



The Business Roundtable

# CONTINUING THE COMMITMENT:

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ESSENTIAL

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COMPONENTS

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SUCCESSFUL

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EDUCATION

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SYSTEM

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THE BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE  
EDUCATION PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

May 1995

## THE BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE

**T**he Business Roundtable is an association of chief executive officers who examine public issues that affect the economy and develop positions which seek to reflect sound economic and social principles. Established in 1972, the Roundtable was founded in the belief that business executives should take an increased role in the continuing debates about public policy.

A principal strength of the Roundtable is the extent of participation by the chief executive officers of the member firms. Working in task forces on specific issues, they direct research, supervise preparation of position papers, recommend policy and speak out on the issues.

In an effort to provide a broad base of information for the decision-making process, membership of the Roundtable is diversified. Member selection reflects the goal of having representation varied by category of business and by geographic location. Thus, the members, some 200 chief executive officers of companies in all fields, can present a cross section of thinking on national issues.

The Roundtable is selective in the issues it studies. A principal criterion is the impact the problem will have on the social and economic well-being of the nation. The Roundtable works only on issues where its members' business experience can make a significant contribution. It has continuing liaison with other organizations dealing with national problems.

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he Business Roundtable, representing about 200 American corporations, accepted President George Bush's challenge in 1989 to make a personal commitment to reform elementary and secondary education. The Roundtable agreed that schools were preparing too few students to meet world standards in core academic subjects, and that too many students were leaving school unprepared for productive work and effective citizenship. The Roundtable CEOs therefore made a 10-year commitment — not just to improve individual schools but to reform the entire system of public education.

To guide the effort, the Roundtable endorsed the National Education Goals developed by the nation's governors and the President and, in September 1990, adopted *Essential Components of a Successful Education System* (see Appendix for a list of the National Education Goals). The essential components served as the Roundtable's framework or architecture for reform, defining a policy agenda for change, state by state, to improve student achievement.

Chief executive officers of Roundtable companies concentrated at the state level for two reasons. First, under the U.S. Constitution, states have primary responsibility for education. Second, no state had solved the problem of providing high-quality education to students in all localities.

In this second edition, *Continuing the Commitment: Essential Components of a Successful Education System*, the Roundtable strengthens and updates its reform architecture, very much like a business improving its products and services through a process of continuous quality improvement. The Roundtable believes that states and communities that have made progress under the guidance of the original statement of the nine components should continue what they are doing. This edition offers an updated presentation that enhances the original discussion of the essential components of a successful education system.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

America’s democratic system, its ability to compete, and the future of its children depend upon all children being well educated.

The Business Roundtable’s *Essential Components of a Successful Education System* is a nine-point agenda for educational change based on the fundamental belief that **all children can and must learn at ever higher levels — from students who now drop out of school to those considered to be high achievers.** To fully succeed in raising the achievement of American students, the agenda called for in the National Education Goals, the education system must address all nine components:

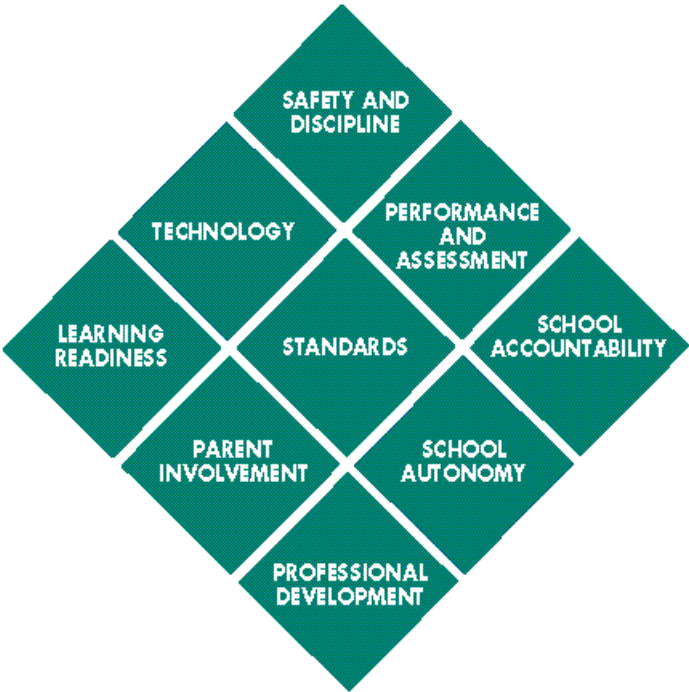
**1. STANDARDS.**

A successful system expects high academic standards that prepare students for success in school and the workplace, and

**2. PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT.**

A system focuses on resourcing, training, and reporting student and system performance so that students, teachers, parents and the public can understand and act on the information.

**3. SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY.** A successful system assists schools struggling to improve, rewards exemplary schools, and penalizes schools that persistently fail to educate their students.



- 4. SCHOOL AUTONOMY.** A successful system gives individual schools the freedom of action and resources necessary for high performance and true accountability.
- 5. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.** A successful system insists on continuous learning for teachers and administrators that is focused on improving teaching, learning and school management.
- 6. PARENT INVOLVEMENT.** A successful system enables parents to support the learning process, influence schools, and make choices about their children's education.
- 7. LEARNING READINESS.** A successful system provides high-quality pre-kindergarten education for disadvantaged children. It also seeks the help of other public and private agencies to overcome learning barriers caused by poverty, neglect, violence or ill-health for students of all ages.
- 8. TECHNOLOGY.** A successful system uses technology to broaden access to knowledge and to improve learning and productivity.
- 9. SAFETY AND DISCIPLINE.** A successful system provides a safe, well-disciplined and caring environment for student learning.

## CONTINUING THE COMMITMENT

**D**uring the first five years of The Business Roundtable's 10-year commitment to education reform, the Roundtable has formed successful partnerships with governors, legislators, and education and business leaders to enact significant reform in a number of states. More than 40 states are implementing or considering comprehensive reform efforts similar to the Roundtable's agenda. The nine essential components have proven to be a valuable basic architecture for reform, one that is adaptable to the unique education circumstances of many states and communities.

The chief executive officers of Roundtable member companies remain committed to devoting personal time and company resources to this effort. This statement updates and strengthens the Roundtable's original architecture for reform, while maintaining its key elements. In particular, *Continuing the Commitment: Essential Components of a Successful Education System* re-emphasizes the central role of high, measurable standards in achieving school reform. It also more clearly acknowledges the importance of other critical aspects of a high-quality education system: safety, order and discipline in schools; preparation for work as well as for higher education; consistent and adequate resource allocation; and parental participation and choice.

The Roundtable's education reform agenda follows the American tradition of regarding schools as one part of a network of institutions sharing responsibility for children's total development. Families, churches, community organizations, the private sector and local social service agencies must all play their essential roles. There is no substitute for a full partnership of home, school, neighborhood and business. Employers' participation in such partnerships can support students' transition from the classroom to the workplace.

The Roundtable's agenda emphasizes the important values of personal responsibility and hard work. To prepare students for a demanding future, schools must exemplify these values. No education system can guarantee that every student will succeed without the student's own consistent, dedicated effort. Persistent effort, combined with initiative and imagination, must characterize the lives of students, teachers and administrators in our schools. Employers can signal the importance of students working hard in school by using high school transcripts and teacher recommendations in hiring decisions.

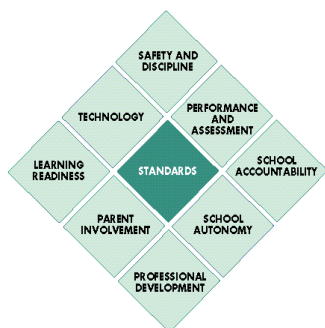
*Continuing the Commitment* also is built on experience gained over the past five years. The Business Roundtable has learned that it is possible to build powerful coalitions for reform. Business leaders recognize that the public needs to be fully engaged. Parents, in particular, need to be assured that their concerns about their children are taken into account. Enacting state legislation and making administrative policy changes are just the first steps. Reform must be implemented, and state and local school systems must develop new capabilities in areas such as standards-setting, instruction, testing and staff development.

## NINE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS

Nine essential components or characteristics are present in effective education systems. **The nine components are based on the fundamental belief that every child can and must learn at ever higher levels — from students who now drop out of school to those considered to be high achievers.**

A successful education system acknowledges that no single instructional approach is best for all students, and that some students may need special help. Such a system expects educators to adapt their methods to the needs of students. It provides help for schools facing especially difficult problems. It also bases consequences for schools, teachers, administrators and students on demonstrated performance.

The nine components are a comprehensive, integrated strategy. Each component interacts with the others. Taken together, these components are designed to support and stimulate the change and improvement needed in classrooms, schools, districts and states to raise student achievement to world-class levels.



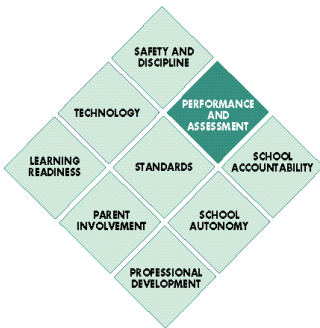
**1. STANDARDS.** A successful system expects high academic standards that prepare students for success in school, in the workplace, and in life.

High standards are the heart of the reform that is required in our nation's schools. Curriculum must be designed that challenges students to achieve high standards. Assessment depends on standards. Accountability and professional development activities must be connected directly to standards.

Our nation must bring out the very best in all of its students. Settling for the lowest common denominator of performance is unacceptable. Without high standards, low expectations become self-fulfilling prophecies, a prescription for education failure.

Standards should be benchmarked against the highest in the world — Americans should expect students to master the difficult substance in core academic subjects that is routinely expected of students in the most advanced Asian and European countries. Some students will require more time and effort to achieve the standards; others, less. In the final analysis, however, a high school credential must reflect a high level of achievement, not completion of required numbers of courses or years in school.

When today’s students graduate — whether they intend to go to work immediately or to continue their education — they will be expected to have mastered basic and advanced skills in arts and sciences, oral and written communication, mathematics, and in the use of computers, telecommunications and electronic data bases. They must be able to apply what they have learned to new and continually changing situations and to work productively with others. To a degree unprecedented in history, people who lack such skills will be isolated — at risk socially, economically and politically — posing dire consequences for the nation as well as the individual.



**2. PERFORMANCE AND ASSESSMENT. A successful system focuses on results, measuring and reporting student and system performance so that students, teachers, parents and the public can understand and act on the information.**

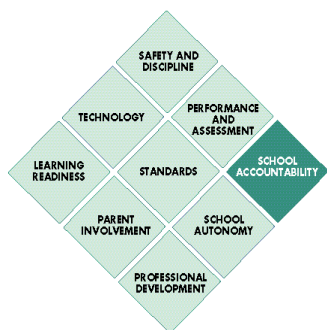
Too often, our school staffs are asked, “Did you do what you were told?” But the right question is, “What did students learn?” Trying hard is not enough. What students know and can do — student performance — is what counts. Our society must define, in measurable terms, the required results for students and work relentlessly toward them.

Moreover, policymakers and educators should reexamine how student performance is measured in the United States. In school, as in life, we get what we measure. If high performance and high standards are valued, an appropriate mix of rigorous, reliable and valid



assessments is necessary. These assessments should reflect high expectations and reward problem-solving, conceptual thinking, and the ability to integrate and apply knowledge. Students should be able to demonstrate they can actually use what they know in real-life situations. There is a difference between knowing the rules of grammar and punctuation and being able to use those rules when writing a coherent and persuasive letter.

Parents, educators, policymakers and employers need to be able to compare student performance at international, national, state, district and school levels. In making these comparisons, students should be assessed against agreed-upon standards of performance. The public also should receive regular information on other school performance indicators, such as drop-out rates and the performance of high school graduates at work and in higher levels of education.

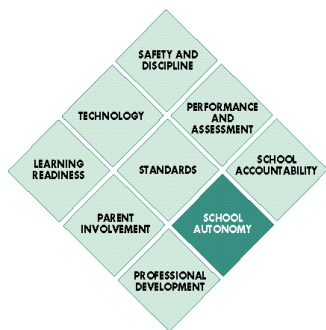


### 3. SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY. A successful system assists schools struggling to improve, rewards exemplary schools, and penalizes schools that persistently fail to educate their students.

Asystem built on high standards requires consequences for schools and school employees based on demonstrated performance. There must be incentives to encourage continual improvement, rewards for success, and penalties for persistent failure.

Some schools will move on their own to adjust instructional and professional development programs, remove ineffective educators, and make other necessary changes to meet student needs and new standards. Others might require outside help. Some might not improve at all. State and local school boards must be prepared for every eventuality. They must be ready to reward and support schools that take effective initiative, help those struggling to meet new standards, and make fundamental staff and program changes in schools that are not changing despite the clear need and opportunity to do so.

No person or group has the right to deny a child access to a good education. Schools should not be allowed to operate, and teachers should not be allowed to teach, if they consistently fail to educate students or make progress toward achieving higher standards.

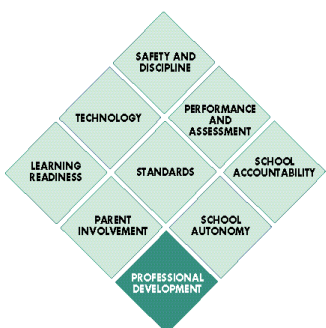


#### 4. SCHOOL AUTONOMY. A successful system gives individual schools the freedom of action and resources necessary for high performance and true accountability.

America needs a flexible school system, not a bureaucratic system tied up in red tape. Schools that are effective are intense collaborations among parents, teachers, administrators and community members — all determined to do everything necessary to help students achieve high standards.

Schools capable of continuous improvement have substantial control over their budgets, curriculum and instructional strategies. They can hire and fire staff. They are free to organize their schedules, and the schedules and assignments of their students and teachers. They can decide how to best meet the individual professional development needs of staff and the organizational development needs of the school. They encourage choice among public schools — for both students and staff. School autonomy requires profound changes in how schools are organized, operated and governed. New forms of governance that provide the autonomy schools need while holding them accountable for results should be encouraged.

To use their autonomy effectively, schools need reliable funding. It is difficult for schools to pursue a consistent improvement strategy if they must continually adjust to unpredictable public funding. Schools also should focus available resources on the classroom, not on multiple levels of administration. Though some schools may need a more equitable share of public resources, reform cannot be premised on increased public spending. As must be done in those other areas of public policy, education needs to become more efficient, as well as more effective.



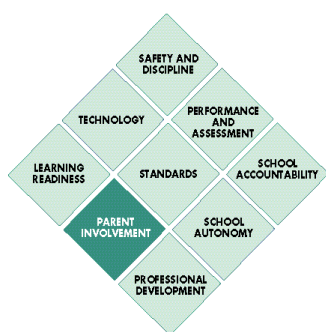
#### 5. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT. A successful system insists on continuous learning for teachers and administrators that is focused on improving teaching, learning and school management.

High performing schools and students require ambitious instructional programs and improved instructional practices. Teachers must teach traditional subjects more effectively and with greater depth and

rigor. New technologies and information sources must be integrated into the curriculum.

These changes pose a significant challenge to America's teachers and administrators. Their knowledge and skills must continually grow in order to keep pace with changes in society, technology and the economy. This growth must begin with better preparation of new teachers and administrators. School leaders and policymakers must hold colleges and universities accountable for more rigorously selecting and educating prospective teachers and administrators. Alternative certification also offers a way to attract to education well-qualified individuals from other professions. In the near future, however, the most important improvements must focus on meaningful and ongoing professional development for current teachers and administrators.

Each school's self-improvement strategy should guide professional development. It should be aligned with changes in curriculum, instruction and assessment. Decisions about investments in professional development, including teacher salary increases now given automatically for obtaining additional education credits, should be controlled at the school level and used as the fundamental mechanism of school improvement. Like other professionals, teachers and administrators must invest some of their own time in improving their performance.



**6. PARENT INVOLVEMENT.** A successful system enables parents to support the learning process, influence schools, and make choices about their children's education.

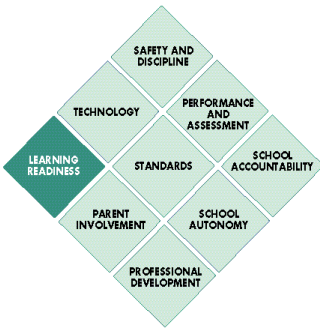
Every child must have an advocate. Children need to be read to, talked to, nurtured and cared for, and provided with healthy adult guidance. All children need security. Each must know that education is valued by one or more persons whose opinion the

child trusts. Parents are the best source of such support. Where parental support does not exist, an advocate for the child must be found in the extended family, a youth-serving organization, a mentor or someone from the school.

Students spend more than 80 percent of their time outside school. It is difficult for schools to succeed without the full support of parents and other responsible adults. Strengthened by parental support,

schools can demand hard work, consistent attendance and disciplined behavior from students. Without such support, teachers and administrators are less able to maintain an environment conducive to learning.

A successful education system must find ways to gain and keep parental and community commitment. Schools should be open and receptive to parents, encouraging them to volunteer time, to participate in school governance, and to voice their concerns about curriculum and school performance. Parental choice among public schools provides all parents the opportunity to find a public school they want their child to attend.



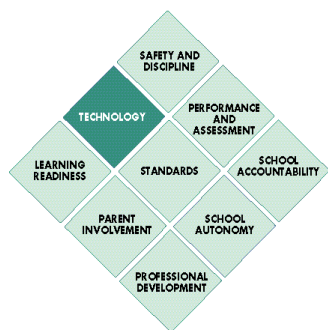
**7. LEARNING READINESS.** A successful system provides high-quality pre-kindergarten education for disadvantaged children. It also seeks the help of other public and private agencies to overcome learning barriers caused by poverty, neglect, violence or ill-health for children of all ages.

Students have to be ready to learn when they come to school, whatever their age. Learning readiness is as important for a teenager’s academic success as it is for a pre-school child’s.

Very young children who come to school burdened by adult neglect can catch up, but the odds are against them. The same is true for older students whose family lives and physical support systems deteriorate. These students need special help to avoid losing the best opportunity they have to devote full time to learning before assuming adult responsibilities.

The evidence argues persuasively for providing high-quality, developmentally appropriate pre-school programs for disadvantaged children. Such programs can significantly reduce teen pregnancy, poor school performance, dropping out, criminal activity, and other negative and expensive behaviors in later years.

For school-age children, schools must focus on teaching and learning. Schools can help students handle the crises in their lives and connect community agencies to student needs. Schools cannot, however, compromise their educational missions in order to provide health care, housing, income maintenance, corrections or long-term mental health services. Government leaders at all levels must join with businesses and community groups to make sure that children and their families have full and swift access to such services.



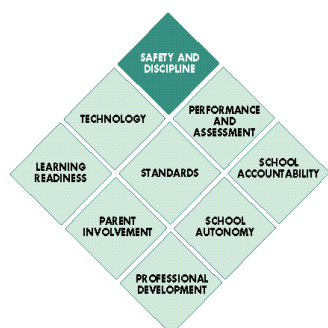
## 8. TECHNOLOGY. A successful system uses technology to broaden access to knowledge and to improve learning and productivity.

Technology is a powerful tool for teaching, learning and school management. It must be a critical part of the comprehensive change needed to achieve high standards.

Technology provides the means to personalize the pace and intensity of learning and to diversify instructional strategies according to students' special needs and interests. Personal computers, modems and electronic information networks offer tools of inquiry, access to data bases, libraries of sound instructional practices, and exposure to world-class instructors for all students — rich and poor — in urban, suburban and rural communities.

Emerging technologies also promise to improve school productivity by providing new ways of organizing professional development and fostering effective student and teacher collaboration, better communication between the school and the home, and better management of personalized instructional approaches.

Schools should not rush to buy technology simply for its own sake. But imaginative and effective use of technology as part of a well-conceived plan for instructional improvement can greatly increase school effectiveness. It can provide schools with an array of tools and models to raise the sights of students and teachers and their standards of learning and performance.



## 9. SAFETY AND DISCIPLINE. A successful system provides a safe, well-disciplined and caring environment for student learning.

None of the previous components of a successful education system is likely to make a difference unless schools are safe and orderly. Teaching and learning cannot be expected in the midst of intimidation, violence or disorder. High standards are irrelevant if students and educators are not assured of their personal safety. Parents and community members expect school safety and discipline to be prerequisites for student achievement.

The school environment is everyone's responsibility. The safety of the streets around the school is the responsibility of the community and its public safety officers. Within the school, teachers, principals and parents are responsible for making sure that no student or outsider is permitted to intimidate or disrupt the work of others.

Many adults within schools want to take greater responsibility for enforcing school order and discipline, but they feel stymied by rules discouraging strong action against disruptive or violent students. Disruptive students need help, and a public school system has an obligation to try to educate them. However, the majority of students who come to school to get an education also have rights. In a successful education system, the needs of both groups of students will be addressed, if necessary by suspending seriously violent or disruptive students or by finding alternative educational placements for them.

Above all, schools must nurture youngsters. Parents want their children cherished as individuals. Children want to know the limits imposed by responsible adults. Schools need to be firm but caring places.

## CONCLUSION

**T**he nine essential components of a successful education system comprise a framework of interacting parts, not an à la carte menu. Addressing a few components while ignoring others will not substantially improve educational performance. The nine components should be considered as a comprehensive and integrated whole. While their implementation should be strategically phased in, leaving any one component unattended will sharply reduce the chances of overall success.

Like any framework, this is a guide to action and does not in itself guarantee success. Each state and locality will tailor the specifics of the Roundtable's nine-point agenda to its own circumstances. The Roundtable's experience indicates that the best place to start is with a powerful statewide coalition for reform that engages the public, assures parents that the reform agenda respects their concerns about their children, and helps local school systems develop the new capabilities they need.

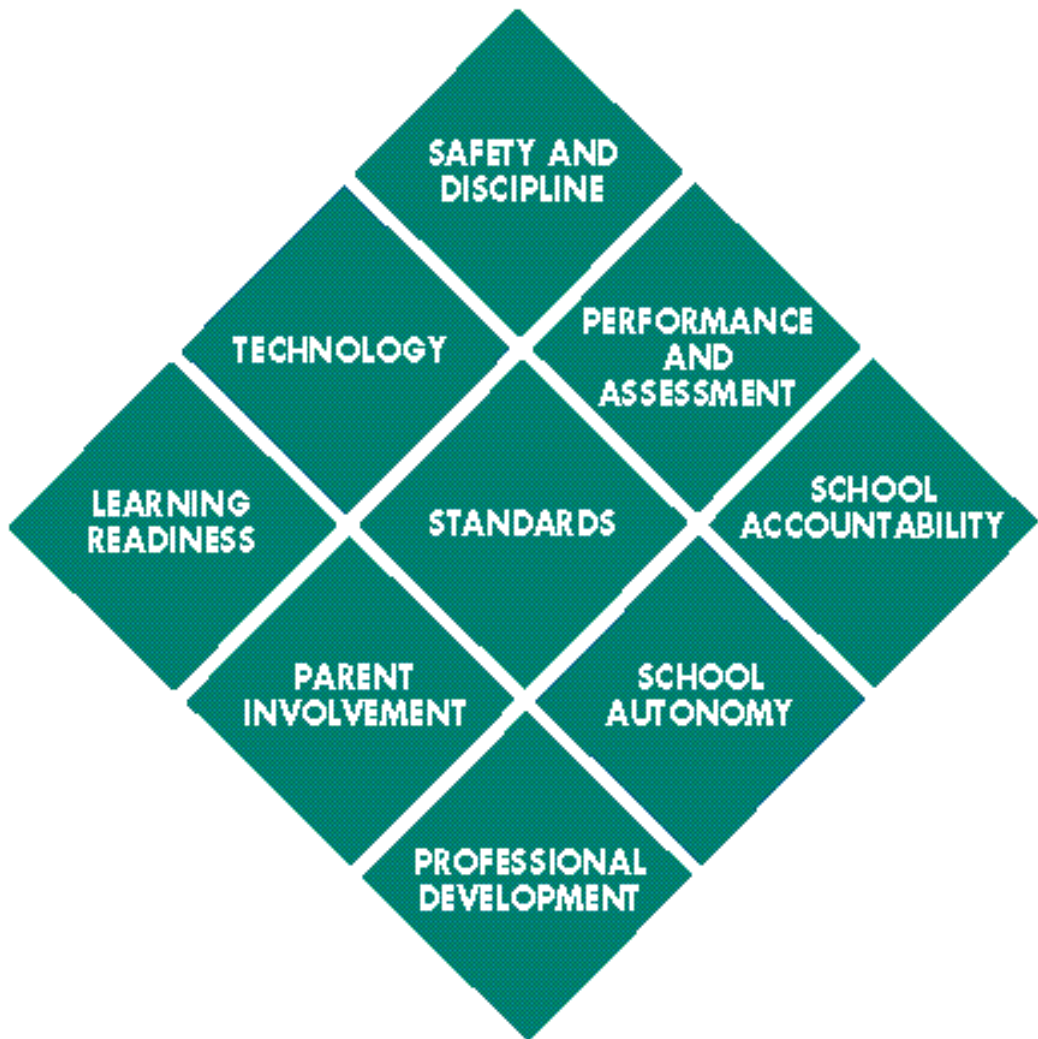
States and localities that adopt this framework must use it to affect the daily lives of schools. This approach requires more than enactment and official endorsement. It requires a sustained effort to change the incentives and capabilities of schools, educators and students.

That is why the Roundtable made a 10-year commitment to improve the education system in every state. It will continue to work, state by state, with business leaders, educators, policymakers and parents determined to raise the standards of learning and school performance. With frequent turnover among elected and appointed leadership at the state and district level, business leaders' continued commitment to this agenda offers a unique opportunity to sustain the focus on comprehensive, systemic change and resist 'silver-bullet' solutions.

This statement reaffirms the commitment of The Business Roundtable and its chief executive officers to the Roundtable's 10-year action plan to change the policy environment for schools in each state. Good schools and high performance must become the norm rather than the exception. Americans must make sure that all students have the opportunity to perform to their maximum capacity and to fully participate in the civic, social and economic world in which they live.



# The Nine Essential Components of a **SUCCESSFUL EDUCATION SYSTEM**





## THE NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS

**T**he Business Roundtable's nine essential components of a successful education system are a strategy for achieving ambitious education goals, whether national, state or local. The original six National Education Goals were endorsed by The Business Roundtable in 1990. Eight National Education Goals were subsequently codified in law in the *1994 Goals 2000: Educate America Act*.

### BY THE YEAR 2000:

- ◆ **School Readiness:** All children in America will start school ready to learn.
- ◆ **School Completion:** The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
- ◆ **Student Achievement and Citizenship:** American students will leave grades 4, 8 and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter — including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, the arts, history and geography. They will leave school prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning and productive employment.
- ◆ **Mathematics and Science:** U.S. students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
- ◆ **Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning:** 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.
- ◆ **Safe, Disciplined and Alcohol- and Drug-Free Schools:** Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, alcohol, violence and firearms, and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.
- ◆ **Teacher Education and Professional Development:** The nation's teachers 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.
- ◆ **Parental Participation:** Every school will support partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children.

## THE BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE EDUCATION INITIATIVE

**T**he Business Roundtable's Education Initiative is a 10-year effort to improve education performance through comprehensive education reform strategies in all states. The Business Roundtable's Education Task Force provides leadership for the following efforts:

**State Coalitions.** Within each state, Roundtable companies create or join coalitions to support reform agendas that apply the Roundtable's essential components to each state's unique circumstances. The Roundtable offers assistance to state coalitions to advance their comprehensive reform agendas. Roundtable leaders are active in education reform coalitions in 40 states.

**"Keep the Promise" Public Awareness Campaign.** The Business Roundtable — in conjunction with the Advertising Council and in partnership with the National Alliance of Business, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Governors' Association and the U.S. Department of Education — sponsors a national advertising campaign aimed at building public support for school reform.

**Education Reform Institute.** The Business Roundtable sponsors professional development opportunities for staff of Roundtable companies and state business/education coalition leaders who are involved in education reform.

**Business Coalition for Education Reform.** The Business Roundtable co-chairs this consortium of 11 national business organizations. The Business Coalition for Education Reform acts as the collective voice of the business community on national and federal education issues that impact state and local education reform.

**Publications.** Roundtable publications available to advance education reform include:

*Agents of Change: Exemplary Corporate Policies and Practices to Improve Education*

*Moving America to the Head of the Class: 50 Simple Things You Can Do*

*A New Architecture for Education Reform: 1994 Report to the Public on The Business Roundtable's National Education Reform Initiative*