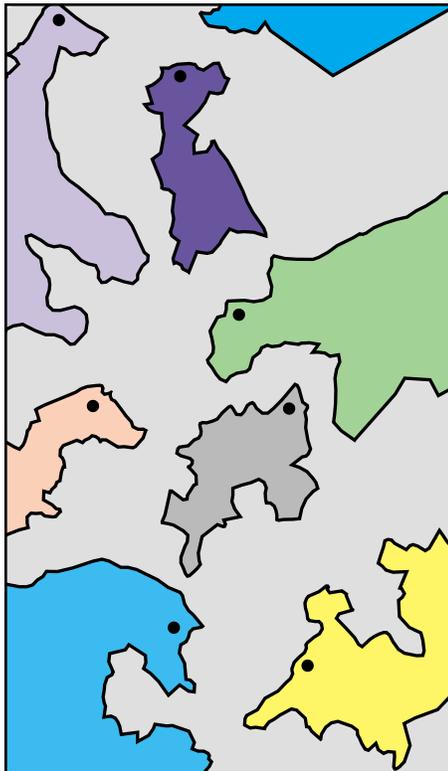


# IN MEMORIAM

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These rescue workers, Pentagon employees, innocent passengers and crew  
were among the thousands who perished

# SEPTEMBER 11, 2001



A whimsical look at high school attendance areas, page 5. Real maps and commentary, page 4.

## High school culture

### Report traces the slide from valuing learning, captures exchange students' views, says fix is up to adults

*In the following excerpt from a new Brookings Institution report titled "How Well Are American Students Learning?", author Tom Loveless suggests that substantive academic achievement gains will elude the nation's high schools unless fundamental changes are made in how teens spend their time, and in what they value. In both cases, Loveless says, the changes need to be prompted by adults. Ellipses mark points where text has been dropped in the excerpting process.*

**By TOM LOVELESS**

A rule of international math assessments is that the older the students tested, the worse the

United States performs. American fourth-graders do the best, scoring in the upper third of nations, eighth-graders score near the middle of the pack, and high school seniors fall significantly behind the rest of the world. Why is this? An observer in a unique position to shed light on this question is the foreign exchange student. By having personally experienced American high schools up close, foreign exchange students can offer insights about American teenagers and American high schools that might otherwise be overlooked.

With the cooperation of the American Field Service (AFS), the Brown Center conducted a survey of foreign exchange students in U.S. high schools during the 2000-2001 academic year...

Before discussing the results, some historical background is in order...

Imagine visiting a medium-sized American town in 1880.... Children worked on farms or in small shops, learned how to make a living in the family, and shortly after the onset of puberty, became adults.... Forty years later, everything had changed. We know how teenagers lived in the 1920s from the intricately detailed descriptions of life in Middletown, the landmark study of a Midwestern town by Chicago sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd. Four decades of surging high school enrollments meant that huge groups of adolescents now spent most of the day together.... The formal instruction provided by

## Smith sets his 5-year goals

Most of Supt. Eric Smith's intended audience was focused on a national tragedy last week, but the schools had a sold-out lunch crowd, so they proceeded with Smith's state of the schools speech.

The Convention Center event was chiefly focused on cultivating relationships between schools and the community's businesses and residents. But Smith used the occasion to mourn the dead in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania, make the case for the schools' progress, and to release new five-year goals.

As many employees will testify from their workplace experiences, goals-setting can unleash tremendous energies and result in great

progress, even if the goals themselves are not met. Smith's goals will do the same over time for the areas he focuses on.

Where is the focus? It appears to be on raising the bar for primary and middle school children. Are the high schools on autopilot?

At the lower grades, Smith wants to get just about everybody on grade level. And he wants more children to go far beyond grade level, as most should. He wants to improve writing.

Tenth-graders take the writing test, but the main academic goals that focus on high school academics seek to raise the system's SAT average 23 points to the U.S. average (it rose 8 points this past

Continued on Page 5

Continued on Page 6

To new readers of

## ***Educate!***

a free community journal  
on public education in  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg

Welcome to this week's edition. Our aim is to supply information useful to you in your role as student, parent or citizen interested in the welfare of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. To be removed from our mailing list, send a "Remove" message to SwannFello@aol.com

***Educate!*** is published by The Swann Fellowship, 1510 E. 7th St., Charlotte, NC 28204. Voice: 704-342-4330 Fax: 704-342-4550. E-mail: SwannFello@aol.com Lucy Bush, president; B.B. DeLaine, vice president. Published since September 2000. Six-week average circulation through last issue: 2,367.

**The name:** The Swann Fellowship was named for Darius and Vera Swann, who on behalf of their son James became the lead plaintiffs in *Swann vs. Mecklenburg* in the 1960s. Darius Swann was the first African American Presbyterian missionary ever assigned outside of Africa. His experiences in India led him to appreciate the value of an integrated society for human development.

**The vision:** As people of faith, our vision is that all children in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system will have excellent educational opportunities which are both equitable and integrated.

**The background:** Formed in 1997 out of several Charlotte religious congregations, the Fellowship focuses on being a witness to the value of diversity, and educating the public on public school issues as they relate to this and allied subjects. The Swann Fellowship is a nonprofit organization exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code 56-2106776. Financial information about this organization and a copy of its license are available from the State Solicitation Licensing Branch at 1-888-830-4989. The license is not an endorsement by the state.

## Calendar

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### September

- 18** Bond Oversight Committee, Building Services, 7:30 a.m.  
Personnel/Policy Committee, Board Conference Room,  
Education Center, 3 p.m.
- 25** School board meeting, Education Center, 6 p.m.

## *Sound off!* for quality education

*Your words in support of a quality, equitable, integrated education can help make the case for community support of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Pick up your pen! Or get your mouse in motion! Here's information on how to submit your letters to area media.*

**The Charlotte Post:** By e-mail: thepost@clt.mindspring.com; by fax: 704-342-2160; by mail: Editor, The Charlotte Post, 1531 Camden Road, Charlotte, NC 28203-4783.

**The Charlotte Observer:** By e-mail: opinion@charlotteobserver.com; by fax: 704-358-5022; by mail: The Observer Forum, The Charlotte Observer, P.O. Box 30308, Charlotte, NC 28230-0308.

**The Charlotte World:** By e-mail: warren.smith@thecharlotteworld.com; by fax: 704-503-6691; by mail: 8701 Mallard Creek Road, Charlotte, NC 28262-9705.

**The Leader:** By e-mail: editor@leadernews.com; by fax: 704-347-0358; by mail: 800 E. Trade St., Charlotte, NC 28202-3014

**Creative Loafing:** By e-mail: charlotte@creativeloafing.com; by fax: 704-522-8088; by mail: P.O. Box 241988 Charlotte, NC 28224-1988.

**La Noticia:** 6101 Idlewild Road Suite 328, Charlotte, NC 28212.

**Educate!:** By e-mail: SwannFello@aol.com; by fax: 704-342-4550; by mail: 1510 E. 7th St. Charlotte, NC 28204-2410.

## Assignment 2002

# High school assignments

As expected, the assignments for high school students for 2002 do not play out the extremes evident in elementary and middle school assignments approved by the school board July 31.

That's because the building blocks of the assignment plan are elementaries serving nearby, and relatively segregated, neighborhoods. As assignment areas get larger, some integration inevitably occurs.

As reviewed earlier in Educate!, the elementary schools are projected to vary from 1% poor to 97% poor, middle schools from 2% to 79%.

The high schools range from 1% to 67%.

Here's a summary of how the high schools are projected to look, based on the attendance areas shown at top right.

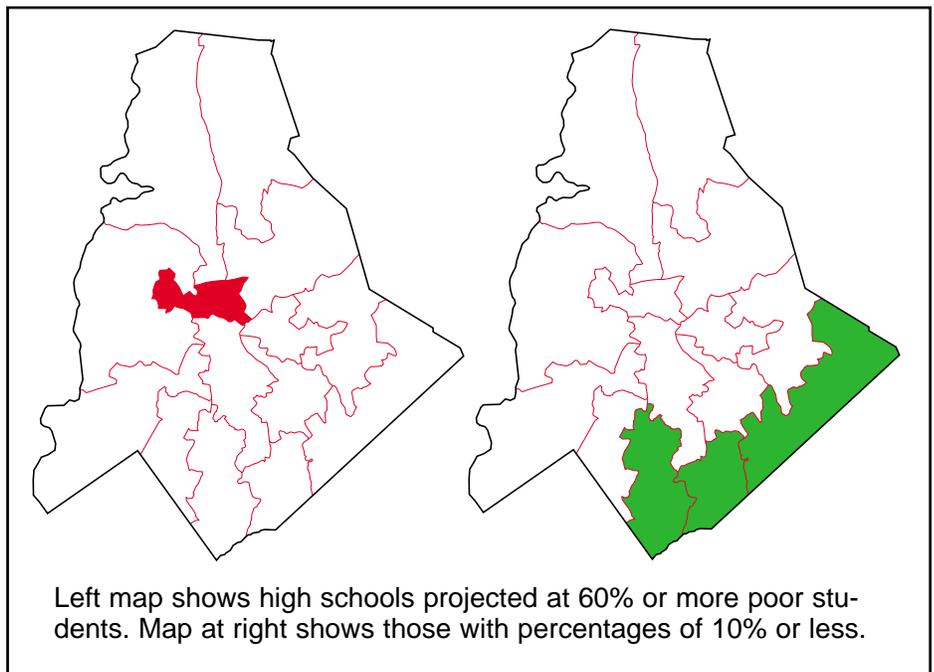
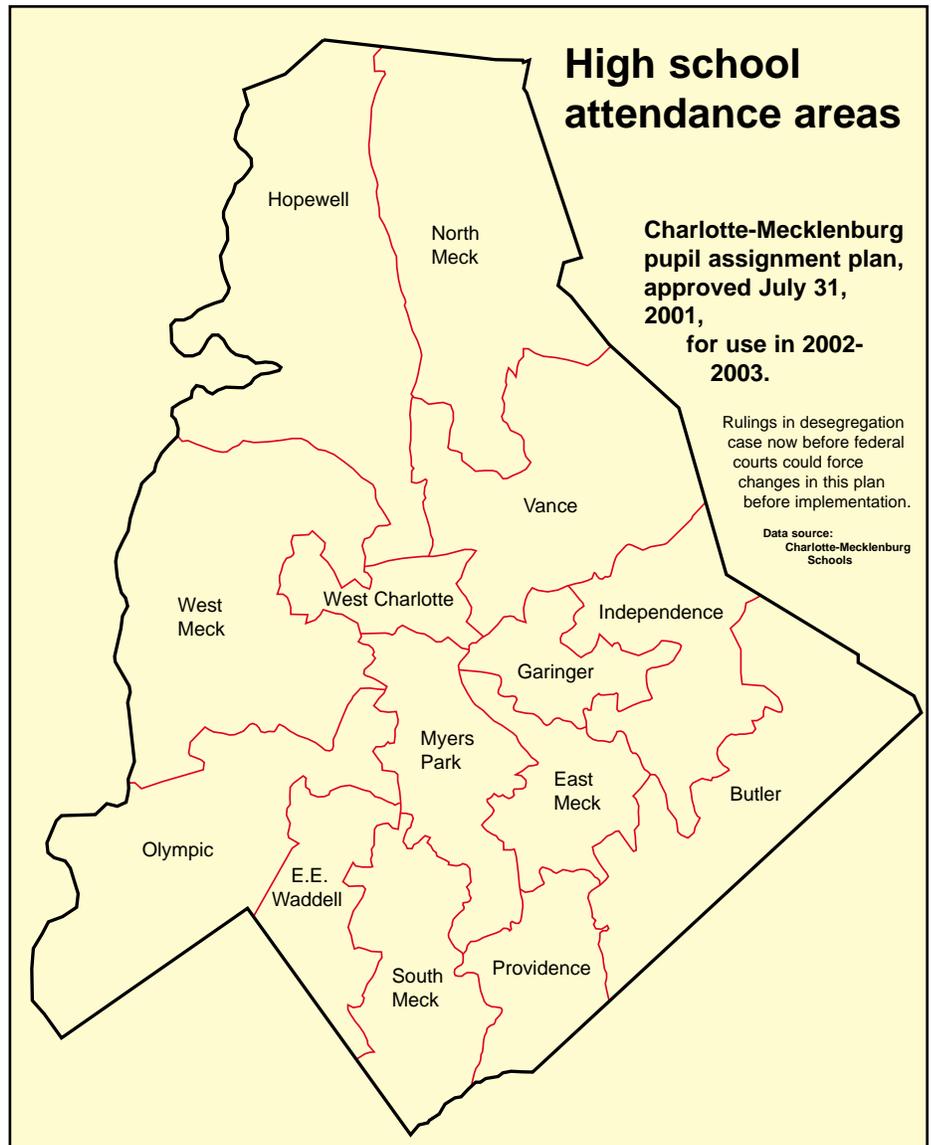
**Size:** Not counting alternative programs and the arts magnet, size ranges from 1,284 at Olympic to 2,456 at Independence. Waddell at 1,108 and Hopewell at 1,585 are new and stationed in growth areas.

**Utilization:** Enrollment divided by capacity yields a utilization percentage. The high schools will operate at from 81% of capacity at Waddell to 131% at East Meck. Mobile units total 174, roughly 12.5% of total high school classrooms and the equivalent of two more high schools.

**Poverty:** As measured by percentages of children who qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch, the school more than 60% poor is West Charlotte at 67%. The number would be higher except for magnet programs at the school.

The schools less than 10% poor are South Meck (7%), Butler (6%), and Providence (1%).

**Exceptional Children:** The number of classes are evenly spread, and range from 5 at South Meck to 10 at Myers Park.



# Smith announces his 5-year goals

Continued from Page 2

year), get half the students to enroll in at least one Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate course, and get 75% of those students to do well enough to get college credit.

These kinds of goals win the superintendent snickers in some quarters – and comments about how he seems interested only in the smartest kids who are in IB and AP classes. That criticism may be harsh. So too is the reality that, without major changes, about a quarter of this fall's ninth-graders likely will not graduate from high school.

Smith's goals, as reported by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Education Foundation:

## Academic Achievement

95% of all students in grades 3, 5 and 8 will perform at or above grade level in reading and mathematics.

50% of students in grades 3, 5 and 8 will perform at Level 4 (above grade level) in reading and mathematics.

95% of all students in grades 4, 7 and 10 will perform on grade level in writing.

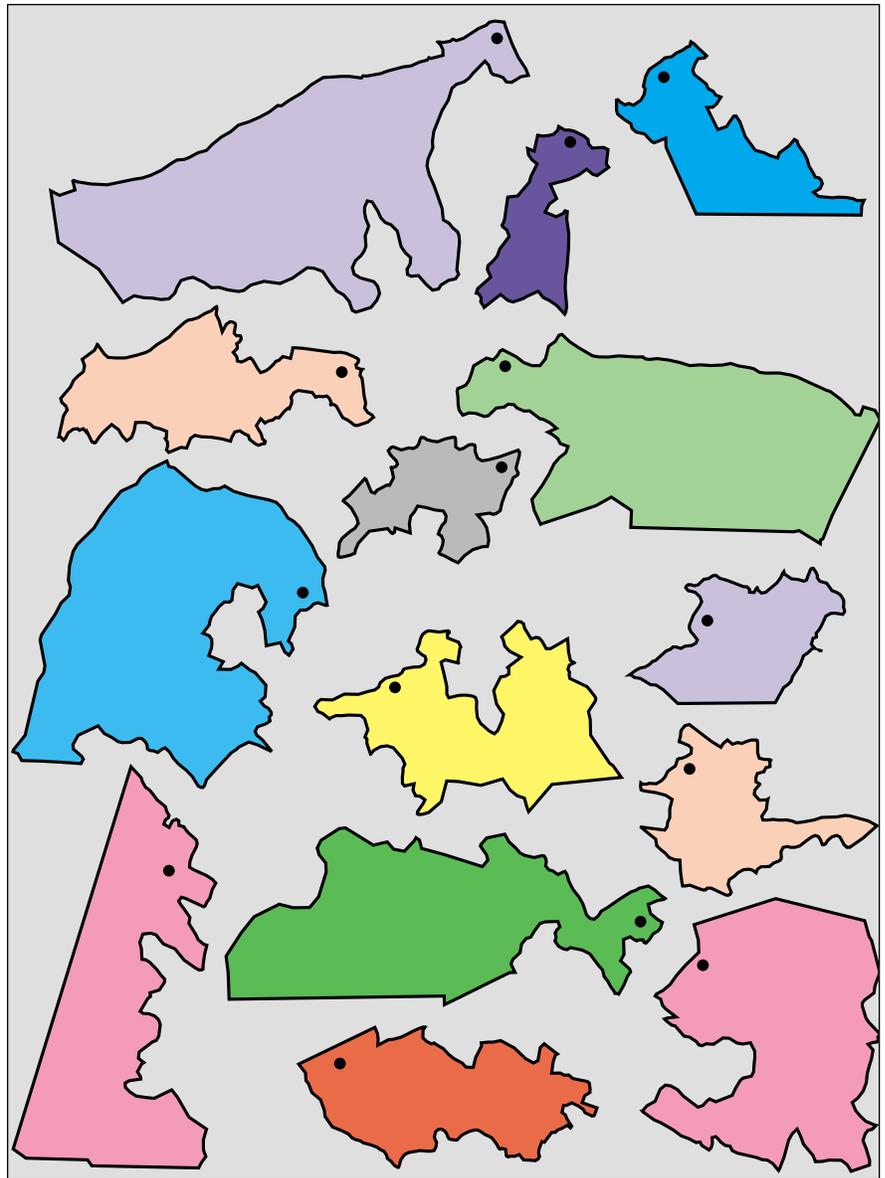
60% of students leaving the eighth grade will earn at least a Level 3 on the Algebra I End-of-Course test.

50% of all graduates will complete at least one Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate course, and 75% of those students will perform at the level required for college credit (a level 3 or above for AP exams and a level 4 or above on IB exams).

Disparity based on race, ethnicity and socio-economic status will be no greater than 10 percentage points on all academic measures.

Average SAT scores will meet or exceed the national average.

40 percent of students with disabili-



“Disaggregated Data”

ties will earn a regular high school diploma.

## Safe and Orderly Environment

95% of respondents on an annual survey will indicate they feel safe at school, believe students are well behaved, and indicate they know the rules for appropriate behavior and consequences for any infractions.

100% of schools will score at or above 85% on the safe school audit.

## Community Collaboration

100% of schools will improve parent contact by using multiple

methods to communicate individually and directly with parents.

The number of partnerships and volunteer programs designed to meet specific district goals will increase by 20%.

## Equity

100% of schools will be at standard for programs and resources.

## Efficient and Effective Support Operations

Support services will be delivered on time, on budget, and with quality at or above the expectation of the school-based customer.

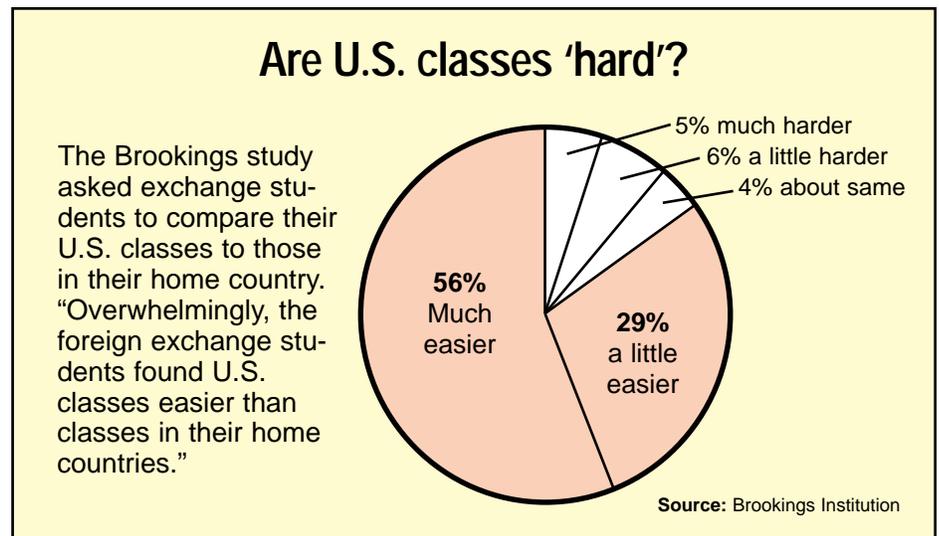
## Report: High school culture shift needed

Continued from Page 2

teachers and other adults was contrasted with the informal instruction of the school's social life. "This informal training is not a preparation for a vague future that must be taken on trust, as is the case with so much academic work; to many of the boys and girls in high school this is 'the life,' the thing they personally like best about going to school."

Yearbooks trace the trajectory of the school's social and academic missions. The first edition, published in 1894, featured the senior class and the school's faculty members, along with descriptions of course offerings. By 1924, "athletics shares the position of honor with the class data, and a faculty twelve times as large occupies relatively only half as much space." In the 1950s, another sociologist, James S. Coleman, studied high schools and warned about the formation of these mini-societies. In retrospect, Coleman's 1961 book, "The Adolescent Society," appeared on the scene like a skunk at a picnic....

Coleman found that youngsters' admiration for academic accomplishments begins to wane immediately after entering high school. For males, social rewards in the typical American high school are allocated on the basis of athletic prowess, not academic excellence. In interviews with students, Coleman discovered that the typical high school social system judges hard work and effort differently in different pursuits, that "the boy who goes all-out scholastically is scorned and rebuked for working too hard; the athlete who fails to go all-out is scorned and rebuked for not giving his all." Acceptance of peers assumes special urgency in adolescence. Adults, not teens, are responsible for the anti-intellectualism of teen culture. As Coleman stated, "The norms of the system are created



in large part by the activities to which it is subject. And it is the adult community that fixes the activities of the adolescent community."

A cautionary note was struck again when Laurence Steinberg led a team of researchers that studied 20,000 American high school students in the 1980s and 1990s. Steinberg argued that school reformers, despite more than a decade of strenuous effort, had failed to significantly improve American education by doing exactly what Coleman had urged them not to do—ignore teen culture. The 1993 book, "Beyond the Classroom," carefully documented how teens spend their time. The average teen devotes about five hours each week, less than 10% of waking, out-of-school time, to homework or studying. Three activities absorb the most time – extracurricular activities (including sports), hanging out with friends, and part-time jobs.

These activities seep into school life and weaken the press for academic excellence. For individuals, an excessive commitment to any of them drives down academic achievement. Parents and employers, Steinberg pointed out, undermine school achievement by tolerating, sometimes even actively supporting, excessive time spent on sports, friends, and jobs at the expense of fulfilling academic responsibilities. Tinkering with the structure of high schools by

adding time to the school day or making coursework more difficult will have no effect, Steinberg concluded, until adults more aggressively guide teen culture towards intellectually productive ends.

The 1990s research of Barbara Schneider and David Stevenson closed out the twentieth century by producing a bookend to the Lynds' findings from Middletown. The century had begun with teens flocking to high schools. The century ended with near universal high school attendance and high school graduates flocking to colleges. In "The Ambitious Generation: America's Teenagers, Motivated But Directionless," Schneider and Stevenson focused on the mismatch between teens' post-secondary ambitions and their plans for accomplishing them. Almost all teens want to attend college and enter a profession, but they have no idea of the skills and knowledge required to do so. In some cases, students overestimate what they need to learn to realize their ambitions; in other cases, they underestimate and fail to take courses that would even minimally prepare them for college. Like researchers before them, Schneider and Stevenson found schools, parents, and peers all important influences on students. But, sadly, these influences often reinforce the "present-mindedness" of high school students rather than point-

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## Report: High school culture shift needed

Continued from Page 6

ing them toward the future.

These studies span several decades and involve tens of thousands of students. A common thread runs through the literature. Schools influence students. But causality also points in the other direction. The survey that the Brown Center conducted of foreign exchange students proceeds from this latter assumption, that students play a significant role in creating the cultures that give schools unique identities. Foreign students who have attended American high schools may help to explain why the U.S. perennially underachieves on international assessments. Or, to phrase the comparison more positively, the findings may help to explain why high school students in many Asian and European nations always do well on tests of academic knowledge.

In a nutshell: they work harder and care more. The answers to four questions support this conclusion.

### How do American classes compare?

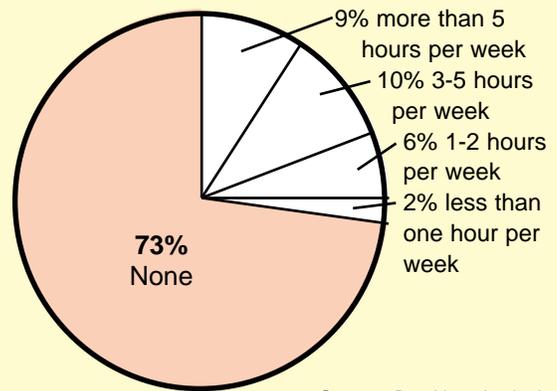
Overwhelmingly, the foreign exchange students found U.S. classes easier than classes in their home countries. More than half, 56%, described the U.S. classes they attended as much easier and 29% as a little easier....

### Do American students spend as much time on schoolwork?

We asked exchange students to compare the amount of time U.S. students and students in their home countries devote to schoolwork. More than a third, 34%, said U.S. students spend much less time on schoolwork, and 22% said a little less time.... The exchange students provide an interesting, counterintuitive caveat to this finding, however. It isn't simply more homework that makes a difference. The survey inquired about the frequency of

The Brookings study asked exchange students, "During a normal school week in your home country, how much time before and after school do you usually spend working at a paid job?"

### Time devoted to part-time jobs



Source: Brookings Institution

math homework. Estimates of how often math homework is assigned in the U.S. and abroad are almost identical.... How can American kids spend less time on schoolwork but have homework assigned just as often? Speculation is warranted here. Consistent with courses being easier, U.S. homework may be as frequent but take less time to complete. It could also be that students abroad spend more time preparing for class, studying for tests, and reviewing material previously covered, activities of good students that go beyond completing assigned homework.

### Do American students value academic success?

We asked the exchange students to compare their friends in the U.S. and students back home on the importance of doing well in math.... Almost half... said U.S. students place less importance in the subject....

The pattern is starkly different for athletic accomplishments. Exchange students view success in sports as a top priority of American high school students.... More than two-thirds of exchange students report that success in sports is much more important to their American friends than to students in home countries. Another 18% say a little more important. As mentioned above, in Coleman's study in the 1950s, athletes commanded the top status positions among peer groups in

typical American high schools. In the eyes of students from other countries, the paramount importance of sports persists to this day.

Teen employment in the U.S. also differs from other countries. Most American teens hold down part-time jobs.... More than 70% of exchange students said they don't work during a normal school week at home....

Compared to the rest of the world, why do American teens spend so much time on part-time work? And why do they value success in sports more than success in mathematics? Clues may be found in the fundamental reasons why students go to school.

### Why do students go to school?...

American high school students perceive only ambiguous connections between high school and the world of work. As Schneider and Stevenson found in their study, American students probably cannot identify the specific skills and knowledge needed for most occupations nor the high school courses in which these skills and knowledge are taught. American students may also believe that the so-called "soft skills," nonacademic skills that are important to employers (for example, teamwork, following directions, punctuality) are learned through part-time employment. Students elsewhere in the world believe that high school prepares them for an

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## Briefs

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**Use of vouchers:** A private group's study of 3,700 Cleveland students using \$2,250 vouchers to attend private and parochial schools found that only 20% had ever attended a public school, the Cleveland Plain Dealer reported. A third were already enrolled in private schools; another 40% were entering kindergarten.

[www.cleveland.com](http://www.cleveland.com)

**Full-day boost:** A study of kindergartners in Montgomery County's new full-day kindergarten program found that 71% had mastered reading fundamentals by year's end, compared with 54% of those who attended

kindergarten for half a day, according to The Washington Post. The program had little benefit, however, for students not from low-income or non-English speaking families.

[www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

**Remembering education:** The Public Education Network, a trade group of local education foundations, issued a statement urging the public, during a time of rising defense spending, to "remember the important role that education plays in preserving, protecting and defending our shared democratic values." The group said it hoped "dialogue about our national readiness and preparedness to respond to threats against our freedom will amplify efforts already underway to increase the quality of

America's public schools."  
[www.publiceducation.org](http://www.publiceducation.org)

**Smaller is better:** The University of Minnesota's Center for School Change reported that the ideal elementary has 300 students, the ideal middle school 500, the ideal high school 600 to 900, the Minneapolis Star Tribune reported. Efficiencies sought in larger campuses are lost, according to the report, in part in higher transportation costs. Smaller schools are safer, have students at higher achievement levels, have fewer discipline problems, and fewer dropouts. When building costs are refigured on the basis of cost per graduate, rather than cost per attending student, small schools are more efficient, according to the authors.  
[www.startribune.com](http://www.startribune.com)

## Report: High school culture shift needed

Continued from Page 7

occupation and see intellectual development as central to the task. Perhaps the notion that a solid grounding in intellectual disciplines opens the door to most professions is more explicitly visible in the larger, national culture of other nations.

### Summary and conclusions

Students from abroad see American high schools as less focused on academic accomplishments than schools in their home countries. They don't believe that American students work as hard as students elsewhere in the world. American students don't seem to care as much about learning academic subjects such as mathematics. They seem to care more about success at sports. Most American high school students hold down part-time jobs. Internationally, the vast majority of high school students do not. American students are also less aware of how experiences in high

school are related to their occupational aspirations. But, like students in other countries, American students are very aware of high school's importance in getting into college. And, like teens everywhere, they enjoy being with their friends....

The portrait painted by this survey is consistent with the findings of decades of research on American adolescents and high schools. Experts have also described the changes individuals can make to alter the situation. Policies may help, but only if they encourage changes in individual behavior that produce shifts in culture. Teens can work harder and spend more time on schoolwork. Schools can expect more and structure the school environment around intellectual accomplishments. Parents can closely monitor their children's academic progress and discourage activities that interfere with learning. Employers can stop hiring teenagers to work part time during the school year, especially on school nights. All American adults who interact with teens, including producers of pop culture, can stress the fundamental impor-

tance of improving one's mind, not only because it's the key to living a productive and fulfilling life, but for its intrinsic worth.

Dramatically changing American teen culture requires that academic learning become a greater priority— for teenagers, of course, but also for parents, for educators, for employers, and for American society as a whole.

This excerpt of work by the Brown Center on Education Policy is reprinted with permission of Tom Loveless and The Brookings Institution. The full chapter, "High School Culture," and the full report, "How Well Are Americans Students Learning?," are available at the Brookings website at [www.brookings.edu/browncenter/](http://www.brookings.edu/browncenter/)

### Comments?

Is the culture of a Charlotte-Mecklenburg high school anti-academic? To the extent it is, how is it to be fixed? Send your comments to:

[SwannFello@aol.com](mailto:SwannFello@aol.com)