

# Education Reform THROUGH STANDARDS AND PARTNERSHIPS, 1993-2000

As we look to the future, it is imperative that we recognize that our national effort to raise standards is not just about testing, Mr. Riley notes. Rather, it represents a broad and sweeping endeavor to reform American education from top to bottom. An unflinching commitment to excellence and equity must be our guiding principle.



## PAPERS FROM THE DUKE UNIVERSITY EDUCATION LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

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**W**HEN President Clinton took office in 1993, it was clear that American education needed to be strengthened at every level. Ten years had passed since the release of *A Nation at Risk*, which alerted many people to the woefully inadequate state of American education. Yet, because of a lack of rigor, standards, and funding at the local, state, and national levels, the crisis had continued. High-poverty schools were beset by the tyranny of low expectations, and there was little

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in the way of a national consensus on what to do about it.

The idea of higher standards for all children was emerging, but only in fits and starts. Just a handful of states and communities were consistently engaged in pursuing high standards, and the progress was slow. Many people doubted or simply did not believe in the fundamental principle underlying the standards movement: that we should have high expectations for *all* children — including poor children, children with disabilities, and the many new immigrant children flooding into our nation's classrooms.

Thus in 1993 American education was struggling to redefine itself, as well as to respond to the many new demands being placed on it. In many respects, we were unprepared. Yet, over the next eight years, a remarkable transformation took place.

Improving education moved to the top of the nation's domestic agenda, and a national consensus formed around the need to raise standards for all children, increase accountability, close the achievement gap, and reach clear national education goals. And instead of being eliminated, as sought by some in leadership positions, the U.S. Department of Education once again became the recipient of bipartisan congressional support that resulted in new and increased funding.

Credit for this remarkable turnaround must go largely to the American people — the parents, teachers, school boards, principals, superintendents, and others who dug in their heels and demanded a new level of excellence for their children. And no one was more gifted than President Clinton in rallying the American people around this call to make education a new national priority.

## THE CLINTON/GORE AGENDA

To challenge the status quo, our Administration focused the federal government on supporting state reforms. We sought to align federal programs with state reforms so that decisions would be made closer to the classroom and the system would be less chaotic. Our proposals were based on three connected and defining principles: high standards for all children, new accountability measures linked to high standards, and new investments to improve the quality of education for all children.

The task was not easy. It took a lot of hard work to

pass the Goals 2000 Act in 1994. I remember my staff and me working in my office until midnight to track down senators before the final vote. Three senators who had already returned to their home states actually flew back to Washington to make sure we had enough votes to win passage.

We made more progress in the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which, among other things, ended the practice of giving poor children a watered-down curriculum and framed the issue of accountability.

Unfortunately, this progress soon gave way in 1995 and 1996 to a bitter battle over the very existence of the U.S. Department of Education. The intensity of this fight should not be forgotten. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and his followers held true to their belief that the best U.S. Department of Education was no U.S. Department of Education. Their Contract for America targeted the department for elimination, and they vigorously pursued that goal.

The charge to eliminate the department was an enormous distraction from the very important task of moving American education forward. Combating that effort took precious time and resources away from our endeavor to improve teaching and learning for all students. I was dismayed at the level of negativity — the willingness to tear down public education — and disappointed that the traditional bipartisan support for education had gone by the wayside.

We sought to end the debate about the role of the federal government by creating a new policy framework built around the concept of partnership. Education would remain a local function and a state responsibility, but it had to be much more of a national priority, with all levels of government working together as partners. In contrast to the ultraconservative ideologues, we offered the American people specific proposals to improve reading, to reduce class size, to modernize schools, to improve teaching, to connect classrooms to the Internet, to increase learning time through after-school opportunities, and to get parents and communities more involved in education.

Looking back, the outcome of this philosophical battle over the national role was a defining moment for American education. President Clinton's victory in the 1996 election established, once and for all, that the American people expected and demanded an ongoing national role in improving education. It was — and is — important for our children and important for our country.

## **CREATING A LASTING FOUNDATION FOR STANDARDS**

Our Administration also worked diligently to create a national bipartisan consensus on how to improve education. As a result, a standards movement that once was unstable is now firmly rooted. Forty-nine states have established statewide standards, and Iowa has upgraded its locally based standards.

This is no small achievement. In 1995 governors would call me to say they could not take the Goals 2000 money, even though they knew there were no federal regulations attached. The political heat was just too intense. I still remember a wild Montana newspaper headline that quoted an anti-Goals 2000 woman saying, "Goals 2000 made me into a sex slave." In all my days in education, I had never expected the debate to come to this.

But we persevered by turning the abstract notion of standards into concrete goals that people could understand: all children should be able to read by the end of the third grade, all eighth-graders should learn the basics of algebra, and all high school students should be computer literate and be encouraged to take the tough courses to prepare for college.

As a result, challenging standards are here to stay. In moving away from the factory-era use of our nation's schools as sorting machines and toward a new model that gives all children the opportunity to reach high standards, we have created a new set of expectations for American education. The question that still must be answered as we enter the 21st century is whether we Americans will fulfill this great promise. I think we will.

## **PROFESSIONALISM AND EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING**

Central to fulfilling this promise and creating a lasting foundation for higher standards will be our long-term commitment to supporting the teaching profession. Our efforts to improve teaching took many forms. We made the first major federal investment to improve teacher education in almost 30 years. We challenged school districts to stop the practice of assigning new teachers to the most challenging classes, a sink-or-swim approach that led to high burnout and the departure of more than 20% of all new teachers within three years. We supported such new efforts as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, and we encouraged the upgrading of professional development

programs. In just three years under our new program, *Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to Use Technology*, more than 400,000 of our nation's new teachers were trained to integrate technology into the curriculum.

As I traveled around the country, I urged local school leaders to stop assigning people to teach outside their field, a common practice in American education that does not serve students or teachers well. The notion of teaching out of field completely bewilders foreign educators, who believe, as I do, that people should teach only the subject matter that they have been educated to teach.

We also spotlighted the unfortunate fact that many colleges and universities had allowed their schools of education to become marginalized, and we urged college presidents to make teacher preparation central to the mission of higher education. We put a new emphasis on reforming the teacher certification process, which too often involves jumping through a multitude of bureaucratic hoops. We urged states to adopt performance-based certification, whereby a potential teacher must demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective in the classroom.

But much remains to be done. We need a dramatic overhaul of how we recruit, prepare, license, induct, and retain good teachers. We will get the high-quality teachers that our children deserve only when we prepare them well, pay them well, and create conditions in which teachers are treated as professionals whose learning and growth are valued and supported.

At a time when millions of students are going to need extra help to meet challenging new standards, we no longer can assume that we can get good teachers on the cheap and expect them to work only nine months a year. I believe it is a wise move for the future of American education to make teaching a better-paid, year-round profession.

## **CREATING AN ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM THAT WORKS**

Our efforts to create a workable accountability system linked to standards began in 1994 with the reauthorization of a new and improved ESEA. We targeted more resources to the poorest schools and promoted the idea of whole-school reform. For the first time in its 30-year history, Title I required states to set a single high standard for all children and to test students at three key grades to gauge progress.

We recognized that creating a legislative framework

was only one part of our task. Creating a new culture of educational excellence for all children was quite another. For all the demands for greater accountability that emanate from Washington, D.C., the reality is that the federal government does not run America's schools. It became clear to me that prodding and encouragement, real financial support, and setting the national agenda were elements of a broader effort to encourage more accountability. Yet even then we were stymied.

In 1997 all states were testing their students at various grades, in various subjects, using various tests. Our Administration proposed two voluntary national tests — one for fourth-grade reading and one for eighth-grade math — in addition to any state tests. We believed that these two tests of basic skills would set a national benchmark for excellence and that they would give parents an independent source of information about academic achievement across state lines. One of the little-known realities of American education is that state standards and state tests are very uneven.

Even though these proposed tests were purely voluntary and many states and cities did indeed volunteer to participate, we met fierce political opposition and ultimately failed to get the support we needed to put them in place. It was my view that these two voluntary tests would have enabled public schools, private schools, and home-schoolers to have a real benchmark to measure their progress. Over time, these two tests would have allowed states to reduce the clutter of testing that increasingly occupies the time of our students and teachers.

Nevertheless, we persisted in our efforts to improve accountability. In 1998 there was strong bipartisan support in Congress for a comprehensive school reform initiative, and in 1999 a \$134-million Education Accountability Fund was created. However, we still came up short in providing low-performing schools with all the extra help they needed. Three years after they had been identified as low performing, half of all Title I schools had not received the necessary extra help. If we demand more, we need to invest more. You cannot have one without the other.

President Bush is a strong proponent of accountability and testing. As a result, the 2001 ESEA reauthorization requires a new series of annual tests in grades 3 through 8 and a timeline for the improvement of individual schools. I believe that these tests and other new accountability measures will be useful if, at the same time, we build the capacity of schools and students to meet the challenge.

Building capacity means thoughtfully putting dollars into high-quality, sustained professional development for teachers and principals. Building capacity means making sure that schools have the necessary tools to use the test data effectively to help individual students succeed. This means online diagnostic testing, training and tools for data analysis, and timely test results. It also means extra time and extra help for those who need it.

In my final State of American Education address in 2000, I urged states to review carefully their progress in establishing standards and new accountability measures and, if necessary, to make a midcourse correction. Some educators have felt so pressured to teach to the test that they are losing the spark and creativity so necessary to the learning process. We also need to recognize that cutting back on music and the arts in an effort to increase test scores is going down the wrong road for achieving excellence. In the broad effort to raise standards, states should not rely on just a single high-stakes test. Parents want their children to have a well-rounded education, and I agree with them.

## **NARROWING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP**

The overriding principle that defined our efforts to raise standards was an intense belief in equity and excellence for all young people. This commitment and a willingness to back it up with real resources was long overdue. For decades we tolerated and — to the great shame of this country — accepted the fact that African Americans, Hispanic Americans, other minorities, and children with disabilities were systematically left out and left behind in getting a high-quality education. As I have said repeatedly, an education of excellence for every child in America must be the new “civil right” for the 21st century.

The achievement gap is persistent and intrinsically linked to the fact that millions of our nation's children still live in poverty. Indeed, we know from the first national survey on kindergarten that the achievement gap is already in place at the earliest ages and even widens in kindergarten. What can we do?

First, attending prekindergarten and kindergarten can make a world of difference for poor children. To my way of thinking, this early education is an absolute necessity. The stronger the start, the better the finish. Second, getting children off to a strong start is particularly important for children with disabilities. Early intervention enables us to include, with great suc-

cess, many more children with disabilities in regular classrooms.

However, this intense focus on the early years should not force school districts to perform a kind of educational triage and shortchange our nation's secondary schools. Unfortunately, that is exactly what is happening now. Secondary schools enroll 33% of all disadvantaged children but currently receive only 15% of all Title I funds. To save one generation of students, we essentially are giving up on another.

This is not a workable strategy. We must fund Title I fully and continue to improve it. We must also insist that all minority students take rigorous academic courses. Research shows that a high-quality, academically intense high school curriculum is the most important factor in the college-going rate for African American and Latino students.

Improving academic achievement in our high-poverty schools will happen only if we encourage our best teachers to work there. To achieve this important end, we must create a set of positive inducements — higher pay, real and continuing professional development, better working conditions, smaller schools, and smaller classes. However, all of these initiatives and others will succeed only if they are framed by a relentless commitment to a no-excuses attitude toward failure.

## **BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE**

Our Administration also put a strong emphasis on getting America's students ready for the future. We worked hard to pass legislation to modernize our nation's school facilities and created a substantial number of technology initiatives starting from scratch. Since 1993, classroom connections to the Internet jumped from 3% to 75%, and school connections rose from 30% to nearly 100%. Encouraging the passage of the E-rate was a consuming but rewarding yearlong effort.

We also put a strong focus on encouraging local school districts to build schools as community learning centers that stay open later and are open to more people. I was a strong advocate for improving the intergenerational aspects of American education and for recognizing the important role grandparents can play in the education of their grandchildren.

We encouraged choice, innovation, and flexibility. At the start of our Administration, only one state had a charter school law, and there was only one charter school in the U.S. Eight years later, 36 states had charter school laws, and more than 1,700 charter schools

were operating. We also supported very strongly the ed-flex legislation, and, over time, we revised or eliminated two-thirds of all the federal regulations for K-12 education.

We made a sustained effort to help children master the basics. Reading and math scores for 9-year-olds in our highest-poverty schools increased about one grade level between 1992 and 1996, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. We created the America Reads Challenge, a wonderful partnership with colleges and universities that allowed about 27,000 college work-study students to become reading tutors. In 1998, two years after President Clinton proposed the Reading Excellence Act, we finally won congressional passage and funding for this significant child literacy law.

We recognized that many children need more learning time. As a result, we created a new after-school initiative — the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program — that has provided academic support and enrichment activities for more than 2.5 million children. Although President Bush and Congress increased funding for this program to \$1 billion for fiscal year 2002, that figure still falls short of the overwhelming demand from school/community partnerships for this support.

We recognized that improving education was an international concern and reached out to our fellow educators around the world. I distinctly remember President Clinton telling me that he had received a call from the President of Brazil, who had just listened to his State of the Union address. Given President Clinton's strong and sustained interest in education, President Cardozo suggested that the next Summit of the Americas in Santiago, Chile, have a special focus on education. And so it did. Later on, prior to the G-8 Economic Summit in Okinawa, I participated in the first-ever G-8 Education Summit.

## **NEW PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE**

Our continuing effort to create new pathways to college was another area of achievement that took many forms. We recognized that students were often deciding as early as middle school, or even sooner, whether they were college material. In response, we created a Think College Early campaign. In just one year, we received requests for one million copies of a publication we developed to help parents and their children prepare for college, both academically and financial-

ly.

We created a new incentive for low-income students to take Advanced Placement classes and tests by covering their costs. In two short years, more than 90,000 low-income students had taken advantage of this opportunity.

We made substantial new investments in the established TRIO programs that had begun as a series of federal educational opportunity programs in the 1960s. Our revitalized TRIO programs reached 730,000 first-generation college students. We also created a new program — GEAR UP — to link high-poverty middle schools with colleges and universities. By 2000, 164 colleges and universities were involved in getting 250,000 additional at-risk young people ready for college.

In collaboration with foundation leaders, we launched a new Pathways to College Network to build school/college partnerships to increase college access. Our School-to-Work Opportunities Act helped states develop programs to broaden young people's education and career options and to promote successful transitions to college and careers.

We used every opportunity to give families the support they need to pay for college. We recognized that one of the primary reasons many high school students do not go to college is the sheer cost of it all and that this is a particular worry for many African American and Hispanic students. In response, we created competition in the system through our Direct Lending Program that saved students billions of dollars on their college loans, and we worked hard to increase Pell grants to benefit more than 3.8 million low-income students.

In 1996 we came forward with two new initiatives: the Hope Scholarship Tax Credit, which made going to a community college essentially free for all Americans, and the Lifetime Learning Tax Credit to help individuals complete college and to encourage them to gain additional education and skills. These two initiatives are examples of future thinking — creative and far-reaching policies that will have a positive impact for decades to come.

Good management of the department also resulted in taxpayer savings of some \$18 billion over eight years by reducing the student loan default rate from 22.4% to 6.8%, increasing the collection of bad debts, and implementing the Direct Student Loan Program.

## CREATING PARTNERSHIPS

Finally, I believe that we were very successful in cre-

ating a working partnership with state and local governments and the private sector by providing practical solutions and supports for real and immediate problems in the classroom. We worked diligently to reduce class size, to improve teacher training, and to get technology into the classrooms as fast as possible.

Our effort to create a policy of partnership was concrete and specific. Grant programs were required to be inclusive and to encourage the development of partnerships between schools, businesses, civic groups, and universities. We successfully developed virtual communities through our many technology initiatives, and more than 8,000 family, faith, and business groups and others joined our Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE).

Creating alliances and partnerships became one of the hallmarks of our years in office. America Goes Back to School, PFIE, Afterschool Alliance, Arts Education Partnership, America Reads Challenge, Pathways to College Network — all were part of our continuing effort to engage the American public. Business leaders and groups were our constant allies in our effort to keep up the pressure to raise standards.

Creating a sense of partnership also meant addressing long-standing and festering disputes about how to educate our children. We worked hard to end the “reading wars” and “math wars” and to find common ground between school administrators and special education advocates.

I took a personal interest in finding ways to change the tone of the dialogue around the sensitive and often-divisive issue of religion in the public schools. Working closely with leaders of many faiths, we developed guidelines to clarify for school officials, teachers, students, and parents the extent to which, consistent with the Constitution, religious expression and activity are permitted in our public schools. In the process, many conservative and liberal religious groups came to see that we were “honest brokers” and truly committed to finding common ground.

Columbine and other school tragedies created a special urgency to help keep guns out of schools. The Gun-Free Schools Act has made a positive difference. Also, working with Attorney General Janet Reno, we mobilized a coalition of 18 education groups to develop an early-warning guide to help schools create safer learning environments.

These positive initiatives paid dividends and created an atmosphere of hope and confidence among educators and parents after years of negativity about pub-

lic education. Underlying our efforts to create a sense of partnership was our very real belief that the education of every child has to be a communitywide responsibility. Our schools cannot do it alone. Better education is everybody's business.

## THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

As we look to the future, I believe it is imperative that we recognize that our national effort to raise standards is not just about testing. Rather, it represents a broad and sweeping endeavor to reform American education from top to bottom. An unflinching commitment to excellence and equity must be our guiding principle.

I am a strong believer in standards, but the movement to raise achievement levels cannot be driven by standardization. Creativity in teaching and learning must be encouraged, not stymied. If we create an accountability system that is more punitive than diagnostic, more about fear than achieving success, then we will have missed the mark entirely about how to raise standards.

We are just beginning to create a new system of accountability, and we need to be open to change as we go along. We will need staying power to get the job done, and that means we must invest wisely in education this year and in years to come.

Time is an important factor in education. The current time structure of the American school day and, indeed, of American education certainly will have to change. Every disadvantaged child must have the benefit of a rich and structured after-school and summer learning program if we are to close the achievement gap. It is good that our children are starting school at an earlier age and staying in school longer.

Every young person today needs some form of post-secondary education and should continue learning throughout life. This leads me to suggest that, if we accept the premise that K-12 education is a free public good, then in the future we should ensure that all academically prepared young people will have at least two years of tuition-free education after high school.

Here we confront one of the most nagging issues this nation has yet to resolve: how we pay for a high-quality education for all our young people. For the past two decades, countless states have been embroiled in court cases regarding the constitutionality of school financing. In almost every case, the courts have ordered that reform take place. At all levels of government, we

must work for the equalization of K-12 school financing. In addition, the federal government must fulfill its commitment to fund fully the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the coming years.

How we finance higher education in America seems wanting, as well. Tuition and fees for four-year public colleges increased by 49% in the last decade, and students are increasingly burdened with debt. This is particularly difficult for people who choose to go into traditionally low-paying careers in public service, such as teaching. We simply must do better. I believe that the national interest would be well served if we were to guarantee a free education to college graduates who are qualified and willing to teach in critical areas like math and science. The John Glenn Commission made it quite clear that a continuing shortage of math and science teachers is not in our national interest.

The very structure of the American system of education also will have to change. In many ways it remains disconnected. Our current system of early childhood education, for example, is a patchwork defined by high turnover, little training, and minimal compensation. Yet we now know from decades of research that the period from birth to age 5 is perhaps our best opportunity to close the achievement gap. Early childhood education must be a priority for the future.

There is also a very real disconnection between our nation's secondary schools and higher education. Something is wrong when one-third of all college freshmen must take remedial courses and new high school graduation standards are not in sync with college-admissions requirements. The old model of two distinct systems of education going their separate ways does not fit our modern times.

Our schools also must be much more creative in giving students a richer sense of citizenship. Young people are intensely idealistic and want more responsibility and new learning experiences. Service learning, Americorps, and other volunteer opportunities should be an integral part of every young person's education. I would favor, too, a requirement that all young Americans spend one or two years performing some type of meaningful national service. This seems to me to be a smart way to help young people mature, build character, and gain a richer sense of obligation and appreciation for the privileges they enjoy as citizens of our great nation.

Technology will have a profound impact on how we reshape American education, so overcoming the dig-

ital divide is an imperative. We must use interactive technologies to help students master difficult and complex concepts, especially in science and math. We can exploit the more powerful interfaces, mobile capabilities, and smarter devices now being developed to individualize and customize learning resources to meet the needs of every student. Ultimately, though, our success in using technology depends on one thing: content. All the bells and whistles and new applications for each new computer will make little difference if we do not engage the minds of our children.

As a nation, we must do much more to give our young people a broader world view. The nation cannot be an effective world leader unless its people understand other cultures. That the vast majority of our students speak only one language is a reflection of our continuing insularity. Another more immediate indicator was the urgent FBI request in the aftermath of September 11th for volunteers who could speak and translate Arabic. We need a new national policy of “bilingualism” and a new focus on international education. We must remember that international education is a vital part of modern diplomacy.

With a growing senior population and constant demands on all of us to improve our skills and knowledge, we must think of our nation’s public schools as community learning centers. Our public schools should be designed as learning centers for the entire community whenever possible.

Year-round teaching, with teachers being paid accordingly, is one way to elevate the teaching profession to the level that it deserves. States and school dis-

tricts should consider carefully a move toward year-round schooling, with vacation time spread throughout the year.

It is clear to me, too, that an important part of a child’s education is good health and physical fitness. I think the country is ready for a major emphasis on physical education from kindergarten through high school, an emphasis similar to the national movement that took place under President Kennedy.

Finally, I have a vision of American education that puts much more emphasis on individualized learning. Some high school students, for example, may learn faster than others and be ready at age 16 to go to college. Why not let them? High-quality teaching, technology, smaller schools, and smaller classes can give all students the individual attention and support they deserve.

Much has been done to improve American education. But much more work remains. As we move ahead, I hope that those in leadership positions will focus on building up public education instead of tearing it down. The American people are fiercely supportive of public education, and they want it to succeed as part of the democratic promise of this great nation.

The future of American education must involve creative ways for students, teachers, parents, and the entire community to work together in partnership to make sure that all children are given a high-quality education. If we offer young people a future of hope and an education of rigor, excellence, and excitement, they will respond — and America will be better for it. **K**

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