



Eco-Link

Linking Social, Economic, and Ecological Issues

Volume 10, Number 1

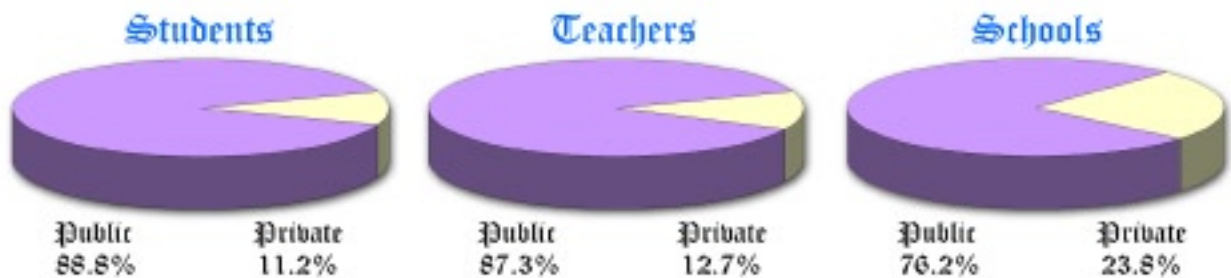
Education in America

Education in the United States is in a state of transformation. In 1989, President Bush and the nation's governors conducted the first National Education Summit in Charlottesville, VA. There was broad recognition that the U.S. was falling behind and would have a hard time competing in a global economy without higher standards for education. Six broad goals were identified and two more were added when Goals 2000: Educate America Act became a federal statute in 1994. Goals 2000 is controversial in the sense that some perceive it as an attempt at federal control of education, which is constitutionally left to states, school districts, and communities. Fortunately, we do have some broad goals to debate and measure progress against.

There are over 53 million students in elementary and secondary schools today, and that number is growing. The nation needs school upgrades, new schools, and lots of well-qualified new teachers. Effective practices such as setting academic standards, teacher teamwork, smaller classes, heavy parental involvement and advancements in technology continue to pave the way to a more successful educational experience.





K-12 Public & Private Schools





2000


Significant Education Trends


 The U.S. needs to recruit 2 million new teachers in the next decade. About 2/3 of today's teachers will need to be replaced in a wave of retirements and increasing student enrollments.


 Teacher salaries start at about \$26,000 (avg.) and rise to about \$39,000 (avg.). However, a qualified teacher might be able to make twice as much at a high-tech firm. Until the 1970's, schools got a significant hidden subsidy as other careers were not open to women and minorities. Now, other higher paying options are open (doctors, lawyers, dotcom entrepreneurs).


 Survey after survey has shown that teachers, in general, do not get the respect they deserve (and once had) as professionals. Pay increases and respect usually translate into better teachers.

 In urban districts, half the new teachers quit within three years. In inner cities, working conditions often scare off teacher recruits. Luring highly qualified teachers into the nation's toughest schools is a huge challenge, but essential to national progress.

 Teacher certification (testing & license to teach) is on the rise and all but a handful of states require certification for new teachers. However, with the teacher shortage in urban school districts, 82.5% allow non-credentialed teachers in the classroom.

 The percentage of students completing high school, or High School Equivalency (GED), for ages 16 - 24 has remained constant at about 89% since 1993.

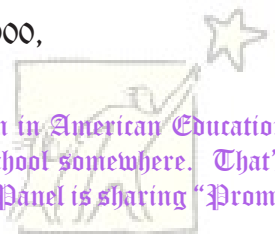
 Since 1993, SAT and ACT scores have remained about the same. SAT's went from 1003 to 1017 points, and ACT's remained flat at 21 points.

 The Education Appropriations Bill determines the funding of Goals 2000. In 1996, some aspects of Goals 2000 were eliminated to include the National Education Standards Improvement Council. Some perceived the NESIC as a "National School Board."

Goals 2000 Educate America Act 1994	
Goals 2000 was created to improve learning and teaching in the nation's education system.	
Goals	Progress
1. All children will start school ready to learn.	↑
2. High School graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.	↔
3. All students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's modern economy.	↑
4. The nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.	↓
5. United States' students will be the first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.	↔
6. Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.	↔
7. Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.	↔
8. Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.	↔

For details on Goals 2000,
go to www.negp.com

It's said that there is not a problem in American Education that has not been solved in some school somewhere. That's why the National Education Goals Panel is sharing "Promising Practices."



Class Size

Efforts are starting to focus on reducing class sizes, especially for the early elementary grades (1st-3rd). Smaller student-teacher ratios have proven to be more beneficial to student learning, and show that the benefits extend well after students move on to larger classes in later grades. In general, class sizes vary from state to state. In more populated states such as California, the size reaches as high as 29.5. However, in Maine it reaches as low as 18.5. School districts are attempting to bring the national average down from 21 to 18. To do this, more teachers are being hired. Approximately 2 million teachers will have to be hired in the next decade to account for retirement, those who leave the profession, and the growing number of students and schools.



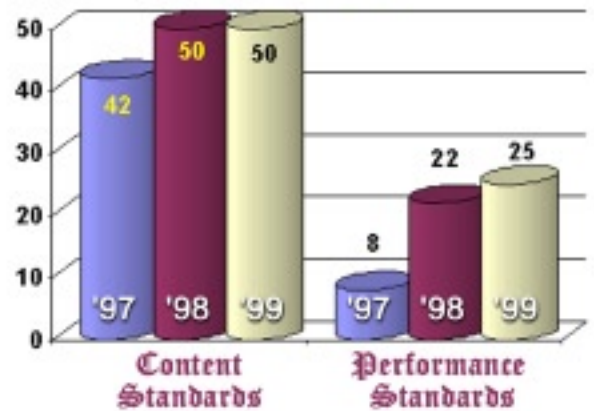
Standards & Accountability

The original intent of Goals 2000 was to support State And District efforts to develop regional standards, implement school improvement and enhance student achievement. Setting high standards for content, performance and delivery is a key to success. The new emphasis on standards helps teachers define what students should know and be able to do. Assessment is a way to track progress, school by school, district by district, state by state and as a nation over time. Accountability falls on the shoulders of parents, teachers, students, schools, school boards and the community. Everyone has a role to play in making our education system the best.

The fundamental mission of the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) is to catalyze fundamental change in schools, communities, states and the nation in order to achieve the National Education Goals. It starts with setting high standards.

Most states are adopting standards-based reform. Academic standards are set, and both students and teachers are assessed to measure progress against content, performance and delivery standards. However, many teachers (64%) are not ready or well-prepared to implement new, higher standards. How do we reward those who are? Good teacher retention relies on respecting and rewarding teachers who are doing their jobs right, and asserting penalties for those who aren't. Teachers with a Master's Degree get paid an average of \$32,000 less than those in other professions with the same level of education. This implies that the teaching profession is an unimportant one. Recruitment should rely heavily on the fact that teachers need to be respected and paid enough to do a very important job.

States with Challenging Standards



The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards outlines the following five propositions when rewarding teachers with national certification:

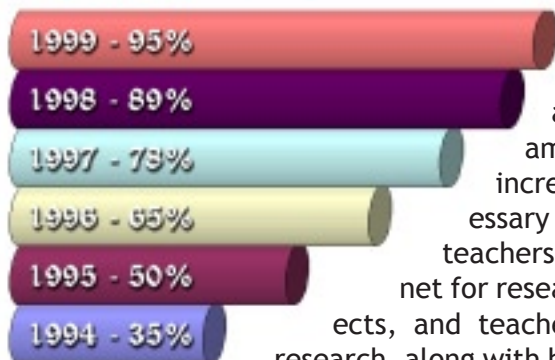
1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

A teacher affects eternity; they can never tell where their influence stops.

Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams

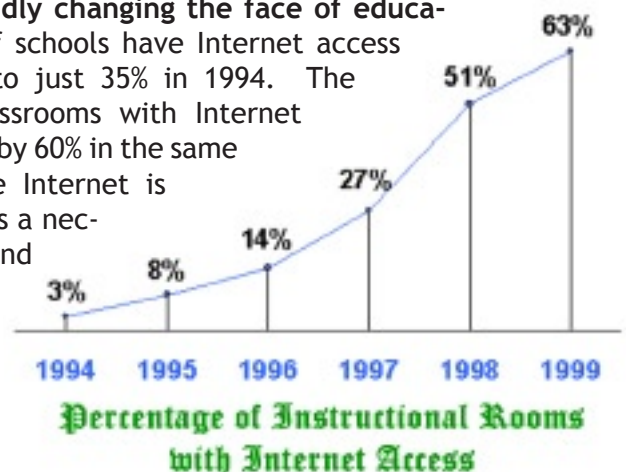
Technology

Public Schools having Internet Access



Technology is rapidly changing the face of education. Over 95% of schools have Internet access today, compared to just 35% in 1994. The percentage of classrooms with Internet access has increased by 60% in the same amount of time. The Internet is increasingly being seen as a necessary tool for students and teachers. Students use the net for research on school projects, and teachers also use it for research, along with help on lesson plans and innovative ideas. Teachers need more professional development opportunities to learn new technology.

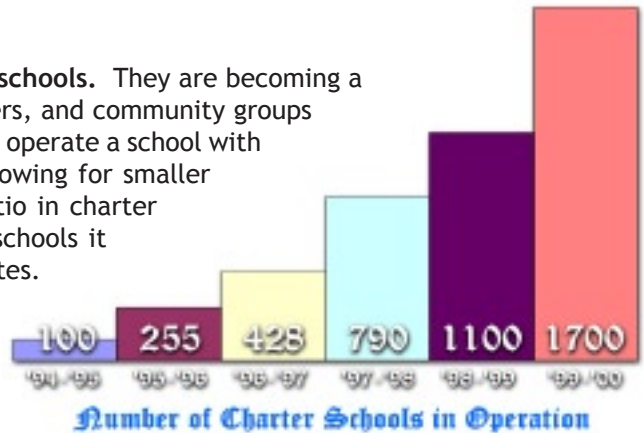
Teachers need more professional development opportunities to learn new technology.



Other Schools

Charter schools offer an alternative to regular public or private schools. They are becoming a more popular means of education. They're run by parents, teachers, and community groups that are granted a charter by the local school district or the state to operate a school with tax money. Most charter schools have less than 200 students, allowing for smaller class sizes. In the '98-'99 school year, the student to teacher ratio in charter schools was 16, while in public schools it was 21, and in private schools it was 15. More than 1,700 charter schools are in operation in 32 states.

Private schools educate over 11% of America's K-12 students. With smaller schools and classes, and less exposure to crime or threats, it's a popular alternative for those who can afford tuition.



Home Schooling continues to grow at 7 - 15% per year, with over 1.3 million children home educated during 1999 - 2000. Home school students' academic achievement is generally very high, and they perform as well as public & private students in various critical thinking skills. Parents home school to teach specific philosophical or religious values, control social interaction, develop close families, and for high level academics.

Magnet schools began as a desegregation strategy, and are based upon the premise that all students do not learn in the same ways. They offer distinctive educational programs and/or instructional approaches that are designed to attract students with particular interests. Approximately 1.4 million students attend magnet schools.

Summary

The effort to improve education in America is no small task. Educators, policy makers and government alike are finding ways to integrate and implement higher standards and improve the quality of education. As technology, class size, demographics and school styles rapidly change, efforts are being made to keep up.

In the Foundation's opinion, true education reform can only be accomplished at the state and local level with an emphasis on high academic standards that measure mastery of core subjects, and the ability to think and solve problems. While the U.S. Constitution leaves education to the states, broad national goals and voluntary national standards are appropriate. The future of education requires market-driven approaches, choice, elimination of bureaucratic/administrative layers and local control of decision making.

Glossary

Assessment: measuring progress against goals, a tool used to evaluate and improve both student and teacher performance.

Certification: While state licensing systems set entry-level standards for beginning teachers, National Board Certification has established advanced standards for experienced teachers.

GED: General Education Development - A GED Diploma documents that you have High School level skills.

National Board Certification: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has established high and rigorous standards for what teachers should know and do. It was created to improve student learning by strengthening teaching.

Content Standards: Broad descriptions of the knowledge and skills students should acquire in a particular subject area.

Performance Standards: Concrete examples and explicit definitions of what students have to know and be able to do to demonstrate that they are proficient in the skills and knowledge framed by content standards.

Delivery Standards: The methods through which content is taught.

Standards

Web Resources

Ask ERIC www.ericsp.org

EE-Link www.nceet.snre.umich.edu

National Foundation for the Improvement of Education www.nfie.org

National Education Goals Panel www.negp.gov



US Department of Education www.ed.gov

National Center for Education Statistics www.nces.ed.gov

National Education Association www.nea.org

National Home Education Research Institute www.nheri.org

www.uscharterschools.org

National Assessment of Educational Progress nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard

Project Learning Tree www.plt.org

Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. www.rnt.org

State Departments of Education www.rnt.org/quick/state.html



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