



NEWS RELEASE

CONTACT: Matt Maurer (202) 955-9450 ext. 322, mmaurer@commworksllc.com or
Lani Poblete (202) 955-9450 ext. 319, lpoblete@commworksllc.com

U.S. Students Take Tougher Courses, Achieve at Higher Levels, And Earn More College Degrees Than in 1980s

Two Decades of Academic Gains Highlighted in Report on “Good News” in American Education

WASHINGTON – August 3, 2005 – Today’s students take tougher courses, achieve at higher levels, and earn more college degrees than they did twenty years ago, according to a new report focused on the “good news” in American education released today by the Washington, D.C.-based Center on Education Policy (CEP).

The report, *Do You Know... The Latest Good News About American Education*, tracks the progress of American education on 24 indicators that span school participation and course-taking trends, student achievement, school climate and public support, teacher quality, and higher education. The report also identifies key areas of concern that require additional improvement.

Overall, the report finds that “U.S. public schools have improved in many ways since the movement to reform education by raising standards first took shape 20 years ago.”

“The critics of public education have had their day, now it is time to set the record straight,” said Jack Jennings, president & CEO of CEP. “Given the amount of negative attacks and media reports they have sustained, many might believe that the nation’s public schools are in the worst shape they have ever been, and that is simply not the case.”

Among the report’s key findings are the following:

- **More Americans are completing high school or college.**
From 1985 to 2002, the percentage of Americans 25 or older who have completed high school jumped from 74 percent to 84 percent, and the percentage who completed college rose from 19 percent to 27 percent.
- **High school students are taking a more challenging curriculum.**
The percentage of high school graduates completing a core academic curriculum – including four years of English and three years each of math, science and social studies – quadrupled from 14 percent to 57 percent from 1982 to 2000.
- **More high school students are completing advanced math and science courses.**

The percentage of high school graduates completing advanced math courses (courses more challenging than Algebra II or geometry) climbed from 26 percent in 1982 to 45 percent in 2000. Meanwhile, the percentage completing advance science courses (more challenging than general biology) rose from 35 percent to 63 percent.

- **Some achievement gaps are narrowing.**

On long-term NAEP trend assessments in math and reading, test score gaps between white and minority students have narrowed to the smallest margins in three decades.

- **Students are safer at school.**

Rates of school-related crime and violence fell by half since 1992, from a high of 144 total non-fatal incidents per 1,000 students ages 12-18 that year to just 64 incidents per 1,000 students in 2002.

- **More students are going to college, and more young adults are earning degrees.**

The percentage of high school graduates immediately enrolling in college has risen from about 55 percent in 1984 to 64 percent in 2003. Meanwhile, the proportion of young adults completing a bachelor's degree or higher has climbed from 22 percent in 1985 to 29 percent in 2002.

In addition to tracking American education's progress, the report also highlights areas that require more attention from educators and policymakers to spur needed improvements. In particular, the report calls for a renewed focus on reducing dropout rates and providing additional support to minority, low-income, English language learners, and students with disabilities to ensure that they achieve at the same levels as their counterparts. Noting the continued lag in performance and the persistent nature of achievement gaps in grades 9-12, the report also calls for a greater priority on reforming the nation's high schools.

Based in Washington, D.C. and founded in 1995, the Center on Education Policy is a national, independent advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent any special interests. Instead the Center helps citizens make sense of the conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.

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