

Calls to Toughen High Schools Remain Misguided

Point of View Essay

by

Gregory Smith
Professor of Teacher Education
Lewis and Clark College

Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU)
Education Policy Studies Laboratory
College of Education
Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Box 872411
Arizona State University
Tempe, AZ 85287-2411

March 2005

EPSL | EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES LABORATORY
Education Policy Research Unit

EPSL-0503-106-EPRU

<http://edpolicylab.org>

Oregon's original Educational Act for the 21st Century was not like this. In addition to putting into place a system for assessing achievement, it aimed to address the needs of the 50% of students who choose not to or are unable to attend college. These students represent many of the people who make life possible in industrial society. They are the people who care for the young and elderly, the people who construct houses and repair cars, the people who serve us in restaurants and supermarkets, the people who build and maintain the infrastructure of our towns and cities. By joining required coursework to central community functions, the Educational Act of the 21st Century combined accountability with educational programs designed to help young people discover the confluence of their own talents and social needs. It sought to encourage all students to become productive citizens confident of their abilities and their capacity to contribute to their communities.

Calls to link high school graduation to the completion of an expanded but narrowly conceived college prep curriculum honor the talents of only a proportion of our fellow citizens. Coupled with a failure to mandate a living wage for all work, such calls may inadvertently consign the remainder to lives of potential poverty and regret.