

An Overview of AMERICA'S EDUCATION AGENDA

Creating good schools for our children is more than a matter of doing what is morally right, Mr. Paige asserts. It is a matter of maintaining our national security, building on our prosperity, preserving our democracy, and strengthening our great country.

PAPERS FROM THE DUKE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

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WHEN PRESIDENT Bush asked me to accompany him to Washington to help promote his principles of education reform, I accepted eagerly. I had worked with him in Texas for six years when I was superintendent of the Houston schools and he was governor. I knew he was dedicated to the needs of students and particularly concerned with improving the performance of and opportunities for disadvantaged children.

During those six years, I instituted then Gov. Bush's principles of education reform in my large urban school district, and I watched student achievement skyrocket. The results I observed were not unique to Houston. Across Texas, white students improved, black students improved, and Hispanic students improved. At the same time, the achievement gap between minority and disadvantaged students and their peers narrowed. The Education Trust heralded our success in closing the achievement gap with this comparison: "If African American eighth-graders everywhere wrote as well as their peers in Texas, the national achievement gap between White and African American eighth-graders would be cut in half." The Education Trust report concluded that the large achievement



ROD PAIGE was appointed secretary of education by President George W. Bush in 2001. He came to the post after serving as dean of the College of Education at Texas Southern University and as superintendent of the Houston Independent School District.

gaps of 1994 had shrunk substantially, from 36 percentage points to 21 percentage points for black students.

I knew then that Gov. Bush was a strong and talented leader, with an impressive knack for bipartisanship and the determination to accomplish great things for our students. He had the vision to see that the education system in Texas had lost its way, and he knew how to set it back on the right course: by committing it to achieving results for every child. He knew that if we harnessed the power of parents and communities, our schools could live up to our ideals. Under his leadership, practitioners, policy makers, parents, and leaders of business, government, and communities of every ideology in Texas united behind his plan for education reform and effected extraordinary change in our schools. I have been honored to help him bring his vision for education to every state in the nation.

Our task began on President Bush's second day in office, when he unveiled his No Child Left Behind plan. This plan sought to change the culture of education by using the same principles of reform that had already shown results in Texas: accountability for results, local control and flexibility, expanded parental options, and doing what works according to scientific research. We faced a formidable challenge. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, most of the progress in student performance in reading and math was made during the 1970s. Little has improved in terms of student performance since 1980. And while science scores declined in the 1970s and improved during the 1980s, they too were flat throughout the 1990s.

While these problems were evident, many school boards were enmeshed in arguments over such topics as budgets and work rules. The system was focused on itself, not on students.

The President designed his No Child Left Behind plan to guide Congress in reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the legislation that defines the federal role in education. It is the most sweeping reform of the federal role in education since ESEA was passed in 1965.

PRACTITIONER TO POLICY

One reason that President Bush chose me to be secretary of education was that he wanted someone with practical experience in improving achievement among those student populations often dismissed as "hard to

teach." When I arrived in Washington last year, I was confident in my expertise and determined to put my experience as a practitioner to work in the policy debates. As a superintendent, I learned firsthand what works to improve student performance. I knew that a good accountability system was vital and that test scores could and should be used to track the progress of individual students, so that teachers could tailor their teaching to meet the specific needs of their children. As we worked to reauthorize ESEA this year, I was often the lone practitioner in a room filled with policy makers and legislators, and my practical experience and perspective as the former superintendent of a large urban school district proved invaluable.

BIPARTISANSHIP

Despite my expertise in education, I had a lot to learn about how Washington worked. My first year in office has led me to reconsider many of my long-held beliefs about politics and the federal government. One notion that was challenged almost immediately after I arrived here was my perception of Washington Democrats. At my very first meeting with Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), we hit it off famously — much better than I, as a Republican, had expected. He was instrumental in my confirmation, and, throughout the reauthorization process of ESEA, we worked well together, as did the President and other Democrats, such as Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.).

I also learned some things about my fellow Republicans. Just a few years ago, after all, many of them had supported the abolition of the U.S. Department of Education. But by working with them, I came to understand that their goal was to restore local control of schools to the parents of America. The new No Child Left Behind law will do just that.

Before I got to Washington, I thought that Democrats adhered to entirely different ideals about education than Republicans did. To my surprise, I discovered that Democrats and Republicans have the same goal at heart when it comes to education: giving all children access to excellent schools. They may disagree on what is the best way to reach this goal, but they are always thinking about what is best for students.

Throughout the past year, Sen. Kennedy and Rep. Miller worked well with their Republican counterparts, Sen. Judd Gregg (R-N.H.) and Rep. John Boehner (R-Ohio), to turn the principles of No Child Left Behind into law. The dialogue spurred progress. The year

before, members of Congress had struggled over positioning in education reform as well as in many other issues. Mired in partisan politics, they failed to reauthorize ESEA. This time, even after the attacks of September 11, Congress did not abandon its resolve to produce a good education bill that would improve schools for all students. While many sharp differences needed resolution, the members and their staffs worked with White House and Education Department staffs with great determination through the summer and fall and through anthrax and evacuations. In December, they sent the President the No Child Left Behind Act, which he signed on 8 January 2002, ushering in a new era in American education.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

The No Child Left Behind law heralds a major change in direction for American schools. A river that had wandered sluggishly east suddenly shifted and began to flow west. Everyone involved in education — teachers and administrators, students and parents, business and community leaders — will notice the change, and the more they understand it, the more it will help them. The new westward current will flow swiftly, and it will carry everyone along. Boats that had run aground or been snagged in the shallows will be shaken loose and brought back to midstream. Most important, the river and everyone on it will flow toward success.

No Child Left Behind helps us look at schools, governance, and the federal role in education in the right way. It reminds us that the goal of schools is not diplomas, but educated citizens. It assures us that the responsibility for student performance lies not just with educators, but also with communities. Most important, it changes the federal role in education from funding to investing. When federal spending becomes an investment, it gives the federal government leverage to demand results.

With the No Child Left Behind law, education reform has grown up. No longer is reform about access or money. No longer is it about compliance or excuses. Instead, it is about improving student achievement by improving the quality of the education we offer our students. It is once again focused on the student, not the system.

Rep. Miller summed it up well when he said, “This bill will help return our school system to the original goals of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act — to ensure that all children have an oppor-

tunity to learn regardless of income, background, or racial or ethnic identity. But unlike the laws on the books over the past 35 years, we will back up our commitment with a set of unambiguous expectations, time lines, and resources.”

ACHIEVEMENT GAP

There is no doubt that our system is in urgent need of repair. Half a century ago, had we known that America would make astonishing improvements in technology, put an end to government-enforced segregation, and spend more than \$8 trillion on schools, we would have expected to finish the century with all our citizens — from business leaders to busboys — able to read, calculate, and understand American history. Instead, though our nation is blessed with many excellent schools and many excellent educators, our system is still failing too many children. According to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only 32% of fourth-graders can read proficiently, and the proportion in urban areas is even lower. Twenty-six percent of urban fourth-graders are proficient readers, compared with 36% of suburban and 32% of rural fourth-graders. (If Americans in 1952 had known they would spend \$8 trillion over 50 years, at the end of which time only about a third of children could read, they might have questioned that use of funds.)

There is also a persistent achievement gap between ethnic groups. While 40% of white fourth-graders read at or above the proficient level, only 12% of blacks and 16% of Hispanics perform as well. The situation is not better in high school. Our high school seniors scored lower on the 2000 NAEP math assessment than their predecessors in 1996. And, although more children are attending college, nearly a third of our college freshmen must take remedial courses. Minority students are taking more courses that will prepare them for college-level work. The performance of most minority groups is still measurably lower than that of whites, and an achievement gap between minority and disadvantaged students and their peers endures despite billions spent trying to close it.

ACCOUNTABILITY

In order to eliminate the achievement gap and improve student performance across the board, we must hold educators accountable to the bold proposition that

every child can learn. This is a belief that President Bush takes very seriously, and he means *no child* left behind quite literally. He does not mean that, after you siphon off the children who have disabilities, or were never properly taught how to read, or never learned English, or disrupted their classrooms, then the rest can learn. He means that all of our students, even the ones our system calls “hard to teach,” can learn.

There is no middle ground or room for excuses. Either educators believe that every child can learn, or they do not. When educators begin to make excuses for children based on race or socioeconomics, both those who make excuses and our children fall prey to what the President calls “the soft bigotry of low expectations.”

The No Child Left Behind law places accountability squarely in the center of our education system. The law requires each state to enact a strong accountability structure based on clear and high standards and a system of annual assessments to measure student progress against those standards.

Testing is not designed to punish students or teachers; it is an integral part of determining whether or not students are learning what the state has decided they should know. When we have clear standards and tests that are aligned to them, testing allows us to make sure every child is making progress. Annual testing allows us to identify and correct problems quickly, so that schools can be held accountable for the progress of their students. For this reason, the No Child Left Behind law calls for states to test their students annually in grades 3 through 8 in the basic subjects of reading and math. Science assessments will be less frequent, but no less important in tracking student progress. Students should make substantial progress every year, in every class, and annual assessments will ensure that they do. Every time they do not, we are not just wasting time, money, and opportunities; we are making students more discouraged, despondent, and disenfranchised.

Every child’s education should be a voyage of discovery, and the No Child Left Behind law is all about discovering and disseminating the information about student performance that assessments will provide. Test scores will be disaggregated by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and English proficiency so that we can see where the achievement gap exists and attack it so that no group is neglected. School districts and schools that fail to make adequate progress toward statewide goals will be identified for improvement and, over time, will be subject to corrective action and restructuring measures aimed at getting them back on course to meet state

standards. Schools that meet or exceed adequate yearly progress objectives or close achievement gaps will be eligible for State Academic Achievement Awards.

Teachers will be able to use individual student data to tailor their teaching to the specific needs of each student. Principals will be able to use the data to make informed decisions about what their schools need in order to improve student performance. Parents will no longer wonder whether or not their children’s schools are teaching them.

In the mystery of who is failing children, teachers blame parents, and parents blame teachers. Assessments will give us the evidence, class by class, child by child, and the data will allow parents to make informed, confident decisions about their children’s education.

Under the plan, if a school is identified for improvement or corrective action, the district must give parents the option of enrolling their children in another public school, including a charter school. The district must pay for transportation, and it must also provide funds for low-income students in persistently failing schools to seek supplemental educational services, such as tutoring. There is no more powerful force for change than parents armed with information and options. The No Child Left Behind law provides both.

Test scores give us the information we need to find out what works, to find out who needs help, and to give more information and control to the people closest to the action: parents, teachers, administrators, and communities. Too often, the reason that schools have trouble is that the people who are the most invested in them are not the people in control. It is time to recognize that the people who know and care the most about neighborhood schools are the people of the neighborhood: the teachers, parents, administrators, and business and community leaders.

This year, the federal government will spend \$387 million to assist states with the cost of developing a system of assessments, and the U.S. Department of Education will work with them to put solid, viable accountability systems in place. We will be a vigilant partner for states as they set high standards and institute annual assessments.

TEACHERS

Just as we empower parents with information and choices, we must equip teachers with the best teaching methods available. Schools should use instructional methods based on reality, not ideology. By now, for example,

we have a big store of information on successful reading instruction. Research has confirmed that reading is the gateway to all learning and that learning to read is much easier before the third grade. We also know from research that even very young children can begin to develop pre-reading skills, and we have learned how valuable phonemic awareness is to developing language skills. President Bush's reforms are based on this research, and his Reading First Program promotes teaching methods that are scientifically proven to work. This year, Reading First commits \$900 million to ensuring that every child learns to read by the third grade. After tripling federal funding for reading, the President has requested an additional increase of \$100 million, which would bring next year's total to \$1 billion.

More generally, the No Child Left Behind law supports and prepares teachers by providing almost \$3 billion to improve teacher quality. This money will ensure that every classroom has a highly qualified teacher, and it gives states and school districts the flexibility to spend the money as they see fit. Local education leaders know better than Washington whether they need to focus on professional development, reducing class size, or other activities related to teacher quality. The law also includes funds for, among other things, math and science partnerships that can be used for professional development for math and science teachers, for the promotion of strong teaching skills based on scientific research and technology-based teaching methods, for the development of mentoring programs for teachers, and for recruiting qualified college students into teaching.

While we should elevate and support the teachers we have, we must encourage additional qualified students and professionals to pursue a career in teaching. The Troops to Teachers Program in the law assists members of the armed forces in becoming qualified to teach and helps them find jobs in high-need schools. Transition to Teaching will help to encourage highly qualified midcareer professionals and recent college graduates to become teachers by recruiting them and encouraging alternative certification routes.

We all know that teachers should be respected and celebrated more, but the only way to improve conditions for our teachers is to turn our children into educated adults every time. Success by some teachers, with some children, has not made teaching the honored career it ought to be. We must be courageous enough to say that some of our teachers are poorly trained and that, as a result, too many children slip through the cracks. If we can show the American people that we have ac-

counted for every child — that every child is learning and growing and maturing — then more Americans will respect, honor, and dream of becoming teachers.

CHARACTER EDUCATION

We depend on teachers and schools to give our children knowledge. We should also expect them to teach our children character, because our children must have character to benefit from the knowledge they receive in school. While reading, math, and science can give our children strength of mind, character education is necessary to give them strength of heart. It is time for schools to return to teaching children that character, honesty, and integrity are important. Good character is not something you are born with; it is something you must learn from those who have it.

We need to make sure our children are on the path to respect, responsibility, honesty, and civic virtue. We must set our children on the path not only to academic achievement and professional success, but also to moral strength.

For President Bush, character education is a special priority. In turn, the No Child Left Behind law reflects the importance of character education programs. The law triples funding for character education grants to states and districts to \$25 million. The grants can be used for such activities as developing character education curricula; implementing model character education programs that involve parents and community members, including private and nonprofit organizations; and training teachers to incorporate character-building lessons and activities into their classrooms. Students will be taught about the principles and values of good character through their regular curriculum.

The No Child Left Behind law gives schools and districts not only the money for these programs but also the freedom from government red tape to use that money to get the job done. The law allows schools and districts to form partnerships with private, nonprofit organizations in order to add a spirit of innovation and a special expertise to their character education programs. Those who receive funds under this program will be required to demonstrate results. In keeping with a guiding principle of the No Child Left Behind law, what matters in character education is product, not process.

IMPLEMENTATION

The No Child Left Behind law dramatically reshapes

the federal role in education. It authorizes the federal government to demand results from our schools. Though responsibility for implementing the bill lies with the Department of Education, real change will occur at the state and local levels. To give states and school districts the flexibility to change, the federal department will relieve them of some burdensome federal requirements right away. We are also working to issue guidelines, establish grant requirements, and offer technical assistance to states and school districts in preparing for the requirements of the law.

The Department of Education wants to hear the needs, concerns, and suggestions of states as they implement the law. The No Child Left Behind law has addressed the shortcomings and loopholes of previous laws that allowed states to miss deadlines, and we will enforce the requirements of the law strictly. I will not let deadlines slip or see requirements forgotten. When students beg their teachers to extend deadlines, the choice between discipline and compassion can be very difficult. But if states ask me to extend deadlines, they will be asking me to make a choice between the needs of children and the flaws of the system. This will be an easy choice for me. I will choose the children.

One thing we learned from Congress last year is how productive we can be when we work together. The department has been working hard to build partnerships with states and school districts. We will be a vigilant partner and a steadfast source of support for states and districts as they implement the reforms of No Child

Left Behind. However, for the spirit of progress to take root across states, school districts, and classrooms, we must follow Congress' lead and work together across ideological lines. Superintendents and teacher unions can blame one another until summer vacation and lose sight of the reason they are both there, which is to ensure that students learn.

Our children do not need adults who measure success in dollars or compliance. Our children don't need adults who make excuses for their failures. Our children need adults who focus on results. Our children deserve to learn promptly and well, and anything that distracts from their learning is a distraction from the schools' mission. I am quite serious about the partnership between the department and states and school districts, and I am very sincere in stating that we are, in fact, in this together. Our success is dependent upon one another.

The goal of leaving no child behind is a daunting challenge and an exhilarating prospect, and every American has a part to play. The students of today are the leaders, citizens, scholars, technicians, and parents of tomorrow, and they are relying on us to give them schools that prepare them for these roles. One day, we will depend on them to assume these roles with wisdom and confidence. Creating good schools for our children is more than a matter of doing what is morally right. It is a matter of maintaining our national security, building on our prosperity, preserving our democracy, and strengthening our great country. **K**

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