companies, the response was to invest in advanced manufacturing technology for U.S. operations that would offset the cheaper labor competition abroad. Others conceded the competition to foreign manufacturers. Economists and academics assured us that even though these low-skilled jobs were lost, the United States would still be dominant in high-skilled jobs, assuming we maintained our technological superiority in both design and level of skill.

I saw this industrial migration first-hand in West Virginia during the late 1980s and early 1990s, as several apparel and shoe factories began moving offshore. Even paying low wages, those operations were an economic mainstay in relatively isolated rural

communities served only by a narrow two-lane road. For the business owners, the trade-off for remoteness (a decade later, to these businesses "remote" was more concerned with limited Internet access) was a reliable workforce, high productivity, and a low wage base. Education attainment and high-skill levels were not an issue.

For one mountain community in my state, the international competition was particularly jarring. Originally, their shirt factory was one of several that the parent company operated in the United States. One by one, other factories closed as their operations moved offshore, however, the innovative workers at this one found a niche that kept the doors open. They began inspecting the shirts manufactured in Mexico or the Philippines and correcting the many mistakes and imperfections, such as a dropped stitch or a missing button.

But the point came when even this high productivity and attention to detail could not offset the wage disparity of much cheaper foreign operations. In desperation, a committee of employees visited the governor's office to ask for my help. Representatives of the two hundred workers—ranging in age from thirty to fifty-five, some with a high school diploma, probably none with a college degree—spoke passionately about what the six-and-seven-dollar-per-hour jobs meant for their ability to raise a family. In many rural communities, there is a tight-knit family structure that values above all else having the children and grandchildren able to live nearby as they grow up. But keeping them at home requires some economic opportunity. Besides a few convenience-store jobs, there were no other steady employment opportunities in this rural area. Some drove thirty to fifty miles in each direction, every day, over twisting mountain roads to work at the shirt factory. For many, this was the only job they had ever had.

I visited the plant and met with management to offer incentives or assistance. But the economic forces rumbling thousands of miles away from rural West Virginia were inexorably in play.

The plant closed. I still wonder where those workers went and what they did.

These workers, many in their late forties and early fifties, were the cross-over generation in terms of both their personal needs and those of society. For many, a high school diploma—much less a rigorous curriculum—was not a prerequisite to a stable life in the community. Their parents had worked in the shirt factory without needing much education; they could do so as well. Wages weren't high by many standards, but neither was the cost of living.

Whether a rural or urban community, low-income neighbors and families are used to sharing and being resourceful. Failure to have a high school diploma does not mean someone is not smart. One could say that many low-income people have a Ph.D. in innovation: stretching the grocery dollar beyond expectation with soups and leftovers, keeping old automobiles running beyond any reasonable mechanical life, figuring out a way to maintain a business's equipment when a massive new investment could cost jobs, or recognizing that truckloads of imported shirts would need inspection.

But while these workers were running sewing machines and stitching seams, our society crossed over to a new era in education. Recent reports by the National Council on Education and the Economy and the Educational Testing Service thoroughly document the movement to a status where the rest of the world's education has improved such that today the United States is increasingly competing for what used to be our constant triumph: the high-skilled, high-paying job.

For those rural West Virginia workers and their millions of counterparts across the country, the shelter of a low-wage, low-skilled job has been ripped away. Without the formal education required for other entry-level positions, most are unlikely to obtain significant employment.

With more jobs in all sectors requiring increased skill levels, the United States is fast reaching the critical tipping point

where there are more unprepared workers than those equipped to compete and contribute. Many of our corporations will face serious decisions about whether or not they are better off relocating someplace where skilled workers can meet their demands. Absent a critical mass of skilled workers, jobs will continue to relocate abroad, overall U.S. productivity is likely to decline, and the American standard of living will surely fall precipitously in the coming decades. The projections are devastating. A nation that has prided itself since inception on being able to hand the next generation a better quality of life than it experienced could be forced to confront an unhappy reality: the good times have ended.

It bears repeating: this is a fate that can be avoided. Let's use an analogy of two cars: the 1964 Ford Mustang and its 2007 namesake. Placed next to each other, the two look much the same—a sporty, two-door body on four wheels—but the similarity ends with the appearance. Vast differences exist inside those two machines. The modern engine has a computerized fuel ignition system; the mechanical carburetor is gone. Today's ubiquitous processing chips and software were nonexistent in the early model. Astonishingly, the car today has more computing power to drive to the grocery store than was available for the first lunar landing.

When the highly acclaimed state-of-the-art Mustang was rolled out in the 1960s, only slightly more than one half of the American public had a high school diploma. Our economy was humming, with 30 percent of those graduating from high school going to college. A high school diploma was not required to land a job in the factory producing this breakthrough automobile.

Just as our cars have changed to meet increasing performance demands, so has our nation's economy. Today 60 percent of current jobs require postsecondary education.[16] Of course, being fortunate enough to be hired for a job making cars (or designing software) requires postsecondary education. Our cars have changed; so have society's economic and technological demands. Have our high schools kept pace? Like the Ford Mustang, today's high school may

physically resemble its 1964 predecessor, with a traditional school building, athletic fields, kids streaming in and out. But what is happening inside *should* be vastly different.

Unfortunately, performance statistics indicate high schools are not keeping up with cars or the economy's demands. In a society where postsecondary education is becoming an acknowledged necessity for a successful future, seeing a third of our students dropping out and another third not ready for college simply doesn't meet modern standards. No one today would accept a new car whose cruising speed is sixty miles per hour, one that has no modern safety equipment, and that will last only fifty thousand miles. Likewise, what is happening—and not happening—in our high schools must be rigorously examined.

It is time for America to trade in its older high school model for a newer one with the capacity to be first in its class.

About This Book

Chapter Two takes up the many hidden costs associated with failing schools and high school dropouts, including lost taxes, increased need for social services and even prison, remediation costs, and lower overall productivity for the nation.

The third chapter in this book examines what happens to those who are left behind by our antiquated high schools, the role that demographics plays in determining a student's destiny, the politics of class and how it relates to education, and the less-than-stellar academic performance in the suburban schools that so many of us believe are nearly flawless.

The fourth chapter takes us inside the nation's dropout factories, and the charade that passes for our nation's graduation rate.

Chapter Five explains why the strengthening of adolescent literacy in our American high schools demands a national response.

Chapter Six illustrates the elements of a successful school, from an engaging and rigorous curriculum to skilled teachers and a safe learning environment.

The seventh chapter briefly examines the past and current roles that the federal government has played in high schools, with the following chapter discussing recommendations for a new role.

Chapter Eight looks at how all of us can build the public will so that we end up with more successful schools of the type outlined in earlier chapters, which includes activities we should be coordinating and addressing in our local communities to fight for these American schools. Also examined is what the federal, state, and local governments can do to share in this commitment.