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## **National High School Center Outlines Emerging Evidence for Strengthening Low-Performing High Schools**

Washington, D.C. – The National High School Center, funded by the U.S. Department of Education and housed at the American Institutes for Research (AIR), has released a research brief highlighting ways to raise student achievement and keep students on track for graduation. The brief is based on evaluations of four widely used high school improvement programs and identifies key practices used to strengthen high schools.

The brief, “Emerging Evidence on Improving High School Student Achievement and Graduation Rates: The Effects of Four Popular Improvement Programs,” outlines five cross-cutting challenges faced by high schools and lessons learned in working to positively influence student outcomes:

- assisting incoming high school students who possess poor academic skills;
- improving instructional content and outcomes;
- creating a personalized and orderly learning environment;
- preparing students for the world beyond high school; and
- inspiring transformations in overstressed high schools.

“Creating an inviting environment that includes specialized catch-up courses and high-quality and defined curricula is essential in preparing students for the world beyond high school,” explained Joseph R. Harris, Ph.D., interim director of the National High School Center.

The take-aways for better high schools are gleaned from the research conducted by MDRC, a partner of the National High School Center, on the following prominent high school improvement programs: Career Academies, First Things First, Project GRAD, and Talent Development. The brief, which outlines lessons learned as well as opportunities for improving high schools, expands on MDRC’s May 2006 report “Meeting Five Critical Challenges of High School Reform: Lessons from Research on Three Reform Models” and includes additional findings related to Project GRAD.

Another lesson of the research synthesis is that instructional improvements along with structural changes that promote personalization are both important in creating higher-performing high schools. “Both structural and instructional improvements are the twin pillars of high school reform,” said Corinne M. Herlihy, lead author of the brief. “It is critical that these components work in partnership, rather than in isolation.”

“Whether districts and schools adopt an existing comprehensive reform initiative or put together the elements of a comprehensive intervention on their own, much has been learned about what is needed, what seems to work, and what doesn’t work,” Harris said.

The newly released report is available free-of-charge on the [National High School Center’s Web site](#)

### **About the National High School Center**

The National High School Center ([www.betterhighschools.org](http://www.betterhighschools.org)), established in 2005, serves as a central source of expertise on high school-related issues for all students with a special focus on students with disabilities, students with limited proficiency on English, and students at risk of school failure. The National High School Center is located at the American Institutes for Research, in Washington, D.C., and serves the Regional Comprehensive Centers, a national network developed by the U.S. Department of Education. Subcontractors include Learning Point Associates, MDRC, the National Center for Educational Accountability, and WestED.

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