TESTIMONY OF ALBERT SHANKER
BEFORE NEW YORK STATE SENATE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE HEARING
JANUARY 15, 1985

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the leadership of superintendents, the leadership of the chief administrator?

MR. PALAICH: Right, and I'm not implying that those people have been doing anything -- quoted-unquote -- bad. There's plenty for them to do. It's time for them to focus their energy on this leadership notion.

SENATOR DONOVAN: Thank you.

Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, as well as the United Federation of Teachers.

Good morning, Mr. Shanker, and thank you for appearing before the committee today. We appreciate your presence and input.

MR. SHANKER: Good morning. Thank you for this opportunity.

I will not read my written statement. You either have it or you will have it in a minute or two. I would like to touch on a number of points, however, that are in that written statement.

Over the last year or year and a half, there has been a great interest in

education, largely as a result of a new awareness both on the part of the business community in this country and the political community, in a way that you might say that just as both of those communities a few years ago discovered that we were not rebuilding our plants and, therefore, couldn't compete with other countries and just as we were not building our infrastructure and, therefore, were becoming non-competitive, there was a realization that there is also a human infrastructure in this country and that, if you don't invest in that, that you develop serious problems.

That, of course, both resulted in and was reflected by a large number, almost 30 reports on the national scene, and one can literally pull from all these reports and the articles and books that followed in the various analyses, hundreds of various proposals.

I would like to touch on just a few things which I think that are the most important in terms of intervening, in terms of providing improvements in education since it's

unlikely that any state or any school districts can make hundreds of changes that are required. Some of these, many of these are being made through the Regents Action Plan and similar plans across the country, but if I were sitting where you're sitting, trying to think of three, four, five, six things that could be done that would make some major differences, I would first of all make an investment in high quality early childhood education.

Now, you can't do that in one year. It will take a period of time. You need teachers; you need space; you need money which will not all be available in one year, but most of the headlines in education come from high school drop-outs and SAT scores. But we tend to forget that what happens in high schools is sort of the end of a production process and that many of those problems are not problems created by the high schools but inherited by the high schools, and I would suggest that, if you kind of try to put yourself as sympathetically into the minds and the feelings of a youngster who starts school

at perhaps kindergarten and third grade and then most of the students learn, or first grade and most of the students learn what they're supposed to and then on to the second and on to the third and then if you happen to be by the time you get into the fourth and fifth grade one of that minority of students who still can't read, write or count and those around you can, and they're still giving you "Run, Jane, run," something which is baby stuff to you by this time, that at a fairly early age you lose confidence in your own ability to learn. You begin to say it's not worth it. Perhaps you begin to bully other youngsters around you if they are good students. You may just stop coming to school at a certain point because you know that you're not going to learn anything there or you may sit in back of the room and kind of make a deal with the teacher, not openly, but an unwritten one which kind of says, "I'll leave you alone if you'll leave me alone," which is a sort of an internal cop-out, or you may start acting out because it's a horrible experience to be in a place where

everyone around you is successful and you know very well that you're a failure. I think that 80 percent of the problems that we have in schools later on, whether they are discipline problems or drop-out problems or problems in grade scores are due to the fact that they have not invested enough during that period of time when children do not feel that they're far behind, when they have not lost hope.

I was happy to see this year the high school study from Ypsilanti Ishpeming, Michigan, which is, as far as I know, the only piece of longitudinal research over a 16-year period of time, which indicated dramatic results in a controlled experiment with a group of youngsters that had a high quality early childhood program.

I would say secondly, in terms of intervention, that what you get later on, in terms of teachers, largely depends upon what you get in the first place and what your -- and who it is that you're able to keep.

Now, we still have a state in which our largest school district hires its

teachers at $14,500 a year. There are some school districts that pay less than that. I submit, I certainly don't want to turn collective bargaining over to the state, and I don't want to get into a habit or position of having the Legislature intervene in these matters, but I don't think that for the Legislature to take an interest in the minimum salary is any more an intervention in the collective bargaining process than federal or state legislation on minimum wage laws where there is an effort to see to it that those who are at the very bottom are in some way protected. In this case, I think that it is the children and the schools and society that would be protected by some concern as to what happens in terms of that hiring rate.

Now, we know that in private business, it's not unusual for a liberal arts graduate with a C average to get a trainee job at 18-, $19,000 a year. So, if in education we're trying to find people at 12-, 13-, 14- and $15,000 a year, there's no question that we are -- we are just not competitive. That is not an

expensive item. Mostly the teachers only are going to be on that minimum salary and the second step and third step for a very, very short time in an entire career.

It is poor policy which tries to save a few dollars at the very beginning and then get stuck with, as tenured employees, people you didn't really want in the first place, but you had to settle for them because that's what you wanted to pay during the -- during the first year, and I would urge that you take a close look at that.

I think that, third, we -- we really need to find some ways of reaching out to youngsters who perhaps did not start with the intention of going into teaching but who are about to graduate colleges and universities and who have done very well in their fields of study. I think that the Commissioner has made some proposals along those lines in terms of providing fellowships to bright youngsters who are about to graduate, and I would support proposals like that, his in particular, and others that are around

like that, which reach out to students who are in math and in science and English and other fields and who are outstanding students.

I also believe that, as a nation, we are probably in this period when there are fewer students leaving high school and entering college and when there is going to be a very great competition for the pool of talent that's out there. It may not be reasonable to believe that nationally we can find two million teachers who want to spend the rest of their lives in a room with children. Some of them, however, may be willing to give five or six or seven years, much as people give a period of time in the Armed Forces or in the Peace Corps or in some other field, and I believe that we ought to develop incentives for the brightest youngsters who may not want to spend their entire lives, without creating any guilt feelings on their part, ask them to give four or five or six years of their lives in exchange for scholarships that we would provide for them either to, while they're teaching, help them go to other professional

schools at night or to help them cancel their college loans.

I think it's a good investment in terms of getting high caliber people. Some of them will decide to stay; some of them will enjoy the job and will find it very rewarding. I think it's a good recruiting device, and I think that it ought to be expanded, and we did succeed this last year in the Congress in passing the Talented Teacher Act, although, given the federal deficit, I don't know whether any money will be put into it. But I think that type concept should be used in the state as well.

We strongly support the notion of internship programs. Our state organization has had that as part of its program since 1977. Some of our local affiliates go back to about 1960 in supporting the notion of an internship. It just makes a lot of sense.

You know that teaching children in class is not just a question of knowing your subject. If you don't know your subject, you shouldn't be there, but if you know

your subject, you may still not be able to do it. Its a complex set of performance skills, and sending someone into a classroom to teach after taking purely formal education is something like sending someone onto a stage to give a piano concert or to act in a Shakespearian play after they've gotten a Master's Degree in music or a Master's Degree in English Literature.

It's nice to have the musical knowledge or the knowledge of English Literature, but there is absolutely no guarantee that a person who has those degrees, even if they've done well academically, is going to be a good performer. You've got to be a good performer, and the way you learn to perform is to get help from other performers, to watch them perform, and I guess the worst thing that we do with teachers right now is that the first day they walk into school, they've got the full responsibility. It's as though they've been there for 10, 15 years. There is no differentiation, no help that's given.

Many outstanding teachers are lost that way, because the only thing they have

to go on is what they remember their teachers did sometime ago, and the chances are when they were sitting there as students, they were not sitting there analyzing what to take. The better the teacher was, the less they were able to consciously notice the techniques that the teacher was using. It is very important.

Now, one time it was not very -- not a very good investment to invest money in an internship, and essentially, if you have an internship, you've got to say that the beginning teacher does not teach full time, gets a chance to observe and to look and to study, create plans and to try different things for different classes, and it also means that more experienced and outstanding teachers are also given time to work.

So it does cost money. At one time, this was not a good investment, because if you remember back in the 1950s and '60s, the average professional life expectancy of a teacher was about three years. They came and they went. So to hire one of these teachers who would

probably only remain with us for three years and give them one or two or three years of training would have been ridiculous. We would have been wasting most of the time that we get, but now many teachers remain for a full professional career of 25, 30, 35 and 40 years. And I don't know of any field -- you can go into any major corporation in this state or this country -- that employs professional personnel and find that they spend as little as we do on training, on research and on development.

I think most business people who just -- would just laugh at it if we published the figures of what we spend -- what we spend on the overall industry, so to speak, and what we spend on this most important aspect, which is to make sure that people get on the right track in the first place.

Now, I would like to say that, while we're proposing various models of career ladders, and so forth, I would -- and I'll get to those in just a minute. I would like to say that we still have, in parts of the state, and I speak

certainly from experience in New York City, some conditions that are so outrageous that they cry out for action. There are still many, many teachers who have classes with 40, 41, 42, 43, 44 and 45 students in a class.

Now, let's forget about theories about whether class size makes any difference. I think that people who can afford it don't send their children to schools where the child is in a class with 45 students, but just think of yourself as an English teacher or Social Studies teacher or Math teacher, and we all know that you can't learn everything there is to learn in school.

In a good school, one of the attributes is one that does assign home work on a regular basis, and home work isn't usually going to be done by the students unless the students know the teacher is going to mark the home work. The purpose of doing it is not an exercise or practice, but it's a way of coaching the students to be able to write, to be able to organize the

Think of yourself with 40 students in a class and assigning an essay two or three times a week in your English class or your Social Studies class, and let's say that it only takes you five minutes to mark each of the 40 papers. In each of your classes, you have five classes of 40 students. It's impossible. It just can't be done.

Then we wonder why the students can't write. Or the same is true of a math teacher marking a math paper; it's not just looking at the answer. It's looking at how the wrong answers were arrived at so you can perhaps find out what it is that you did that was wrong in your own presentation as a teacher or what it is that you have to sit down and get straight with the student.

Until we address those problems, I think that trying to do something more to motivate the teacher in terms of a career ladder or a teacher who is facing 40 or 45 students a day, with problems like that, I think [illegible] kind of [illegible].

Now, I would like to turn to the general concept of career ladder proposals. I think the first thing to be noted is that, in spite of all the talk about career ladders and some form of merit or reward system, there is as yet no successful model such as this on any large basis in any school system in the United States.

Now, that doesn't mean that we can't ever have one. It doesn't mean it's a wrong idea. It just means, be careful. Don't jump on something. You know, if you were a doctor and there were some disease you were trying to cure and someone came along with a new pill, and there are all sorts of scientific reasons why that pill might work, the chances are you wouldn't try it on a broad scale basis on everyone in the population. You would wait and you would see if it works and see if there were any after effects and try it on several different types of patients, and there is a whole procedure for the introduction of cures in the medical field.

introduction -- similar set of procedures for the introduction of cures for educational ailments. Now, in general, there is no secret. The teachers and their organizations, by and large, have opposed proposals of this sort because they have feared, first of all, that with poor basic salary schedules that the addition of career programs would be a substitute for decent salaries for everybody and that it would be used as a kind of public relations device to say that, "See that Joe over there is getting $50,000," and everybody would forget about all the people getting 14-, 15-, 16- or 17-.

So I think one of the things it's important to do, and I would note that in Tennessee when they adopted a plan similar to Proposal Number One, that that was -- that was done, and it was a very expensive program. The governor of that state devoted all the money in a one-cent statewide sales tax -- which I guess in this state would be about a billion dollars -- a billion dollars was put into that plan, and they

career ladder, and then they made the career ladder very attractive by saying that 25 percent of all teachers in the state would be senior teachers and 25 percent would be master teachers. The senior teachers were to receive 30 -- three-zero -- percent salary increase, and the master teachers a 60 -- six-zero -- percent salary increase, and everyone in the state was to receive the largest salary increase they ever got.

Now, in spite of the fact that that was a very attractive and generous proposal, the dominant teachers' organization in the state opposed it and succeeded in postponing it for a year. There was, in that plan, another attractive feature, and that is that, in it's original natural form, the decisions were not going to be subject to any kind of politics or favoritism. That is they were not going to be made by people on the school side.

They were going to be -- the evaluation was to be done by committees including several teachers and supervisors and people from

the state and the individuals being evaluated were to have a kind of peremptory challenge where, if they knew anybody or had any reason to believe that anybody on the panel was going to be prejudiced, they had a right to say, "I don't want that person." So that they at least took care of a good number of the objections that are usually given that this isn't going to go to the best people; it's going to go to the most politically supportive, or for other reasons.

However, I would like to -- I would like to raise an issue that goes a little beyond that. I, as I indicated at the beginning, have been very positive about the reform issues and the reform proposals that have been emerging across the country. But I think there's one thing that's wrong, and that is that, if you're trying to get and keep good people, bright people, people with initiative, people with a lot of spunk, people who don't have to be teachers because they're good -- they can be a lot of other things, but we'd like them to be teachers [illegible]

what you're aiming at here -- one of the things you've got to be careful about is lots of legislation which essentially tells these people, "Hey, we don't pass pieces of legislation for doctors on their compensation; we don't pass it for lawyers; we don't pass it for dentists, for architects, for actuaries. We don't pass all sorts of reform measures, but we don't trust you folks in education. You people really can't be trusted unless we design everything for you and tell you how to do it."

It's like those things that used to be called teacher-proof materials that they tried to put together in the early '60s, teachers -- you know, foolproof materials. The thing is that we should be getting into something quite different. We should be -- if you want to get the best and brightest and keep them, respect them. Give them some dignity. How do you show respect? How do you treat people with dignity? Give them the power to do something themselves.

Lawyers have bar associations.

[illegible]

judicial review, on criminal code, on all sorts of things. Medical associations have those same things and, as a society, we turn over quite a number of decisions to the internal professional structure of those organizations, because we don't trust all of you to do all the things, and there are times when you go astray and the Legislature has to come in or somebody has to come in, but by and large you show respect for those professions by granting them a substantial amount of self-government.

I'm here to say today that what you -- that if you were to keep the best and the brightest, say, " You don't have to spend your entire lives locked in with a bunch of children. We want you to do that, though; the children need you, but we are going to give you a different life, a life with your colleagues, a life which will help you make decisions, select textbooks, be heavily involved in training," and for the younger people who are coming into the field, I would say that instead of imposing a [illegible]

which will allow -- give teachers, instead of what you've got written throughout this, that this is going to be done by local school boards or superintendents in accordance with guidelines set by the state Commissioner, the teachers out there, the best and the brightest, are going to say the same old thing, "They don't trust us. It's going to be done by the Commissioner or the school boards, and sure, they'll call us in and listen to us for a couple of minutes, but they don't really care what we think. They don't respect us."

There is not another profession in the world where somebody would be imposing this sort of thing on us from above, instead of letting us figure out how to run our own profession.

Thank you.

SENATOR DONOVAN: Thank you, Mr. Shanker.

I gave you double time, because of your importance in the field of education, which we respect, and we appreciate

your candor here this morning, and we are limited in the amount of time we can reserve unto ourselves for questions, because we are running way behind, and we've got 30 speakers to hear from, and we'll be here 'til 10 o'clock tonight if we don't move along. I say that in terms of those who want to carry out a dialogue.

What we are attempting to do, Mr. Shanker, is to meet with the staff and legislators who might want to sit with you a little longer this morning, if you would make yourself available, and they're so disposed, they can embellish on what it is you are saying and, from my personal point of view, I thank you for being here, and I -- if you have proposals in the making, we'd like you to favor our committee with them. If they are in keeping with your testimony, that's even more appropriate. So, publicly, we want to thank the UFT and others for their contributions to education, to the children and the state.

MR. SHANKER: Thank you very

have it.

SENATOR DONOVAN: Yes, I have it. Thank you.

The next speaker is Nathan Quinones, chancellor of the city schools of New York, and I'm going to have to be excused for a minute to go over and sign in to the Senate, being -- mark myself present. So, I'll be right back.

MR. QUINONES: Good morning. And first, I'd like to appologize for getting here later than I was scheduled to arrive, and I think that Senator Donovan was much more successful in getting to New York City last week than I have been in getting to Albany here this morning.

Senator Donovan and other members of the Senate Education Committee: I consider the topic of your hearing today to be absolutely crucial to the future of public education, and I'm, therefore, pleased to have this opportunity to exchange ideas with you.