

The Fate of the American Dream: Strengthening Our Education and Skills Pipeline

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Keynote Address Transcript

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Introduced by
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and
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SELTZER: Before I introduce the young gentleman who is going to introduce Patty Stonesifer, I want to say it's fantastic to have her here with us today. Jobs for the Future has had the tremendous privilege of working with her leadership team, Stefanie [Sanford] and Tom [Vander Ark] and Jim [Shelton] and all the others at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. I've always thought of myself as an outcomes-based, action-oriented person. Well, I'm running after them every day and in every way. So it's a phenomenal team that you have, and thank you for joining us for this very important conversation.

I'd like to make a few comments about the young man who will introduce Patty. Damian Ramsey was the valedictorian of the first graduating class from University Park Campus School in Worcester, Massachusetts. He graduated in 2003. When he entered the school as a seventh-grade student, however, he was seriously below grade level in all areas tested. During his six years at University Park, with support, he built an academic capital that many strive to accomplish, A's in advanced college classes at Clark University and a full AP schedule in the eleventh and twelfth grades. His efforts and hard work led him to be able to graciously decline full college costs from Dartmouth College, Boston College, and Clark University and to choose Brown University, where he is a junior with excellent academic standing.

His training through a school that would not accept failure as an option for its students was not easy. He was making adult decisions and accepting incredible responsibilities at a very young age, giving up many of the extracurricular activities he loved to be a financial help to his single mom and younger brother and sister. But he made it. When CNN did a feature story on University Park, the segment opened with Damian, sitting on the front stairs of that building, built more than 100 years ago. Looking into the camera he said, "I guess demographically we are the kids who aren't supposed to make it." Isn't this the issue we need to address in this country? Why are there kids who aren't supposed to make it and what can we do about it collectively? It's my pleasure to introduce Damian.

[APPLAUSE]

RAMSEY: Well, that introduction already covered some of the material that I'll be presenting in my speech. In the fall of 1997, the doors of the University Park Campus School were opened to 35 predominantly underdeveloped, young seventh graders from the Main South area of Worcester, Massachusetts. As Marlene Seltzer said, I was one of these underdeveloped students, well under my reading level, well under my math level. However, when I graduated, I was at the top of my class and had just received my acceptance letter

from Brown University, one of the most prestigious and highly acclaimed academic institutions in the United States and in the world.

My progress, my development, and my success were much due to the culture that I found at University Park Campus School. Here was a school with committed faculty, who held high expectations for their students. Here was a school with strong parental involvement. Here was a school with a low student-teacher ratio, granting more room for one-on-one attention when needed. Here was a school with a tenacious and extremely determined principal, Mrs. Donna Rodriguez. Here was a school with a promise: the promise of free tuition at Clark University for those students who graduated from UPCS and were able to pass Clark's entrance requirements.

In an interview after visiting the University Park Campus School, Alethia Frazier Rayner, a former researcher at Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform, said the school stands out because it is making a specific commitment to help young people, mostly kids of color in a disadvantaged community. It is giving them opportunities they probably never would have had. This statement, the last part especially, hits home for me because had it not been for University Park Campus School, I probably would not have attended college. A product of a low-income, single-parent, matriarchal family, I can honestly say that college wasn't the topic of discussion at the dinner table. Discussions about paying bills and purchasing food for the family often took precedence over discussions about higher education.

University Park Campus School was the first place that I really became acquainted with the notion of postsecondary education. Because of the school's partnership with Clark University, we high school students were able to use the university's facilities, including its library and gymnasium. Students who performed well academically were sometimes treated to dinner in Clark's cafeteria. We had our school dances and proms at Clark. And as juniors, we were able to take courses there. This early access to the abundant resources of a university instilled in students like myself the drive to pursue higher education, planting seeds that would eventually blossom and bloom with our admission to universities all over the country.

University Park Campus School and the culture therein, coupled with its partnership with Clark, got us to dream outside of the box. I speak for my whole class when I say that the school made us inquire into our futures and reflect on the many opportunities and the myriad possibilities that come with a college degree. As a young man who has experienced the benefits of a small college preparatory high school, I am an avid supporter of the Early College High School Initiative. I believe that college high schools have the ability to really change and transform the lives of many, especially those who would otherwise lack access to resources available in these schools.

The president and chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the \$17.1 billion philanthropy formed by a recent merger of the William H. Gates Foundation and the Gates Learning Foundation, Patty Stonesifer has used these vast assets to not only raise school graduation rates but also to help students of various racial and socioeconomic backgrounds have access to resources that would prepare them for college and work. She has been involved in an effort to make large schools smaller, has headed the Gates Library Project responsible for donating computers to public libraries in poor neighborhoods, and has donated both time and money to organizations aimed toward assuring that all students nationwide have opportunities like mine, the ability to attend quality schools that prepare their students for higher education.

In light of the foundation's mission to improve access in global health, Stonesifer also chairs the Executive Committee and serves on the board of the Vaccine Fund launched in 1999 to help supply vaccines in 71 of the world's poorest countries. Stonesifer also serves on the board of directors of the Seattle Foundation, Amazon.com, and Viacom, Inc., and also served as a senior vice president of Microsoft. Stonesifer is extremely active and extremely committed to the betterment of society as a whole, and I am honored to have the privilege of introducing her today. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

STONESIFER: Thank you very much. What a great introduction but also what a pleasure to have the job I have and get to stand with people like Damian. Damian, thank you very much for that introduction. People ask me whether I realize I have the best job in the world, to which I answer yes, and in fact I volunteer in this job because of the opportunities that I have had, and I often tell Bill and Melinda that they could auction my job on an annual basis [LAUGHTER] and actually add to that endowment with people who would really give a lot to have the opportunities that I have.

And the second thing that people ask me after that is, what have I learned? What's the biggest thing I've learned after 20 years spent in high tech producing software and connecting people around the world, and nearly 10 years now in the not-for-profit sector? And I always tell them that after all those years and fantastic experiences and all the media hype about the coming age of technology, I was in fact seduced into believing that the high-tech sector was filled with the most dedicated and often the smartest and most talented professionals anywhere. But now, 10 humbling years out of the technology sector and into the nonprofit, and trying to understand what it takes to really stand with Damian and his colleagues, I really do realize that the people who are running these schools and who are running these health programs around the globe have the real talent and the real dedication and an equal distribution of IQ [LAUGHTER] that you can find in any sector in the world.

It's really a privilege to be working with all of you.

I also want to talk about one particular person, and that is Hilary Pennington. Hilary, in fact, had a tremendous influence at the beginning of the Gates Foundation Education Program in helping us answer the question: what can we and should we do about education in the United States? And she's really helped us build our program, but of course helped Jobs for the Future in its strength and credibility, not just in the practice of creating great schools but in policy. The combination of strength in policy and strength in practice is a very rare one, and we thank Hilary and Jobs for the Future for that. And we also thank Marlene and the rest of the JFF team, who show in their talent and their dedication what really can be done. So we thank you for all your partnership.

[APPLAUSE]

I know to some extent I'm here speaking to the converted. You wouldn't have shown up today if you didn't want to continue to see momentum and continue the great start we've had on improving high schools and pushing education reform. As you probably heard, hundreds of excellent new high schools are opening every fall, and 27 opened in September in my hometown of Indianapolis. Kids are graduating, going on to college, who never would have had the chance before, and across the country we're seeing a growing awareness of the urgent need to improve America's high schools. But, as you know as well as I do, we have a long, long way to go. Our schools and our school systems are still failing far too many kids. Anyone who wasn't already convinced of that need only look at the most recent high school scores, which showed no meaningful gains for high school students.

Why do so many students fall through the cracks? I know you've spent a lot of time talking about that and thinking about that, and there are many reasons, of course, but I wanted to focus today on just one. Most of our high schools are simply too isolated. They're cut off from too many of the resources that could help kids make the most of their lives and their opportunity. Tom Vander Ark, who most of you may have met, heads up our education program at the Gates Foundation, and he has a powerful line that really struck me about the American high school. He says, "You can see it from the air, you can see it from the air," meaning it sits there, off by itself, isolated, surrounded by fences, surrounded by roads, so that we can stay cut off from the scary teenagers and the scary things that are going on in that high school. At its core, that's what high school redesign needs to change.

It's about breaking down those barriers and connecting the schools and the students back to the community, to the corporations that are listed and proud to be here on this banner, to the cultural organizations, to the postsecondary institutions that communicate from the day you walk in the high school that there's an opportunity afterward, and to the other partners who have so much to offer. You represent that connection, and I hope that today gives you even more courage to optimize the possibility of connecting in our efforts around education reform. It's about making the most of those connections that it's going to take to get kids ready for college and for work.

That's what I think of when I hear the word pipeline that's in a lot of the discussions that you had today: an education system that extends into the community, rather than closing itself off, rather than being that place you can see from the air. And it prepares every kid, every step of the way, rather than letting them drop out unnoticed or fail to fulfill the opportunity that they had because their kitchen table wasn't filled with the discussions of that opportunity. Building this system is crucial to the effort to improve our high schools and to ensure that our own communities and country live up to the opportunity that we say we provide.

It's even more important now that schools across the country, and especially in the Gulf Coast region, are welcoming students who have been displaced by Hurricane Katrina and teaching all of us, once again, the very real story of the haves and the have-nots, and making us face what has happened in this country and is happening in this country. These kids, living in new cities and schools that feel quite foreign to them and where no one knows them, these kids exemplify the opportunity to fall through the cracks. I believe that there's only one way we can build a system that works for these students and all like them, for every student, and that is by forming great partnerships that ensure that neither the schools nor the kids fall through the cracks.

That's what I want to talk about today, how we use partnerships to prepare every child in America for college work and citizenship. Partnerships are fundamental to how we think about the structure of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. They've been at the forefront of our thinking from the very beginning, since that day in 1996 when Bill and Melinda asked me to lead the foundation alongside Bill's father. The Gates family, Bill and Melinda, started this foundation because they feel a duty to share their wealth responsibly. They know their success in the business world, this extraordinary success that they've had in the business world, is dependent on far more than their own individual efforts. Melinda worked for me as the head of a very significant division at Microsoft and, of course, 30 years ago, Bill and Paul Allen formed Microsoft rather than continue at Harvard. Sorry, David, we'll talk about that later. [LAUGHTER] But they recognize that they benefited enormously, not just from their own efforts but from a free market economy, a healthy democracy, and the opportunity they had to get a great education. In short, they really understood that they got a great deal, and so they started this foundation based on their firmly held family belief that to whom much is given, much is expected. And while that may be extremely true in the Gates family, I would argue that that is true of every single person sitting here. To whom much is given, much is expected.

The second core value that drove them to this work and caused me to get on board with them is a deeply felt family belief that all lives have equal value, no matter where they are being lived. All lives have equal value. And that seems easy to nod and accept, but it is very, very hard to accept the reality that that is not the case. We are not equally valued, in the ways that our government spends, in the ways that we conduct our lives and the choices that are made in our corporations and in our homes. The random chance of a child's birth, whether he or she is born in a rich country or a poor one, in a rich neighborhood or a poor one, should not be such a determinant whether she has any hope of leading a healthy life or getting a basic education.

Like you in your own family giving, Bill and Melinda want their philanthropy to have the biggest possible impact, so we make a few choices and we commit to working them for the long haul. They believe that they can have the biggest impact by promoting equity, by helping make sure all people, no matter where they're born, have a chance to live that healthy, productive life. So it's my job, and really my privilege, to ask every day, "What are we doing to ensure that opportunity for a healthy, productive life for as many people as

possible in the United States and around the world.” And besides being able to ask that question, I have resources at hand that I can help deploy to do that.

Internationally, we asked that question and decided that we can do the most for equity at our foundation by focusing on health, especially in the very poorest countries. You’re probably aware that millions of people still die from diseases that have been virtually eliminated in the rich world. We know that when health improves, life improves, by every measure, by social measures, by education measures, by economic measures, and good health gives people the best chance to build a better life for themselves, to send their kids to school, to have an opportunity for a better job. So we’re focused, in our developing world work, on making sure that vaccines, drugs, and other life-saving tools are developed, delivered, and adopted, so they can reach the people who need them most and who have the most to gain from them.

Here in the United States, we did that same kind of soul-searching and decided that we can do the most for equity by helping ensure that we actually deliver—not we, the Gates Foundation, we, this collective citizenry—actually deliver on that American promise of a free and quality public education for all citizens. So we are focusing our work on addressing the needs of students in high schools.

Whether we’re talking about health or high school, solving these problems is going to require far, far better coordination than we’ve ever had before. There’s simply no other way to bridge these huge gaps in health or in education that separate rich and poor besides building partnerships. That’s why, of the investments the Gates Foundation makes, and we are able to deploy \$1.4 billion a year to try to do something about improving equity in health and in education, 80 percent of that money goes directly into partnerships. Whether you’re in the public sector or in business, we fundamentally believe that if you want maximum results you have to make partnerships work. It is one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. It is one of our core tenets that in spite of having unbelievable resources at the foundation we are a drop in the bucket and that most major social change—essentially, I’d be comfortable saying all major social change—happens because either governments or the private sector decide it needs to happen. We as philanthropists can do the most by actually acting as a catalyst to the creation of partnerships, the creation of political will, and the creation of movement that insures that governments and markets perform as well as they can against these challenges.

I’d like to read you a few sentences about partnerships that appeared in a recent article in the *New Yorker* by an author that I really like, James Surwicksi. I know that some folks have read his recent book. James wrote that firms that were once exemplars of going it alone have dedicated themselves to playing well with others. It’s not about Microsoft. Procter and Gamble now gets more than 30 percent of its innovations from the outside. Pharmaceutical companies rely more and more on partnerships with small biotech to come up with new drugs. Even Apple Computer, once the most imperially self-reliant of companies, has changed. Those were his words not mine. Steve Jobs used to fantasize about controlling everything down to the sand in Apple’s computer chips, and now Apple led by Steve Jobs works contentedly with companies like Motorola and Hewlett Packard. Of course, partnerships weren’t invented in Silicon Valley.

There’s an old African proverb that I have on my desk that says a lot about partnerships. If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. The first part of that proverb—if you want to go fast go alone—is a very polite way of saying partnerships can be a real pain. If you want to make a quick decision, your first thought probably isn’t going to be to consult a dozen people or form a steering committee. Yet partnerships have and do create enormous benefit. They force us to test our beliefs about our work and the result we’re getting. In business, my experience was that your competitors and your customers tell you constantly where you need to improve. In the nonprofit world, we don’t always get that same kind of feedback, especially at a foundation. It’s very hard to measure the results of your work or even know if you’re following the right strategy, but honest partnerships—and I stress the word honest—can make us uncomfortable and help us avoid complacency. In isolation, it’s very easy to take pride in the number of kids

you are serving and the number of schools you are changing. In an honest partnership, you are constantly reminded of the kids you were not serving. That's an honest partnership in the value of this.

I know a lot of this talk can sound theoretical but it isn't. I thought I'd give you just a couple of examples, but if we are going to create a great system of schools or make sure everyone in the world has a chance at a healthy life, we have to build partnerships—between the market players, between the governments, and between those of us in the nonprofit sector who can take the risks and get out front from time to time. There's simply no other way to attack the problem.

Let me talk a little bit about how we think about it. We start with the identification of a problem and then we say, "Okay, we could deliver this vaccine to this child but what if we wanted to deliver it to every child. What if wanted to not just deliver it to every child but to insure that that child's grandchild has a vaccine, has the vaccines when she needs them." That's going to require a lot of partnership. With our resources, we definitely could deliver that vaccine. There is no way that we can take the ancestral view and ensure that grandchild gets the vaccine without recognition that you have to change the system. You have to work with all the players. This requires pervasive change and it starts with partnerships.

So a few years ago, Bill and Melinda and myself hosted a dinner at their house—people do show up when you have dinner at their house—for a number of leaders in public health. These were from all different parts of public health, and these experts started to tell us that the world in the last 20 years had lost momentum in the effort to immunize children. They told us that 40 million children that year were going without the basic package of immunization that costs only about fifteen dollars. When we asked why, they said there were just too many independent actors. Lots and lots of partnerships. There was too much competition for attention. Too much competition for credit. Too much spreading thin of too little money. These problems were simply crippling the immunization movement and costing those 40 million children and causing a tremendous number of deaths around the developing world.

Vaccines were being developed. They were being tested and manufactured, but they weren't being delivered. It was ultimate pipeline problem. The pipeline stopped at the gates of those developing countries or stopped at reaching the half of the population in that country that was the least served by the health system that did exist there.

So at dinner that night, the idea came up to create a partnership to solve the problems, and people started talking about policies and other things, and Bill turned back to this assembled group and said, "Think big," and so they did. They came back within just a matter of weeks with a very bold program to create the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations, which we started funding with \$750 million—and we've since doubled that amount. Very excitingly that partnership includes WHO, UNICEF—what we call the full alphabet of partners—but also vaccine manufacturers and other foundations and ministers of health and developing world leaders. And since 2000 we have saved over a million children's lives but most importantly that partnership, through fits and starts and efforts, has immunized tens of millions of children WHO would have never reached and is preparing to introduce new vaccines as they come out to shorten the gap between when our children receive the basic vaccine and when it actually reaches those who might need it most, who might have the highest benefit from it.

The evidence that this kind of partnership is working was underscored to me last week. We put money in at the beginning, but I'm happy to tell you that we have ten countries that are now regular donors to the Global Alliance, and ten days ago several European Union countries announced that they are putting in billions of dollars through a new financing vehicle called the International Financing Facility for Immunization because they saw that the partnership can and will work and that every child, everywhere, not that child or that next child, but every child, everywhere can and should receive their basic immunizations.

This partnership wasn't easy. There were tons of egos, institutional and individual. It's not always individual egos. It's often institutional egos and there were lots of obstacles, institutional and individual. All of which needed to be set aside, and that partnership worked because ultimately everybody in it agreed to keep their eye on every child, everywhere getting the vaccines that they needed.

By the same token, in our efforts together to create an education system that prepares every child in America for college and work, we have to make the most of all of our strengths. And we have to get past the egos and obstacles and seize the opportunities to work together in partnerships to ensure it.

I hear a lot about what you've been talking about today and I know that you share my conviction that kids don't just need great individual schools. Yes, one kid needs one great school but to serve all kids to live up to that ambition of every child everywhere we need great systems of schools, where each stage prepares the children in that community for the next one, from pre-school through postsecondary and on to work and citizenship. And high schools need to prepare kids to make the most of their lives, whether going on to college or getting a great job after graduation. To do that, we need to understand what colleges expect students to know and what employers expect them to be able to do. High schools need to be connected to colleges and to companies, and state governments need to help nurture those connections rather than see them as separate entities. Each of these things will require outstanding partnerships.

Fortunately, we have very impressive examples to draw on, and I understand that even more commitments were made today to further some of these partnerships. I'd like to just talk about three of them.

The first is an area in which JFF has been intimately involved and I know you've spent time talking about it, the early college high school. These are partnerships in which high schools and colleges work together to offer high school students the chance to earn college credit and even an Associate's degree. In an early college high school, everyone—students, parents, teachers, administrators—knows what the student needs to know and be able to do as they move from high school into college. It's woven in to the basic premise of the school. This isn't just a matter of getting the right prerequisites on their transcript. It's making sure they can analyze problems, communicate clearly, and do the higher-level math that will be required. And early college high schools, a relatively new concept in America, are getting amazing results. I could tell a dozen stories, and I know that Hilary and Marlene could tell you a dozen more stories about them, but I'll mention just one. The Middle College High School in Queens, New York.

Middle College High has partnered with LaGuardia Community College and together they're focused on reaching kids who are at risk of dropping out by the tenth grade. Kids, that's their focus. Kids who are at risk of dropping out by tenth grade. In fact, today marks a big milestone for the school and for those students. At a ceremony that was to be held this morning, eight students will receive their high school diplomas along with an Associate of Arts degree. They were the very first students from the school to earn dual degrees, but fifteen more students are in the queue right behind them from the original class who will receive their dual degrees next summer. The others have all earned high school degrees and some college credit. Those are kids who are prepared for college and work, and they came from a target of kids at risk of dropping out by tenth grade. So many people deserve the credit for this success, and I got a chance to talk to Damian about his success a little bit at lunch, and I said, "How did you decide to do this school in the first place?" And the first thing he said was, "Well, my mother had heard," and so our mothers, our parents, the students, of course, their extended family and the school's faculty and staff deserve a tremendous amount of credit for this. But so do those community partnerships who have decided not to let these early college high schools fail, who have decided not to keep these high schools disconnected from the continuing education resources in the community.

We also have to recognize, and I think I already have and I'll do it again, the work of the people at JFF, who have been the crucial link among all of the early college high schools getting going around the country. They're coordinating the entire initiative. They spread the news about best practices. They track the progress

of early colleges so we can learn from each other what's working and what isn't, and they're helping various intermediaries who are trying to build these schools develop new ones so that we can scale the success that we see in these initial schools into many, many more and to move faster and with greater results.

They're also offering guidance to states and other organizations, and believe me, there are financial challenges in things like this. Who pays for the college credits? I remember that was one of our very first discussions, and so there's lots of policy work, lots of government work, and then when you figure it out in Delaware, how do you move it to Michigan. One of the roles that JFF has in creating and ensuring that this partnership is greater than one plus one equaling two—that we can actually move faster and further by connecting the high schools to colleges and by connecting all of these folks working together into a much bigger national initiative.

Besides preparing every student for college, we also want to prepare them for work, and we need partnerships that connect high schools to employers, too. And no one is doing a better job—well maybe there are other people doing a better job—but the one I am going to talk to you about is the Christo Rey Network. Many of you may know Christo Rey. They have opened 11 Catholic college prep schools around the country that serve low-income and minority kids, and I've had the pleasure of visiting some of their schools and some of their employers. These schools work with local businesses that offer the students entry-level office jobs. Five kids share one job. Each kid goes to school four days a week and works one day a week. In turn, their salaries help pay this private school tuition.

So far, more than 440 companies nationwide have partnered with Christo Rey. San Juan Diego High, the Christo Rey's school in Austin, Texas, places its students at Dell and law firm, Akin Gump. Those are two brand names that I would have given my right arm to work with at age 18, and even today they wouldn't be bad brand names to be able to say you have on your resume, right? But to have that at age 18 certainly broadens your horizons and not only your skills for work but your skills at learning what it takes to network, what it takes to communicate, what it takes to deliver a great presentation, and they're helping kids not just be successful in those jobs but at making the contacts and continuing on.

Even here at this conference, we're seeing other new partnerships taking shape between schools and businesses, and I was very glad to hear about the commitment to the go-forward efforts. I know that many of the details are still being worked out, but I understand that Citigroup, Johnson & Johnson, McGraw-Hill, and your leadership at the Ford Motor Company have all committed to escalating. I'm sure many more of you are committing to escalating your work on high school reform.

Partnering with states like Texas, Ohio, and North Carolina, we hope to work with you to support career academies and build more relationships with postsecondary schools and to give students the chance to get real-world job experience. But I want to emphasize that you, as corporate leaders, have more assets for what it's going to take to build great partnerships than you have probably inventoried, and building a great inventory of the assets that you have is one of the things I hope is happening today. These commitments like you are making—like Christo Rey is making, like these early college schools and the postsecondary institutions that are partnering with them are making—will be indispensable as we move from a series of small great high schools to a system that ends the separation between high schools and the rest of the community—that ends the separation between high school and continuing into work and continuing into college. Foundations and other nonprofits certainly will continue to play a crucial role in spreading these models, and all told what I understand is that U.S. foundations and nonprofits spend about \$1.5 billion a year on education. But that is a pittance compared to what the government of the United States spends—\$500 billion annually. So for building all of these partnerships, I'd like to emphasize that a tremendous amount of what we can offer is to increase the conviction and the realization and the commitment of our governments to spend that \$500 billion to the benefit of all students. Unless we work together on that, we can't possibly make the most of all the money—not the money that Ford is putting forward but the money that Michigan is putting forward or that the U.S. government is putting forward. That's why, along with all of these alliances

linking schools with employers and nonprofits, we all must build our alliances and our communications with our partners in government.

Earlier this year, in terms of partnerships with government, we at the Gates Foundation were delighted to join JFF and ACHIEVE and five other foundations and ten state governments in a project that's building consensus on policies that make it possible to improve high schools throughout entire states. This partnership, which many of you I think attended or learned a lot about, was launched at a meeting of the National Governors Association. It has helped create a kind of blueprint that states can use to evaluate their own policies. (If you don't see your state on the list of the ten who've already signed up, I hope that you will talk to the folks at JFF about how we can ensure your state actually gets on that list.)

The blueprint encourages states to ask the obvious questions, but it encourages them that others are asking the same things. What really are our goals for graduation rates? Not so long ago, we all had to agree on how we actually calculate graduation rates. What are the gaps? How do we get from where we are? What is it going to cost? Do we have enough? Do we need more? Now the partnership has given grants to ten states to help them implement their policy plans.

I want to be honest about this partnership. It may be hard to believe, but it was three years in the making. It's nice to stand here and talk about the states and the blueprints, etc., but Governor Mark Warner of Virginia who led this work as chairman of the NGA told me that he likes to say that he always thought it was hard to get education organizations to work together until he tried to get foundations to work together. I wanted to say I am a realist about partnerships, but they are very important, and when we did get the partnership aligned and committed, everyone in this partnership stayed focused on that goal and so three years later we're really seeing some results. They've come together in a way that we've never done before—that these organizations have never done before. ACHIEVE and JFF have a lot to be proud of in helping make it happen.

So, in all of these areas—linking high schools, helping states focus their own policies, partnerships that are now tackling the toughest problems in education—I hope each of you will think about how you can build on these ideas not just at this conference today but on your flight home and next week and next month and in the lunchroom when you manage to get that executive who's trying to decide how to further their work in the community and in the nation.

I also want to challenge you just a little bit about how to make the most of your partnerships. I won't pretend that the Gates Foundation knows exactly how to do this, but in addition to our partnership with JFF and ACHIEVE, we've got dozens of partnerships going. We're learning more every day about why some succeed and why some fail. I'd like to suggest three questions for you to ask yourself about your own work in partnership and the first one is, are you too democratic? I don't mean the difference between Republicans and Democrats, but too democratic. One of the things about our work is that we have a tendency to ensure all voices are heard, which is very good, but decisions often are delayed past a reasonable point and so we can't get bogged down by consulting every person on every decision.

You need to look at governance that allows you to be informed and fast moving and the way that you convince your partnership of this is the second question, which is about measuring results: deciding what you're going to do and putting intermediate and long-term measurements in place and being willing to step up and say, didn't get that one right. I remember maybe 18 months ago, Tom Vander Ark—after we'd spent quite a bit of money, and quite a few years working on really increasing the number of high schools—came into my office and absolutely looked like a man who had been almost at the finish line of a marathon and realized that he still was supposed to swim the Potomac afterwards. And he said, "I love supporting these new high schools getting opened. I love the momentum we're seeing and the kids that are getting through these, but if we don't do something about the systems these high schools are in, this is never going to endure." Being willing to literally not just take a look at the results that you're getting but continue to ask yourself are you asking the right questions in this partnership is, in fact, very important. So, we have, in fact,

really increased our work with districts and with systems and with partners of all kinds and in the policy arena and others to ensure that not just a hundred or a thousand or 3,000 great high schools exist for kids, but that we create a system of change.

My last and final question I hope you'll ask yourself in the remaining hours today and also on that flight on the way home is, have you really set your ambitions high enough? We know how big the need is. It is so much easier to say, let's start small, but in my view setting your ambitions at every child, at the entire community, at the entire state, will cause a level of creativity—and in your organizations, will cause a level of buy-in—because of the boldness that you will not see if you set your sights at the doable. If you already know you can get it done, I would say your partnership is nowhere near as bold as our kids need it to be.

Those three questions, if we work on them—really deciding how to make decisions rapidly, really deciding what are we going for and what are the results, and being willing to change when we find out answers that may not be perfect, and then setting our ambition at every child, everywhere, every kid ready for college and work—I believe if we do those and continue to build the partnerships in the schools, in the policy arena and across the country, that we really can make progress against that ambition.

I want to conclude today by expressing my gratitude for all you're already doing in your partnerships. I hope that we partner more and we see more progress in the future. Remember what I said about the African proverb, if you want to go fast, go alone. But we're all here today talking about how to improve our schools because we want to go far. We want every high school senior who crosses the stage on graduation day to be walking to Brown, [LAUGHTER] to be walking to something more than that high school diploma. We want him and her to be walking toward a hopeful future and a future that she has been preparing for her entire life. I'm thrilled that we are going to help her get there by going together. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]