The crisis in high-school physics education

As our society becomes more and more based on high technology, both for the goods and services we use and for the economic health of our country, it seems that fewer and fewer of our youth are learning the basic science they need to cope with the technology. Any technology that is sufficiently far beyond someone's ken will appear indistinguishable from magic. The graph on page 29 shows that only just over 3% of our high-school seniors take physics. Even "General Science" does not draw a large audience.

Our special issue on the crisis in high-school physics education begins with an overview of the problem by John M. Layman (page 26) and continues with a discussion of why physics graduates don't become teachers, by Beverly Fearn Porter and William H. Kelly (page 32). On page 44 Judy Franz, Bill Aldridge and Robert Beck Clark discuss paths to a solution of the crisis, and Jack Wilson and Tim Ingoldsby describe places where things are going right on page 52. An interesting program for retired physicists is described by Paul Horowitz in a letter on page 110. Lewis Branscomb discusses recommendations from a task force of the Education Commission of the States in his Guest Comment (page 9), and in our Editorial, Ronald Geballe calls for returning to higher standards in education (page 148).