

## A Decade? But We Just Got Started!

With the year 2000 due any day now, can 2061 be far behind? The name Project 2061 was adopted as a metaphor for long-term (although some friendly critics have suggested that it actually indicates the year we expect to finish our work). But, as sometimes happens, the critics may be right. After all, it's been ten years since the AAAS launched Project 2061, and the nation is still far from having K-12 school systems whose graduates are literate in science, mathematics, and technology. What does that say for our work? Or anyone else's?

### No Quick Fixes

At the very least, it says that we were right in not promising quick or easy solutions. The system is simply too large, too complicated, too decentralized for swift reform. While many individuals, institutions, government agencies, and initiatives—Project 2061 among them—have made important contributions to education reform in the last decade, it will take several more decades of such combined effort to transform the system. The Project 2061 message was and is: keep your eye on the ultimate goal—universal science literacy—and plan for a long campaign.

And, in fact, the campaign began long before Project 2061 had entered the fray. Reform efforts initiated in the late 1950s—or perhaps even further back in the

post-World War II era—recognized that more people than ever before would need a “good” education. And a “good” education would be one in which science and mathematics would have an important place. Project 2061 was able to give the idea of universal science literacy renewed prominence and to set out a new strategy for how the scientific community could contribute more effectively in helping the nation reach that goal.

### A Strategy for Reform

The first step in the Project 2061 strategy was to define the goal itself—science literacy. It is easy now to forget that in the mid-1980s it seemed unlikely that the scientific community—with its reputation for interdisciplinary rivalries—would be

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able to agree on what all students should be expected to learn across the entire landscape of science. It took three years of intense effort and cooperation within the scientific community to show otherwise. The result of that effort was *Science for All Americans*, published in 1989 to widespread acclaim from scientists and educators alike.

The second step involved creating reform tools (rather than reform solutions) to be used by

others in their efforts to improve curricula, instructional materials, and teacher education. *Benchmarks for Science Literacy*, Project 2061's first tool, recast the science literacy goals of *Science for All Americans* into developmental terms, describing what students should know and when. This four-year effort involved hundreds of scientists and educators.

### Tools for a New Millenium

Though scarcely an unbiased observer, I think it fair to say that *Benchmarks* has turned out to be a significant contribution to the reform campaign, if only because of the influence it has had on state frameworks and the forthcoming national science education standards. And Project 2061 is still in the reform tool business, with *Resources for Science Literacy* and *Designs for Science Literacy* well underway.

But it will take us to the celebrated year 2000, if not beyond, to help reformers learn how to use these tools effectively, and then to revise them based on user feedback. And what about the tools that are now only in the planning stage? More years still. How many? At least enough to get us over the 2000 hurdle and well on our way to....



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