in the early grades by helping districts to hire and train 100,000 teachers. And the Title VII Bilingual Education proposal would ensure that all teachers are well trained to teach students with limited English proficiency, who are found in more and more classrooms with each passing year.

Third, my bill would increase support for safe, healthy, disciplined, and drug-free learning environments where all children feel connected, motivated, and challenged to learn and where parents are welcomed and involved. The recent tragedy at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, reminds us that we must be ever vigilant against the risks of violence and other dangerous behaviors in our schools. Our reauthorization bill includes several measures to help mitigate these risks.

We propose the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act by concentrating funds on districts with the greatest need for drug- and violence-prevention programs, and by emphasizing the use of research-based programs of proven effectiveness. Moreover, with respect to students who bring weapons to school, this proposal would require schools to refer such students to a mental health professional for assessment and require counseling for those who pose an imminent threat to themselves or others; allow funding for programs that educate students about the risks associated with guns; expand character education programs; and promote alternative schools and second chance programs. A new School Emergency Response to Violence program would provide rapid assistance to school districts that have experienced violence or other trauma that disrupts the learning environment.

My Safe Schools Reform initiative would support innovative reforms to improve student achievement in high schools, such as expanding the connections between adults and students that are necessary for effective learning and healthy personal development. This new initiative would provide resources to help transform 5,000 high schools into places where students receive individual attention, are motivated to learn, are provided with challenging courses, and are encouraged to develop and pursue long-term educational and career goals.

Fourth, in response to clear evidence that standards-based reforms work best when States have strong accountability systems in place, my proposal would encourage each State to establish a single, rigorous accountability system for all schools. The bill also would require States to end social promotion and traditional retention practices; phase out the use of teachers with certificates that are the practice of assigning teachers “out-of-field”; and implement sound discipline policies in every school. Finally, the bill would give parents an important new accountability tool by requiring State, district, and school-level report cards that will help them evaluate the quality of the school their children attend.

Based on high standards for all students, high-quality professional development for teachers, safe and disciplined learning environments, and accountability to parents and taxpayers, the Educational Excellence for All Children Act of 1999 provides a solid foundation for raising student achievement and narrowing the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers. More important, it will help prepare all of our children, and thus the Nation, for the challenges of the 21st century. I urge the Congress to take prompt and favorable action on this proposal.