

Seven Strategic Propositions from Last Year's Conference and Why High Schools?

From the Preface to: *Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps in Whole School Systems: Recent Advances in Research and Practice*. Report on the 2008 Annual Conference of the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University. (Conference handout, also downloadable for the AGI web site at www.agi.harvard.edu).

Proposition 1

- **Leadership that Combines Passion with Competence:** Superintendents, principals, other administrators, and even lead teachers effectively cultivate not only a sense of urgency but also a sense of possibility, built on demonstrated expertise among people in key positions and their commitment to continuous improvement.

Proposition 2

- **Clear, Shared Conceptions of Effective Instruction:** The district identifies key ideas concerning effective instructional and supervisory practice, and works to establish them as a “common language” for approaching instructional improvement.

Proposition 3

- **Streamlined and Coherent Curriculum:** The district purposefully selects curriculum materials and places some restrictions on school and teacher autonomy in curriculum decisions. The district also provides tools (including technology) and professional development to support classroom-level delivery of specific curricula.

Proposition 4

- **Organizational Structures and Personnel that Embody Capacity to Teach and Motivate Adults:** The district maintains routines and structures within which adult educators engage teachers and administrators in continuous improvement of instructional and supervisory practices. Coaching, observing, and sharing make it difficult for individuals to avoid the change process, and the push for adaptive change spurs resisters to leave their comfort zones or eventually depart from the district.

Proposition 5

- **Patient but Tough Accountability:** The district develops tools and routines for monitoring teaching practices and learning outcomes, targeting assistance where needed, and sometimes replacing teachers or administrators who fail to improve.

Proposition 6

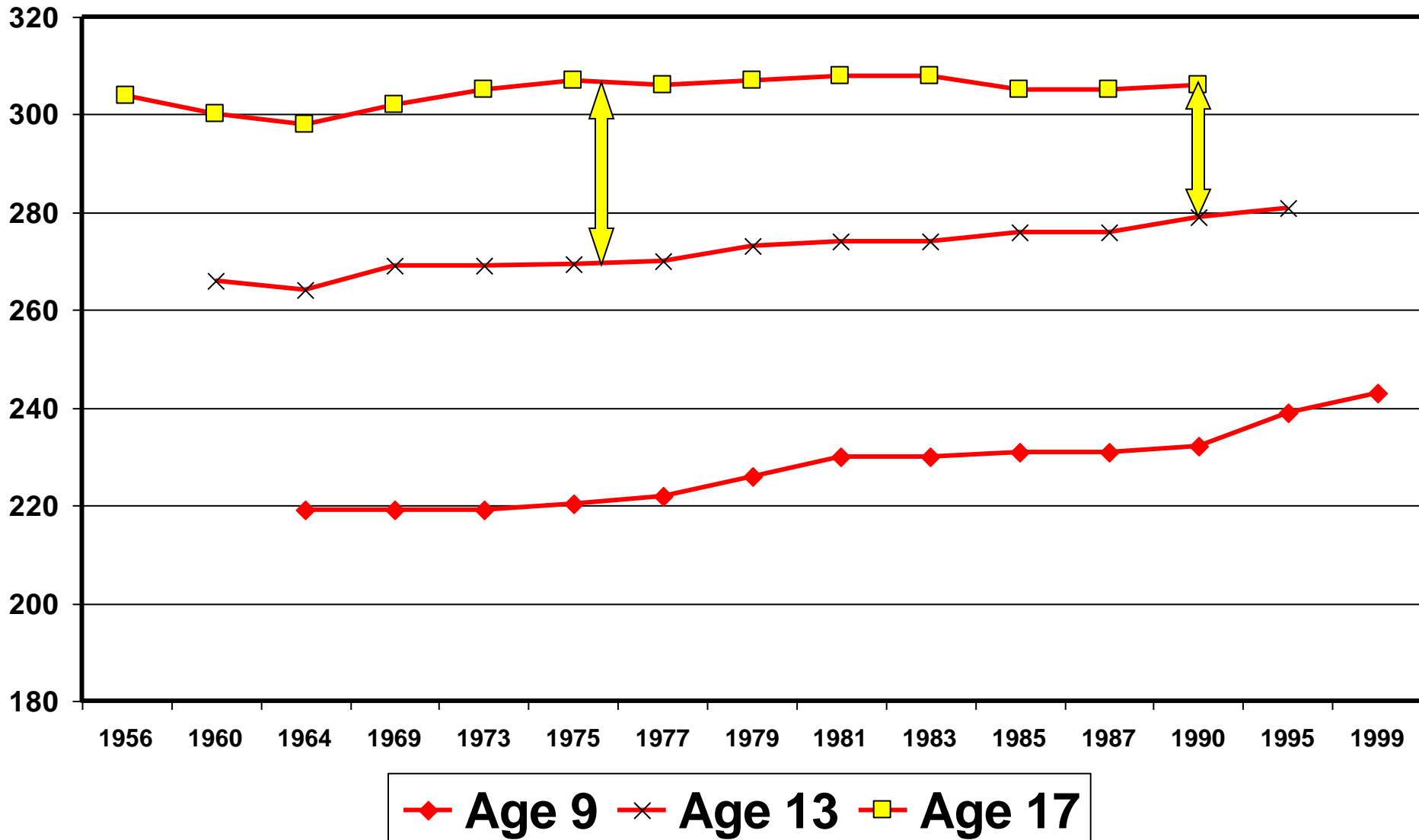
- **Data-Driven Decision Making and Transparency:** Teachers and administrators analyze student performance for individual students and summarize data by grade level, special education status, English as a second language status, race/ethnicity, and gender. The district publicizes strategic goals for raising achievement levels and reducing gaps and tracks progress in visible ways. Administrators identify, examine, and often emulate practices from successful schools.

Proposition 7

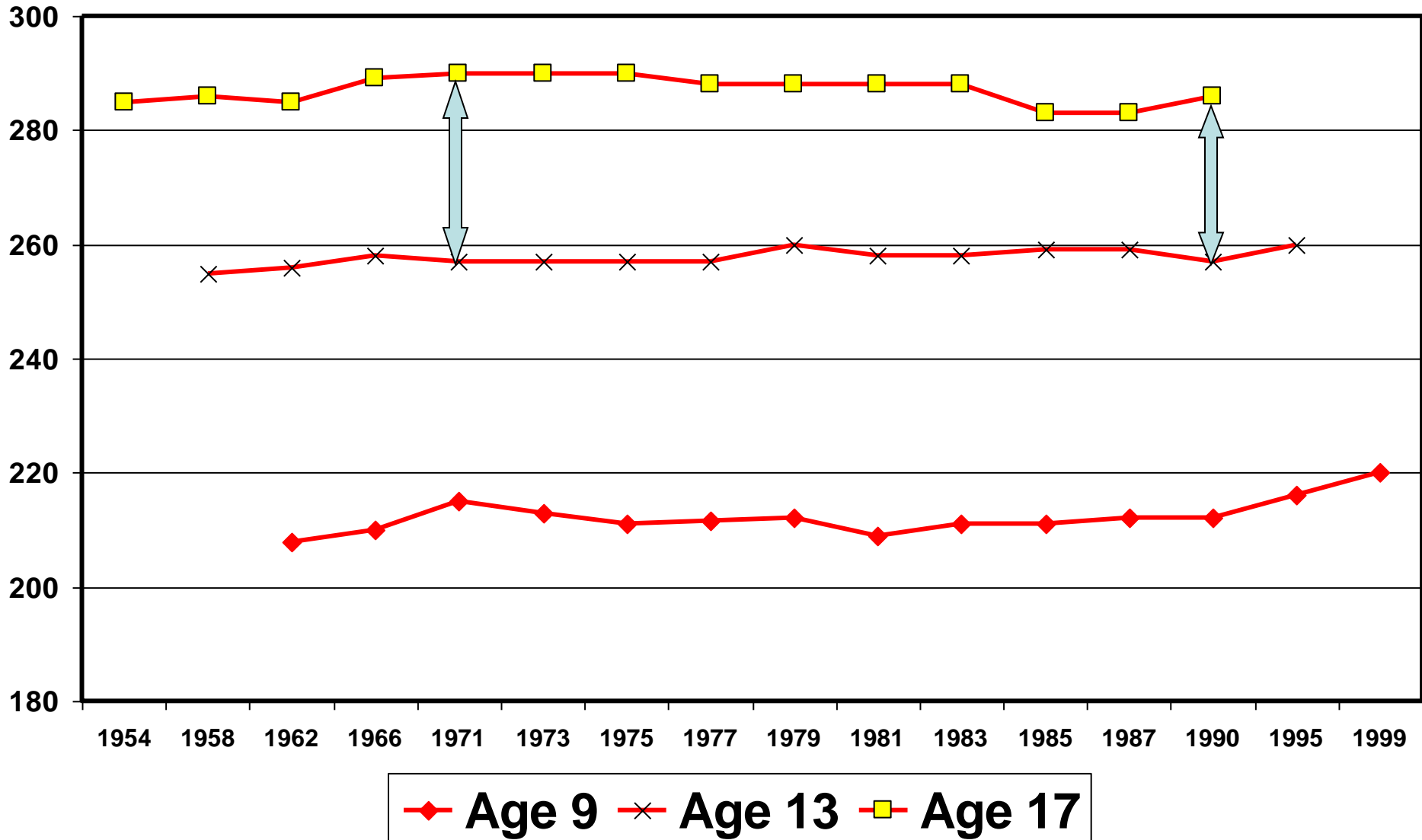
- **Community Involvement and Resources:** The district engages a broad range of stakeholders, including school board members, local businesses, and parents, to do their parts toward achieving well-formulated strategic goals.

Why High Schools?

Mathematics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, Long Term Trend Assessment, 1973-2008, Birth Years on x-Axis



Reading, National Assessment of Educational Progress, Long Term Trend Assessment, 1973-2008, Birth Years on x-Axis



Program for International Student Assessment, 15-Year Olds, 2003, Math Problem Solving in OECD Nations (Red = U.S. Students)

