



## Stand Up for Public Education™ Communications Kit

### Letter to AASA members

Dear AASA member:

AASA's longstanding mission has been to support and develop effective school system leaders dedicated to the highest quality public education for all children. Last year, AASA's leadership took bold steps toward strengthening AASA's position in the national education arena by refocusing our mission around a multi-pronged initiative, **Stand Up for Public Education.™**

Expanding access has been the ongoing mission of public education. Most of the landmark legal decisions affecting public education have been about access and opportunity. As public schools worked to meet the goal of universal access, it became increasingly clear that we still needed to ensure that all children had the same opportunity to succeed. This was evidenced by great gaps in performance, particularly when student performance was examined by race and social class.

Now in the No Child Left Behind era, public schools have shifted from a focus on access to a demand for a high level of achievement for all students. While every school administrator in America supports the goals of NCLB, this shift requires the political will, the financial capacity and the educational resources to ensure academic success for every school-aged child in America. AASA's **Stand Up** initiative advocates a systemic focus, both locally and nationally, on three fundamental principles of public schooling:

- Getting children ready for school, through comprehensive nutrition and health programs, early childhood education and ongoing support for families;
- Getting schools ready for children by redesigning and transforming our schools' organization, teaching and learning practices and leadership strategies to meet the needs of each student who comes to us; and
- Getting children ready for democracy by preparing young people for active, responsible roles in society.

AASA members who comprise the Governing Board's Public Engagement Advisory Committee believe that AASA is well-positioned to take the lead in providing a national voice for quality public education. Our **Stand Up** initiative provides the perfect vehicle for carrying a positive, pro-public education message to parents, community, business and faith-based groups, and the media.

But success requires advocacy at every level of our organization—national, state, and local. That's why AASA has created a **Stand Up for Public Education Communications Kit** to help you articulate the "good news" about public education. This kit includes resources such as a

strategic communications plan, an opinion-editorial, news release, talking points and a PowerPoint presentation. Each piece of this kit is chock-full of positive public education facts and figures—and all are based upon a year’s worth of AASA polling data gauging the public’s attitude toward public education. It is our hope that you will supplement these sample materials with your own school district data, quotes and examples. This way AASA members speak with one voice nationally, but each member highlights the high-quality work being carried out locally in his/her school system.

To maximize and expedite the use of these materials during back-to-school, AASA is making this communications kit available electronically. This way you can easily amend the materials to best suit your school district’s needs and distribute them to your targeted audience(s).

To access the materials on-line, go to: **[www.aasa.org/supe](http://www.aasa.org/supe)**.

**Let’s put the “public” back in our public education system.**

Thank you for helping AASA take the lead in representing high quality public education.

For more information, contact the following AASA staff:

Terri Duggan Schwartzbeck, public policy analyst, [tschwartzbeck@aasa.org](mailto:tschwartzbeck@aasa.org)

Barbara Knisely, public information manger, [bknisely@aasa.org](mailto:bknisely@aasa.org)

Vanessa Wells, membership development manager, [vwells@aasa.org](mailto:vwells@aasa.org)

Sincerely,



Don Kussmaul  
AASA President



Paul Houston  
AASA Executive Director



## Stand Up for Public Education™

### Talking Points

- Public education is the great equalizer of our democracy. Our public education system offers children the opportunity to receive a free education as well as learn important life skills, such as how to seek common ground amidst their differences—and respect where common ground is absent.
- Public schools educate *every* child who enters through the front doors—regardless of his/her educational, physical or mental need.
- Public education faces great challenges from accountability—the urgency of closing the achievement gap and getting all children to achieve at higher levels.
  - Public schools have responded by shifting from a focus on access to a demand for universal high achievement for all students.
  - This shift requires a different kind of education and a different kind of educational system.
- As states experience ongoing budget shortfalls, schools are asked to do more with less.
- It's time to summon the political will to provide the necessary resources to move *every* child toward high levels of achievement.
- Every child enters school at a different academic achievement level. This community needs to summon the will to build a social infrastructure around getting our children ready for school:
  - Comprehensive nutrition and health programs
  - Early childhood education
  - Ongoing support for families
- Public education is stronger when the public is on board.
  - Strong parental involvement is critical to student success.
- The ultimate success of a high quality public education system is graduating young men and women who are ready to become good citizens—in our democracy and the world.
- Our children should expect nothing short of excellence from all of us. I am committing the school district to do its part to stand up for public education and I look forward to working with parents, business and community leaders and our elected officials in making our schools the best they can be.



## <Name of School District> Superintendent Rallies Community to Stand Up for Public Education

For Immediate Release

Contact: <Name, phone number, e-mail>

**CITY, STATE – Month, Day, Year** - <Name of School District> <Name of Superintendent> kicked off the new school year by urging parents, community leaders, local business owners, faith-based groups and state and local officials to get involved in guaranteeing academic success for every student this year.

“I urge every member of this community to stand up for public education,” said <Name of Superintendent>. “Public schools educate *every* child who enters through the front door— regardless of that child’s educational, physical or mental need.”

<Name of superintendent> said that the federal No Child Left Behind Act has shifted the focus from universal access to universal high achievement for all students. <Name of Superintendent> said that <he/she> is committed to raising academic achievement for every child in the <name of district>, “and that our community must summon the will to provide the necessary resources to move *every* child toward high levels of achievement,” <he/she> said.

Leading the nationwide campaign to **Stand Up for Public Education™** is the American Association of School Administrators, the national organization for the majority of America’s public school system leaders.

AASA Executive Director Paul Houston said that the **Stand Up** campaign was created to educate parents, community and business leaders and elected officials at all levels of government that universal academic achievement for all students shift requires the “political will, the financial resources and the educational capacity” to determine how best to educate every child. Houston said that AASA’s **Stand Up** initiative advocates a systemic focus, both locally and nationally, on three fundamental principles:

- Getting children ready for school, through comprehensive nutrition and health programs, early childhood education and ongoing support for families;
- Getting schools ready for children by redesigning and transforming our schools’ organization, teaching and learning practices and leadership strategies to meet the needs of each student who comes to us; and
- Getting children ready for democracy by preparing young people for active, responsible roles in society.

<Name of Superintendent>, who is a member of AASA, said “Every child enters school at a different academic achievement level. That’s why this community needs to summon the will to

build a social infrastructure around getting every child ready for school through comprehensive programs, such as nutrition and health, early childhood education and ongoing support for families.”

<Name of Superintendent> added that <Name of District> will continue to redesign and transform the schools’ organization, teaching and learning practices and leadership strategies “to meet the needs of each student who comes to us.”

“When we proactively respond to the educational, social and health needs of our students, they pay us back by growing up and becoming productive citizens,” <Name of Superintendent> said. “To me, that’s the ultimate success of a high quality public education experience: graduating young men and women who are ready to become good citizens—in our democracy and the world.”

<Name of Superintendent> said that public education is stronger when the public is on board.

“Let’s put the ‘public’ back in our public education system,” <he/she> said. “I urge every member of this community to commit themselves to ensuring academic success for every child in this district.”

“Come to our monthly school board meetings, volunteer in a classroom—there are so many opportunities to contribute to the success of our students.”

<Consider soliciting a statement of support from the leader of the board, PTA member, any active community member here.>

<Name of Superintendent> added that “the success of our students reflects the success of our community. Our children should expect nothing short of excellence from all of us. I am committing the public school system to do its part and I look forward to working with parents, business and community leaders and our elected officials in making our public education the best it can be.”

To learn more, contact <list a contact within the school system>.



### **Sample Opinion-Editorial**

**Can be used either as a letter to the editor of your local newspaper(s) or as an opinion piece submitted for the opinion-editorial page.**

## **America Needs a Strong Public Education System**

**September 2004**

The conclusion of the Labor Day holiday serves as an unofficial back-to-school signal. Once again the <Name of School District>, as well as thousands of public schools across the country, are a hub of activity from sunup to sundown.

Back-to-school coincides with the release of data which ranks how our district fared under the <State accountability system> and the targets set by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. If you are a parent, by now you know that <insert a sentence or two about how your school district fared in meeting AYP and your state standards>. Every time new data is released, there are always those who proclaim that “quality public education” is an oxymoron.

Critics of public education like to assert that academic achievement is stagnant, our kids cannot compete internationally, or that vouchers are the silver bullet. Those who wax nostalgic about “the good old days of education” forget that the system was an exclusionary one that discriminated against children of color or those with disabilities. When someone laments the fact that the nation’s public education system is not what it used to be, I agree with them and say, “You’re right! And that’s a **good** thing!”

Unlike private and parochial schools, our nation’s public school system educates every child who enters through the front doors—regardless of his/her educational, physical or mental need. This provides children the amazing opportunity to receive a free K-12 education in a diverse environment. I don’t know about you, but I cannot think of a better way to prepare children to grow up and become productive citizens of our diverse nation and the world.

Yet public schools face the critical challenge of closing the achievement gap. NCLB holds schools accountable for eliminating the disparity in academic achievement between poor/minority students and those from higher social classes. Many Americans blame failing schools for this gap. As a public school superintendent, raising academic achievement levels for every child in this school system is my No. 1 priority. But we all know that every child enters school at a different level.

Research shows that social class differences in health care quality and access, nutrition, childrearing styles, housing quality and stability, parental occupation and aspirations, and

even exposure to environmental toxins play a significant role in how well children learn and ultimately succeed.

Columbia University Teachers College professor and former education columnist Richard Rothstein argues in a new book titled “**Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black–White Achievement Gap,**” that blaming the achievement gap on failing schools is a mistake because it diverts attention from addressing the effects of economic and social disparities on children before they enter school.

As a public school administrator, I am committed to closing the achievement gap. But there is a reason that “public” appears in public schools. Without public support there can be no public school. To accomplish this worthy goal of universal high achievement requires the political will, the financial resources and the educational capacity to determine how best to educate every child. School, community, business and elected leaders must commit themselves to work together in providing comprehensive nutrition and health programs, early childhood education and ongoing support for families.

Educators know that as we get all kids ready for school we also need to get schools ready for kids. We will continue to improve our schools’ organization, teaching and learning practices and leadership strategies to meet the needs of each student who comes to us. Schools must offer more personalized, individually tailored approaches that capitalize on what kids already know, what their learning styles offer, what new brain research tells us about teaching and learning and what technology offers us.

Finally, we all must stay focused on the real goals of education: giving students the tools they need to succeed in life and preparing them to be good citizens—in our democracy and the world.

I urge every member of this community to commit to ensuring academic success for every child in this district. Come to our monthly school board meetings, volunteer in a classroom, <insert local opportunities to become involved here>. There are so many opportunities to contribute to the success of our students.

We have an exceptional generation of children in our public schools today, and they should expect nothing short of excellence from all of us. I am committing the public school system to do its part and I look forward to working with parents, business and community leaders and our elected officials in making our public school district the best it can be. Stand with me in standing up for public education.



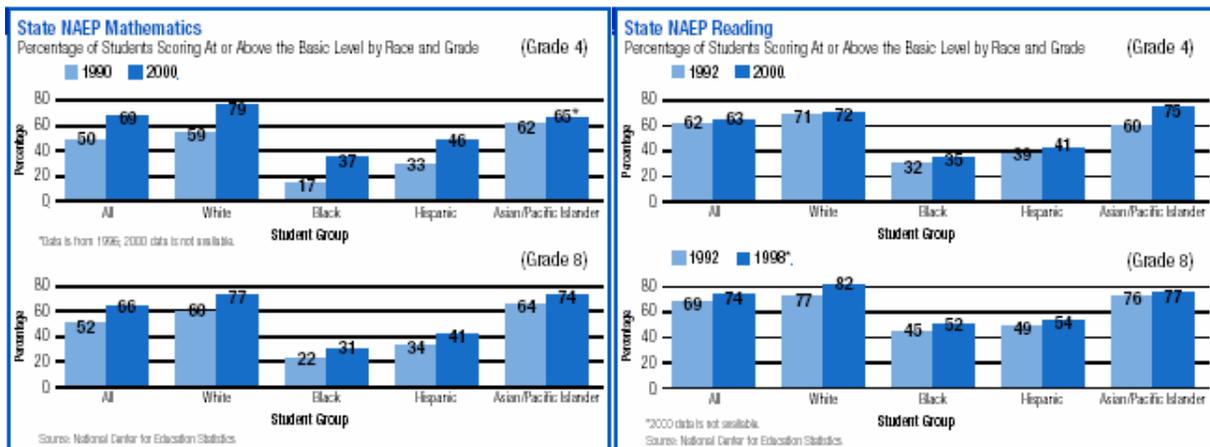
## Stand Up for Public Education™ What's Right About Public Schools

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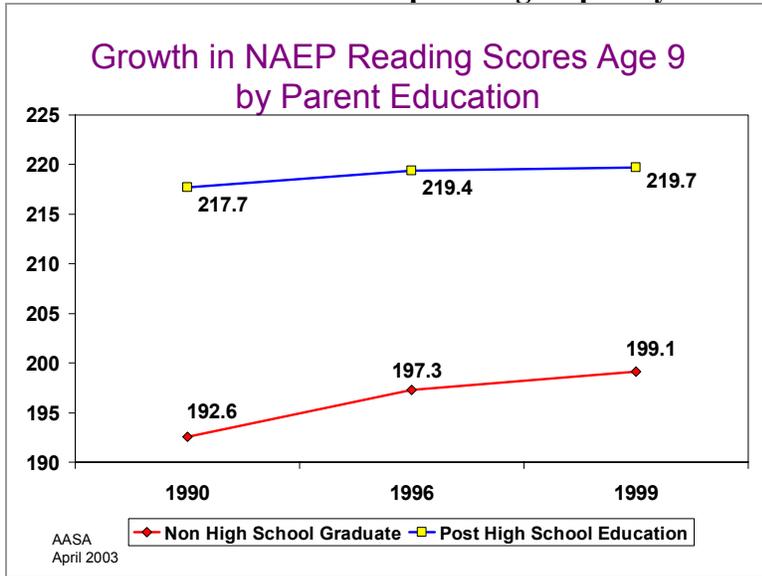
**Academic achievement is going up – both across the board and for specific groups of students.**

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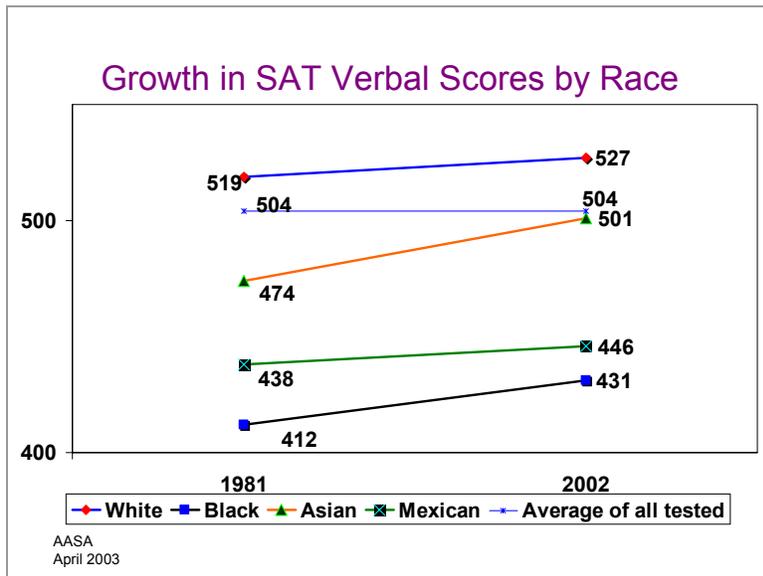
Between 1990 and 2000 (2003 scores cannot be compared to 1990 because NAEP changed procedures regarding accommodations for students), **the math and reading scores of students in grades 4 and 8 went up across the board and for all major racial and ethnic groups on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).**



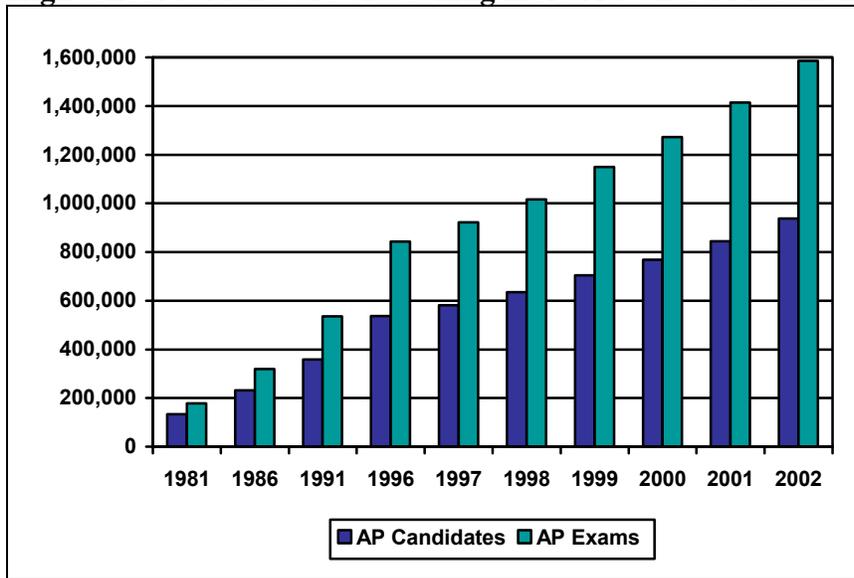
Scores of students also went up when grouped by the level of parents' education.



High school students, on the other hand, are doing better on the SAT college admissions test. While the average score remained flat from 1981 to 2002, all student groups improved, and more students from a much broader spectrum of economic backgrounds took the test.

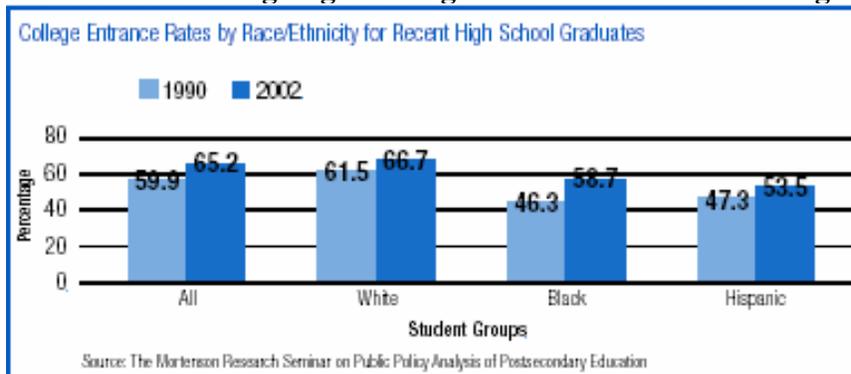


### High school students are also taking more Advanced Placement exams.



In fact, when asked, **58 percent of parents and the public agree that students today “work harder in school—take more classes and harder classes—than previous generations.”**

### More students are going to college – in all racial and ethnic groups.

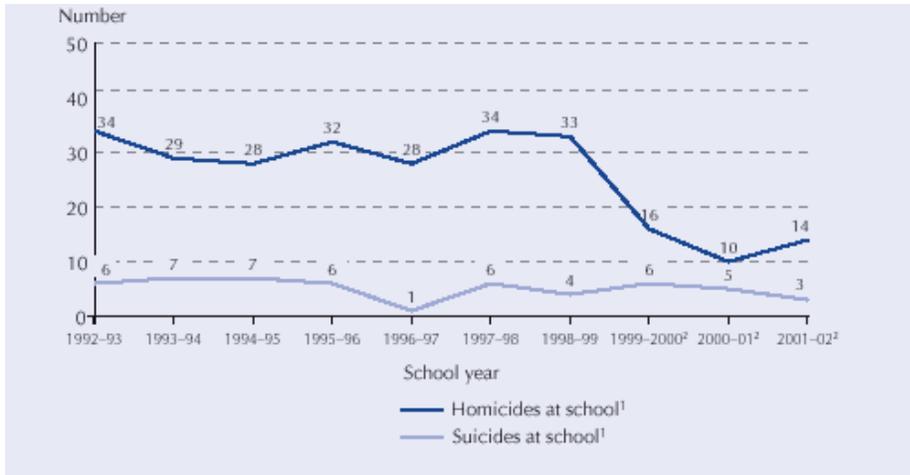


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### Schools are the safest place for our children.

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Incidences of school crime have decreased over the past decade. Between 1992 and 2001, the **rate of non-fatal violent crimes and assault against students dropped** from 48 per 1000 students to 28 per 1000. **Homicides on school premises also dropped from 34 in 1992 to 14 in 2001.**




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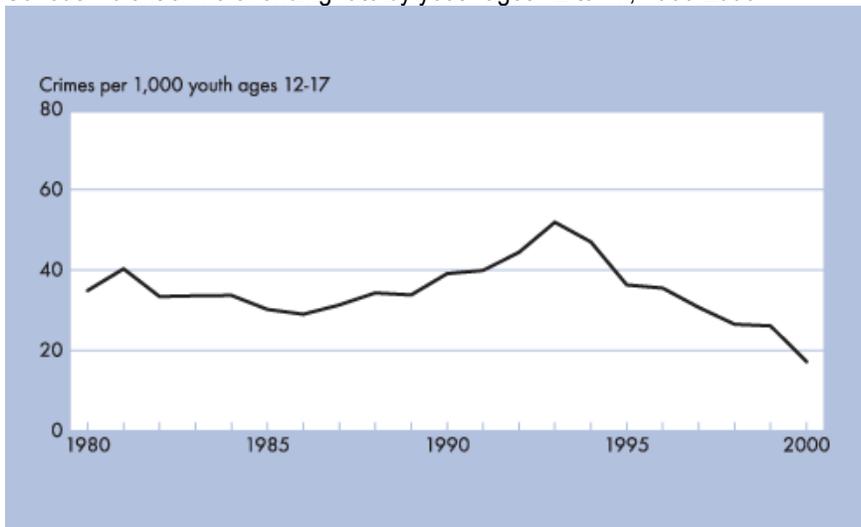
**We have a great group of kids in our schools today.**

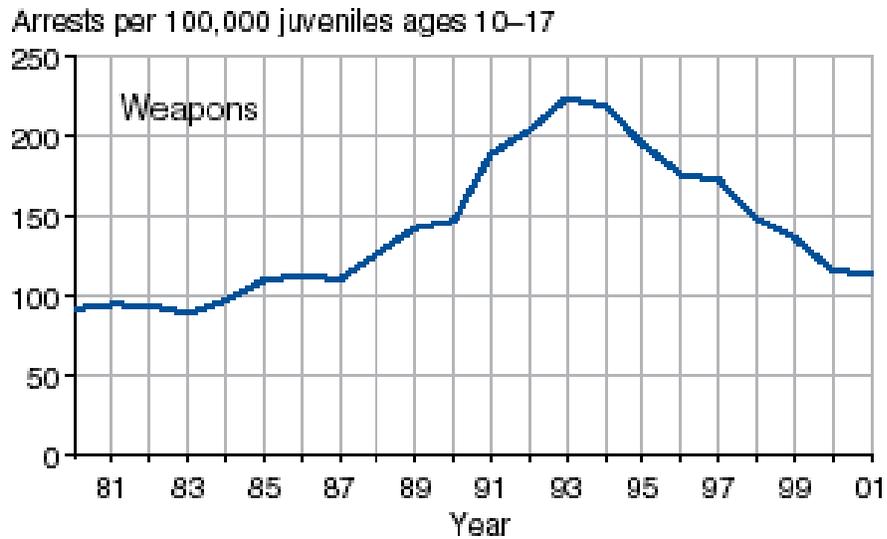
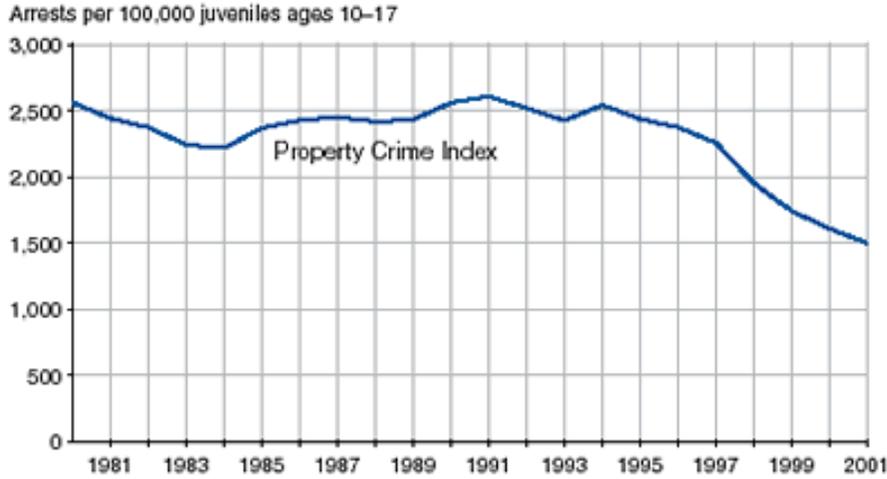
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The “Millennial” generation, as it has come to be called, replaces the WWII generation – the “Greatest Generation,” according to generational studies experts. Students of this generation are more inclined to better behavior, to see commonalities instead of differences, to play by the rules, and to achieve great things.

**Signs of this changing youth trend can be found in all major juvenile crime indicators. Violent crime, property crime, and weapons violations by today’s youth are all at record lows.**

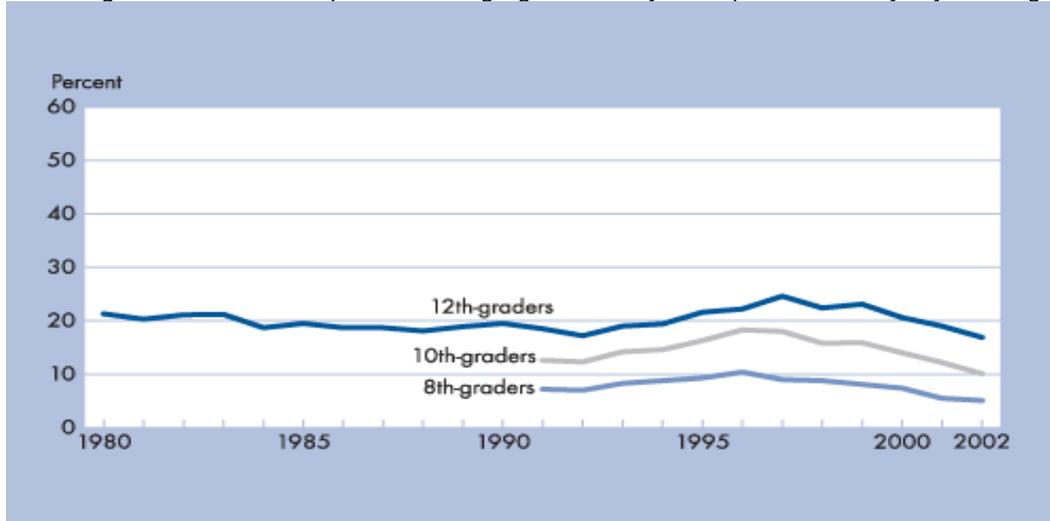
Serious violent crime offending rate by youth ages 12 to 17, 1980-2000



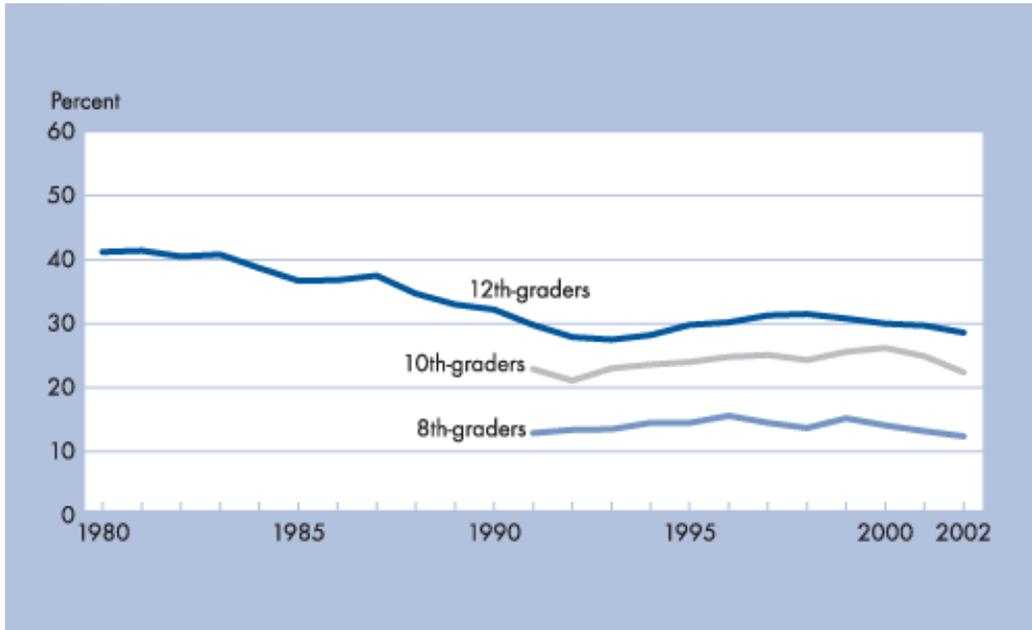


Further, trends in unhealthy behaviors including smoking, drug use, alcohol use, and teen pregnancy are also trending downward.

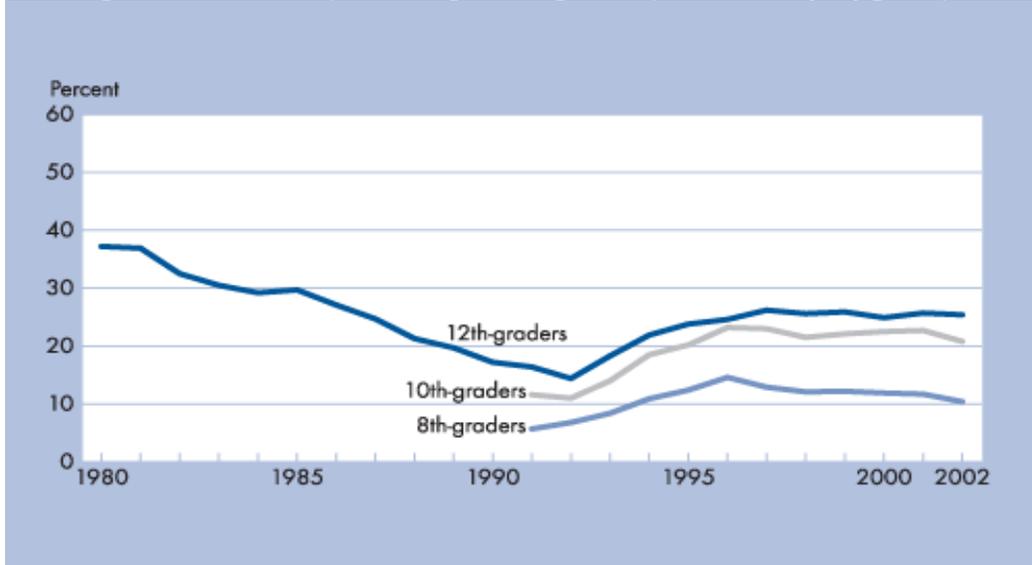
Percentage of students who reported smoking cigarettes daily in the previous 30 days by school grade (1980-2002)

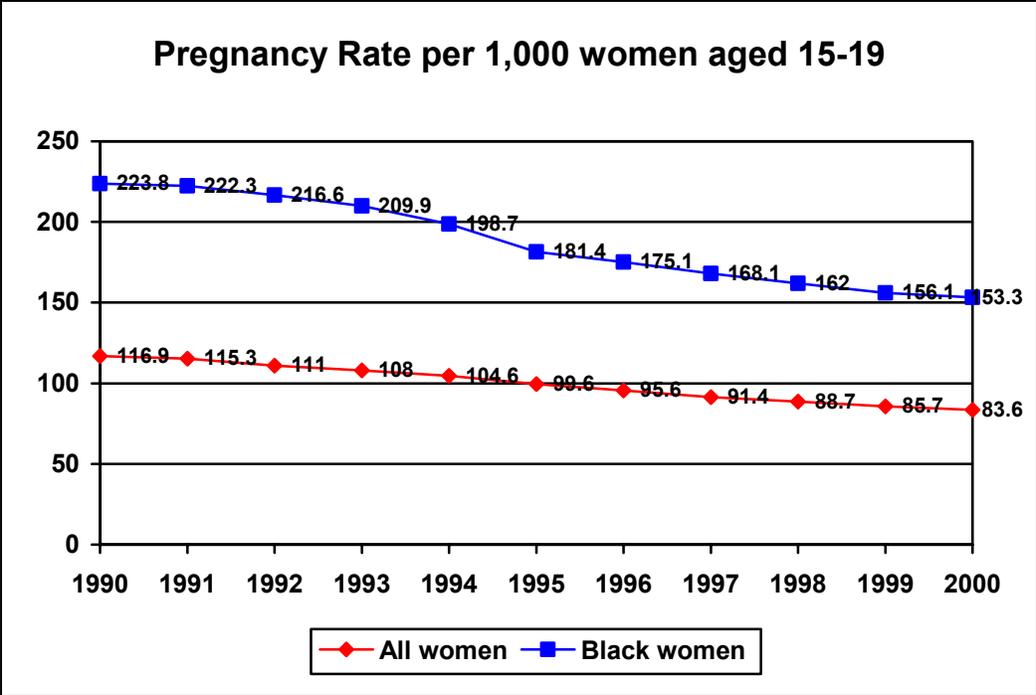


Percentage of students who reported having five or more alcoholic beverages in a row in the last 2 weeks by grade, 1980-2002

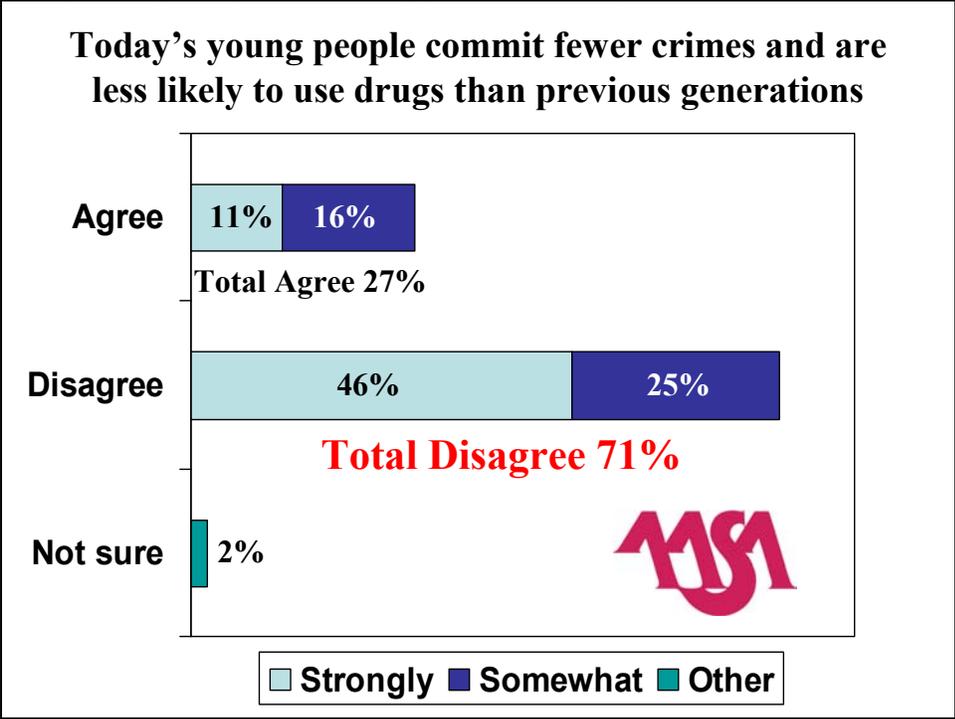


Percentage of students who reported using illicit drugs in the previous 30 days by grade (1980-2002)

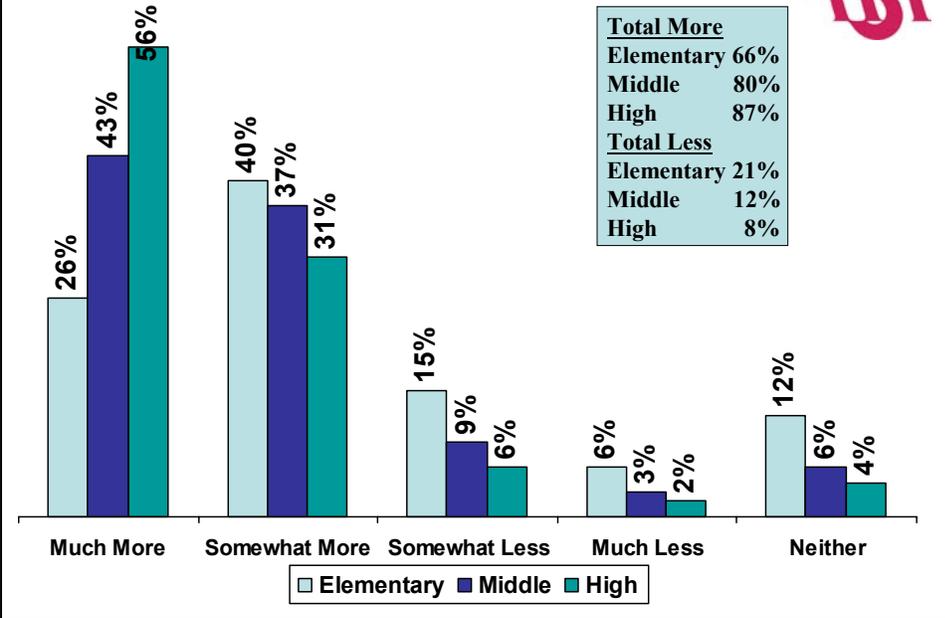




Yet, public perception is the opposite of reality.



Do you think that (insert item) schools are (more/somewhat) more or less dangerous than when you were a child?



**We must advocate not just for public education, but for the students who are in school today. Tell the story of the great generation of kids in school today and remind the public that our children deserve the best public schools.**

## Stand Up for Public Education

### Getting the Message Out

<i>Audience</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>
Local media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sequence data and announcements into manageable chunks.</li> <li>• Anticipate questions and prepare answers.</li> <li>• Weave Stand Up messages into other conversations about school performance, budgets, etc.</li> <li>• FACT: Most of the public gets education information from local media, either newspaper or television.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite editorial board and education writers to briefings.</li> <li>• Invite reporters into schools for a tour.</li> <li>• Ask reporters for feedback on the type of school information they would like to receive that would be helpful in their local education reporting.</li> <li>• Suggest news hooks and pitch story ideas that highlight positive/innovative examples of the work of principals and teachers and student academic success.</li> </ul>
Public (parents and non-parents)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work through the media.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FACT: Most of the public gets education information from local media, either newspaper or television.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Talk specifically about what your district is doing – to improve, to help children.</li> <li>• Talk specifically about the all the achievements being made in your district – test scores, but also SAT, AP, students engaged in community service, students engaged in any kind of powerful learning activity, students taking initiative, etc.</li> <li>• Report local examples of data regarding safety, decreases in drug and alcohol use, etc.</li> <li>• Advocate for the children using the Great Kids data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media</li> <li>• Letters to the editor</li> <li>• District newsletter</li> <li>• Community gatherings, neighborhood meetings, town hall meetings</li> <li>• District website</li> <li>• Local e-mail listserves</li> <li>• Local talk radio</li> </ul>
Parents – both individual and PTA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Same as above, plus remember:</li> <li>• Parents more likely to support improving the schools we have rather than giving kids an escape route.</li> <li>• Parents like having test data, but aren't sold on testing as the best or only measure of quality.</li> <li>• Parents think parental involvement is important – support parent centers in schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media</li> <li>• District newsletter</li> <li>• District website</li> <li>• School newsletters</li> <li>• School websites</li> <li>• (same as above)</li> </ul>
School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in joint strategy planning.</li> <li>• Develop message together.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Briefings</li> <li>• Memos</li> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Emails</li> <li>• Informal communications</li> </ul>

**Stand Up for Public Education**  
Getting the Message Out

<i>Audience</i>	<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Mechanism</i>
District Staff: Principals/Counselors  District Staff: Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principals and teachers are best spokespeople – find those who are articulate and make them available to media.</li> <li>• One message, many voices.</li> <li>• Now is the time to get the positive message out! The public is more optimistic about schools during back-to-school time.</li> <li>• FACT: Public believes principals and teachers when it comes to school quality and how to improve schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff meetings</li> <li>• Memos – provide information and talking points</li> <li>• District training – media specific</li> </ul>
Civic Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The public identifies developing citizens as the most important goal of education by a margin of 2 to 1 over improving achievement.</li> <li>• Parents and the public also overwhelmingly say that schools can't close the achievement gap alone.</li> <li>• Get positive message out now.</li> <li>• Use back-to-school time as an opportunity to get involved.</li> <li>• Community involvement varies by district – find a way to encourage people to get directly involved.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite them to briefings.</li> <li>• Offer to speak at their meetings.</li> <li>• Brief them ahead of time to bring them “into the circle” and thus get them on your message.</li> </ul>
Business Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Back-to-school optimism</li> <li>• Community involvement varies by district – find a way to encourage people to get directly involved.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get them involved.</li> <li>• Local chamber of commerce or other business coalition – offer to speak at meetings.</li> <li>• Local civic groups – offer to speak at meetings.</li> <li>• Be accessible.</li> </ul>
Faith Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Back-to-school optimism</li> <li>• Community involvement varies by district – find a way to encourage people to get directly involved.</li> <li>• Example: In Lancaster, PA, business leaders, civic leaders, clergy, and county commissioners all initiated a city-wide literacy campaign to get books and volunteers into schools (Vicki Phillips, 1999, now superintendent of Portland).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get them involved.</li> <li>• Offer to speak at meetings.</li> <li>• Be accessible.</li> </ul>