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******NEWS RELEASE--FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE******

A FLAWED CAMPAIGN TO REINVENT HIGH SCHOOL

New analysis argues that recent attacks on American high schools and proposals for stiffer graduation requirements are simplistic and almost certain to fail

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TEMPE, Ariz and BOULDER, Colo., Oct. 1, 2007 – Several recent high-profile reports calling for the “reinvention” of the American high school are simplistic and seriously flawed, according to a new analysis by two distinguished scholars.

W. Norton Grubb, an economist who holds the David Gardner Chair in Higher Education at UC Berkeley, and Jeannie Oakes, who holds the Presidential Chair in Education Equity at UCLA, analyzed a wave of commission reports since 2004 that attack the American high school and call, in particular, for higher state graduation requirements and for exit exams.

Grubb and Oakes conclude that this current push for “rigor” fails on several levels. The reports don’t adequately consider the likely consequences of the policies intended to enforce higher standards. They also “have little to say about how [the] imposition [of these standards] will enhance student performance.” And most discussions in these reports focus on narrow definitions of rigor—higher test scores, more demanding courses, or both—while ignoring other conceptions of rigor that may be as valid, if not more so, to discussions of how high schools should better fill society’s needs.

Rigor, the authors explain, can also be advanced as depth rather than breadth, as more sophisticated levels of understanding including “higher-order skills,” and as the ability to apply learning in unfamiliar settings. These goals are largely neglected in the new “high standards” commission reports.

Grubb and Oakes advance their argument in a policy brief titled, “ ‘Restoring Value’ to the High School Diploma: The Rhetoric and Practice of Higher Standards.” It is one of a

series on education policy issues questions published jointly by the Education Policy Research Unit at Arizona State University and the Education and the Public Interest Center at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

The commission reports analyzed by Grubb and Oakes have had a very real policy impact. As they note, “Recent legislation has forced the translation of rhetoric into practice. Most states have increased their graduation requirements, and half the states have adopted exit exams.”

Yet the current push to increase rigor and heighten standards is “seriously flawed,” they write, and “any gains come at the expense of other goals for high school reform, including equity, curricular relevance, and student interest.”

In place of the current approaches, Grubb and Oakes describe a clear and distinctly different alternative to the nineteenth century model of the traditional high school. They suggest that high schools offer “multiple pathways” structured around themes, some drawn from occupational areas, others drawn from broad, multidisciplinary concepts.

Such an approach would “provide room for examining the important occupational, political, and social issues of adult life in the process of teaching disciplinary subjects.” They also explain that focusing “on a single theme nurtures multiple concepts of rigor,” and “the approach distributes responsibility for standards throughout the educational community, and it provides students with the benefits of curricular choice and several routes to graduation.”

Find “‘Restoring Value’ to the High School Diploma: The Rhetoric and Practice of Higher Standards,” by W. Norton Grubb and Jeannie Oakes, on the web at

<http://epsl.asu.edu/epru/documents/EPSSL-0710-242-EPRU.pdf>

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