

August 04, 2006

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Dear Mr. Nock and NCLB Commission Members,

I am responding to your announcement of the NCLB roundtable discussion scheduled for August 04, on High Schools and College Readiness. While I will not be able to attend, I offer this letter and attachments to you and the Commission for consideration.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) has emerged as the leading advocacy organization focused on infusing 21st century skills into education. The organization brings together the business community, education leaders, and policymakers to define a powerful vision for 21st century education to ensure every child's success as citizens and workers in the 21st century. The Partnership encourages schools, districts and states to advocate for the infusion of 21st century skills into education and provides tools and resources to help facilitate and drive change.

This spring, P21 released a crucial report regarding the need for high schools to have a relentless focus on the results that matter for student success in the 21st century. The report, "Results That Matter: 21st Century Skills and High School Reform," argues that high school graduates will not be prepared for success in college — not to mention life and work — in the 21st century, unless their schools focus on the results that matter in the 21st century.

Traditional metrics in high schools such as attendance, graduation and college matriculation rates are important, but they are no longer sufficient indicators of student preparedness. There is broad agreement — and ample evidence highlighted in "Results That Matter" — that for many students, high schools are not working and need to be overhauled. The report presents three fundamental ideas about high schools that are not yet widely perceived:

- There are results that matter for high school graduates in the 21st century — and these results are different from and go beyond traditional metrics. Even if every student in the country satisfied traditional metrics, they still would remain woefully under-prepared for 21st century success beyond high school.
- Improving high schools requires the nation to redefine "rigor" to encompass not just mastery of core academic subjects, but also mastery of 21st century skills and content. Rigor must reflect all the results that matter for all high school graduates today. Today's graduates need to be critical thinkers, problem solvers and effective



communicators who are proficient in both core subjects and new, 21st century content and skills. These 21st century skills include learning and thinking skills, information and communications technology literacy skills, and life skills. Twenty-first century skills are in demand for all students, and they will have an enormous impact on students' prospects in college.

- The results that matter — 21st century skills integrated with core academic subjects — should be the “design outcomes” for creating high schools that prepare students for success in the 21st century. Only by setting clear goals that incorporate 21st century skills can high schools truly prepare students to succeed in postsecondary education, workplaces and community life.

Obviously, NCLB plays a critical role in any thoughtful approach to improving the college readiness of today's high school students. To that end, P21 has developed a set of principles to provide guidance for strengthening the Act in terms of its approach to accountability and integrating 21st century skills for today's students. While P21's framework for 21st century skills already is consistent with the metrics and accountability emphasized in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, these principles outline several areas within the Act that deserve increased attention relating to 21st century skills, particularly with respect to standards, assessment and professional development.

Aligning NCLB, high school reform and 21st century learning is an issue of urgent importance. Our international competitiveness and quality of life are in jeopardy unless we make rapid progress. It's a challenge of the magnitude of the Sputnik-era push to strengthen mathematics and science education in the 1960s. And it is a challenge that we cannot afford to ignore.

The two documents attached (“Results that Matter” and “NCLB Principles”) are intended to inform the commission's important work relating to NCLB and college preparedness. I hope they are useful in crafting a thoughtful approach to NCLB in regard to these issues.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at kay@itstrategies.com, or (520) 623-2466.

Sincerely,

Ken Kay
President
Partnership for 21st Century Skills