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PRESENTATION BY ALBERT SHANKER

7

PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION

8

OF TEACHERS BEFORE THE NATIONAL

9

SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION ON APRIL 4,

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2 MR. ALBERT SHANKER: Thank you very much. It's
3 a pleasure to be with you this morning, and to have an oppor-
4 tunity to give what will be a personal view and an organiza-
5 tional view on how we got to certain conclusions in the
6 Carnegie report, and what the context of that report is.

7 Unlike many other reform reports, which can be
8 read as a list of recommendations or items or new regulations,
9 Carnegie's recommendations make no sense unless one first has
10 an in depth picture of what the analysis was that went into it,
11 and then what kind of a vision there is for the future.

12 Now all of us remember how we got here. We went
13 through the '70s, a period of time during which we lost sub-
14 stantial ground; we became less important in a sense in Ameri-
15 can society; parents of children became a smaller percentage of
16 the voting population; SAT scores went down, and the annual
17 Gallup polls indicated that the schools were getting worse and
18 worse marks from the general public each year.

19 Then something very good happened, and that is
20 the reform movement--not totally good; we don't have to agree
21 with all the reports and all the recommendations; many of them
22 were in many ways wrongheaded. But what was right about those
23 reports was that here we had governors and legislators and top
24 business people in this country saying and saying out loud,
25 and I must say, now saying over many years, that we

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2 be interested in rebuilding our factories or rebuilding our
3 bridges and roads; that unless we invest in the human infra-
4 structure of this country, unless we invest in children, all
5 the other investments are not going to amount to very much.

6 Indeed, these people didn't just speak words or
7 write reports. If we look across the country, there indeed has
8 been very substantial economic investment in education over
9 the last four years, and that trend has not stopped.

10 Now, I am sorry to say that in spite of the fact
11 that I have and most of you have supported the thrust of the
12 reform movement; that if one deeply analyzes what is likely to
13 happen as we carry out the reforms that are in place now and
14 the reforms that are envisioned, I'm sorry to say that one
15 cannot really predict that any major or substantial improvements
16 will be brought about as a result of these reforms unless we
17 go beyond this first phase of reform into a second phase.

18 The reforms that have been given to us mostly
19 imposed by state legislatures and sometimes state education
20 departments, are very, very much mechanical; and what they tell us
21 to do is to lengthen the year a little bit, lengthen the day a
22 little bit, have minimum competency tests for teachers, required
23 curriculum, some homework, no automatic promotion, no auto-
24 matic graduation--hard to quarrel with any of these things.

25 But we will in a few minutes. I will t

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2 to an analysis of these issues. I would like to approach the
3 reform question by raising two major issues; one is the teacher
4 issue, the staffing issue, and the second has to do with
5 students.

6 One of the key aspects of this round of reform
7 that we've had is that unlike many earlier rounds of reform
8 there is a recognition in every one of these reports that
9 nothing is going to work unless we have an adequate number of
10 well-trained, highly competent, motivated classroom teachers
11 all across the country.

12 So we have to ask ourselves, what are the pros-
13 pects. And then we have to ask ourselves if, somehow, we
14 should manage to figure out how to do that, how to get a staff
15 of teachers all across the country, good teachers and keep them,
16 but if we maintain the current system in terms of what we
17 require of students, would it work? What would the prospects
18 be?

19 Let me begin with the teacher side of it. By
20 this time, we're aware of the fact that there will be one-half
21 of the nation's teachers leaving within the next six years.
22 1.1 out of 2.2 million will be leaving. It will take 23 per-
23 cent of all the college graduates in this country each and
24 every year for at least the next 11 years and perhaps beyond
25 that in order to maintain the current staffing ratios

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2 without any improvements; 23 percent.

3 We are in a period of time that the colleges are
4 in the baby bust period, and there will be very great compe-
5 tition for talented people from the armed forces, from business,
6 from other professions throughout our society; so they are not
7 just going to be standing out there waiting for us.

8 Now, it's easy to get 23 percent if we're willing
9 to settle for the bottom 23 percent, the bottom 23 percent
10 don't have too many options or alternatives, and as a matter
11 of fact, in many school districts, we are selecting from that
12 bottom 23 percent now. Or if not selecting, at least we're
13 settling for them.

14 Well, what are our prospects? Three years ago
15 when college students were asked, "How many of you want to
16 become teachers?" only 4 percent said they were heading our
17 way--and remember, we need 23 percent. Last year, we were
18 up to 6 percent who said that they wanted to become teachers
19 and I think that there is a more recent poll which brings us
20 up to 8 or 9 percent.

21 Nevertheless, most of the evidence out there
22 indicates that the numbers are insufficient; and secondly,
23 that the largest group within that group who say they want to
24 become teachers, of course there are dedicated and outstanding
25 and bright people just as there have always been, bu'

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2 largest group within that are people who are in the bottom 23
3 percent.

4 What do they look like, that bottom 23 percent?

5 Well, they are the people who come to here in California and
6 take the C best exam, or to Florida and take an exam, or in
7 many other states represented here today; and you know these
8 exams we give teachers today are really a terrible disgrace.
9 The kind of exam that we give to teachers would be the equiva-
10 lent of giving a high school biology examination to somebody
11 who is going to be a doctor.

12 What do we ask of an elementary school teacher?

13 Well, we ask that that teacher be able to get a 65 percent on
14 a sixth grade arithmetic test. Imagine. Well, thank God we've
15 got a standard, right? And that we don't have those who only
16 get 50 percent on a sixth grade test, or 40 or 30.

17 Think of a person who becomes a teacher with a
18 65 percent, and he stands in front of a class, this is a very
19 good class, the kids are getting all the answers right, but
20 the teacher marks every third one wrong because the teacher
21 only gets 65 percent, gets one out of every three wrong; and
22 the kids go home at the end of the year and say to their
23 parents, "I never will understand arithmetic."

24 Or we get situations such as the one we had in
25 one big city where a number of the applicants for teaching were

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clearly shown to be illiterate and yet when September rolled around, the teachers, prospective teachers who had been told that they would not be hired were indeed hired because there just wasn't anybody else around.

So we do have very serious problems in terms of quality and in terms of numbers. Now, a lot of people might say, "Well, why not hire these teachers the same way we always have?" The world is filled with ex-teachers; everyplace I go somebody is always waving at me, whether it's outside Mosconi Center or at the airport or at the hotel: "Hi, Al." I turn around, they say, "Oh, you don't know me. I used to be a teacher." I never meet anybody who used to be a surgeon, but "I used to be a teacher."

So there are lots of people who used to be teachers. Half the world, maybe. Why don't we round up the usual suspects and fill these positions the way we always did? Well, you can't. We got a lot of people into teaching in past years not because they really wanted to become teachers but they were running away from something else. They were running away from the Great Depression of the '30s; many men from the end of World War II until 1975-'76 preferred to fight in Chicago or Brooklyn to Vietnam or Korea. We don't have the draft anymore.

Of course women had no other opportunities until

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2 recently, but if you look at the number of baccalaureates and
3 master's today being awarded in other fields to women and
4 minorities, you see that they are no longer headed our way.
5 So we have got a very serious problem.

6 How do we handle this problem? The usual way of
7 handling it -- let me just add one other thing. No institution
8 can function unless it gets a fair share of the best and
9 brightest people around. You don't need everybody to be the
10 best and brightest; there's no law firm, there's no hospital,
11 there's no architecture/engineering firm, there isn't any
12 institution that's totally made up of everybody who's on top,
13 but every institution needs its fair share of those people,
14 and it needs to put those who are the best and brightest in
15 some sort of relationship with the other good people in the
16 institution; and they shape each other up and they shape the
17 institution up.

18 So if we don't get a fair share of the people
19 who are the best and brightest, we are not going to have
20 schools that amount to very much.

21 When you think of that 23 percent that we need,
22 almost one-quarter of all the college graduates in the country,
23 and think of the fact that we don't want the bottom 23 percent
24 because they're the ones who can't spell and they can't count
25 and they can't read and they can't understand and they can't

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2 think critically and they can't express themselves. Basically
3 they shouldn't be teachers. They are still people who need
4 further education themselves.

5 Well, suppose we decided we would take people
6 just from the top half of college graduates. That might be a
7 reasonable thing to do because after all, college admissions
8 are pretty open in this country where you have a lot of
9 grade inflation. In order to take from the top half, we would
10 need to take into teaching almost one-half of the top half of
11 all the talent in the country.

12 Can this country afford to spare that amount of
13 talent for one institution in our society? Namely, elementary
14 and secondary education. Well, just thinking about it for a
15 second as an indication of how impossible that is, you can't
16 devote all that talent to one institution.

17 So the usual approach is well, how do you
18 attract and retain a substantial number of good teachers?
19 Well, salaries. I am certainly not here to talk against
20 higher salaries for teachers. I've supported them my whole
21 life, I still support them, I still think that that's a major
22 part of the answer. No question about it; and there are many
23 localities where the money is there and they're behind, and
24 they ought to be doing it, and there are many localities that
25 have been doing it.

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2 years of your life? Is it so some kid can do a little bit
3 better on some idiotic multiple choice examination? I hope
4 not. After we graduate school, the chances are we'll never
5 bump into another multiple choice test again, or not very many
6 of them.

7 We're doing it because we want think; we want
8 people who can express themselves. We want people who are able
9 to muster arguments for their point of view, who are able to
10 understand other arguments. You want people who can express
11 themselves, communicate, who can think critically, who can
12 exercise judgement. These are the things that we need.

13 We need them in our economy, we need them in our
14 democracy, and indeed individuals need those things if they
15 want to fully enjoy life. That's what we're about.

16 How do you get students to the point where they
17 can do these things? Well, if you want to get them to think
18 and express themselves, you've got to get them to write, to
19 put their thoughts and expressions on paper. And then you've
20 got to read what they've written, and you've got to mark it,
21 and then you've got to spend five minutes with each student,
22 coaching them. There is no way of expressing to an entire class
23 how to improve thinking or writing. You've got to spend a few
24 minutes with each of them.

25 So if you're in a secondary school and you've

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2 got 30 kids in a class, 5 periods a day, it's 150 students,
3 and if it takes you only 5 minutes to mark a paper and 5
4 minutes to talk to each one of those students, that's 25 hours
5 per set of papers. Nobody's going to do that.

6 As a matter of fact, the National Assessment
7 of Educational Progress tells us that it's not being done, and
8 that students aren't learning how to write and to communicate,
9 because it's just not possible.

10 So how do you solve that problem? All these
11 years where I have said and what you have said and what others
12 have said is well, smaller class size. I just said that we
13 can't find the teachers that we already need merely to main-
14 tain the current class size. How are we going to find more
15 teachers to reduce class size? If at a time when you can't
16 even find the people that you need to maintain the current
17 situation, you go out there and try to get more -- where are
18 you going to get those additional teachers from? Are they
19 going to be from the top of the college list? No. If you
20 are going to get more, you are going to go lower and deeper,
21 and you are going to get people who are dumber.

22 The result is that the tradeoff is going to be
23 that you will have more teachers out there, but you might not
24 want some of them to be anywhere near kids. So you can't
25 do it because they're just not around.

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2 Now once again, some organizations go around
3 saying, "Al Shanker is against raising salaries and he's
4 against lowering class size." No, you may be in a community
5 where you can find more teachers and where you can lower class
6 size. If you can, go ahead and do it.

7 I am saying that on a national basis -- and if
8 we are trying to find 1.1 million teachers and we can't find
9 them now and we've got very low standards of entry, that if
10 instead of 1.1 million we're going to need 1.4 or 1.5 or 1.6
11 or another 2 million, that our standards are going to go very,
12 very low indeed, and that we cannot do it on a national basis.

13 Furthermore, even if you go out and get some of
14 these people, and we are able to find them with additional
15 money or something else, we have got to remember that as we
16 improve salaries and working conditions, so is IBM, so is
17 Hewlett-Packard, so are all the other institutions that need
18 these very same people. It is not a static situation.

19 Now am I saying that we therefore should give up
20 on the idea that we should have a better pupil:teacher ratio
21 or higher salaries? No, I am saying that it can't be accom-
22 plished as long as schools are structured the way they are now
23 structured; and what I'm going to get to eventually is that
24 all of these things can be accomplished if we change the
25 structure of what we are doing. Not that these things are

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2 not worthwhile doing or that they should not be done; rather,
3 that they must be done but they can't be done the way we're
4 organizing education today.

5 Now what's a third thing that's usually talked
6 about in terms of attracting and retaining teachers? Well,
7 the third thing is to give teachers time for professional
8 development; time to talk to other teachers, time to see what
9 other teachers are doing, time to think about what they're
10 doing, time to perhaps engage in some experimentation.

11 We know that we cannot attract and retain very
12 many good people unless they have a life with other human
13 beings; they don't want to be locked in with kids for their
14 entire lives -- and kids will eventually become human beings;
15 that is what education is all about, but they're not there yet.

16 (Laughter.)

17 Other professions, yes. You have a client,
18 you have a patient, but you also have a life with other
19 doctors or other lawyers or other architects or engineers.
20 You're not always with the laymen or with a patient or with
21 a client.

22 Well, once again, how do you accomplish that?
23 Well, you accomplish that by hiring more teachers, so a
24 teacher won't have to teach five periods a day, only teach
25 four or three. Well, again, if you're going to get more

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2 teachers, you're going to go lower, deeper into the talent
3 pool, and you're going to lower standards once more and bring
4 in people who should not be in.

5 Now, even with the class size question; you know
6 it now takes, if you have 30 students per class and five
7 periods a day it takes 25 hours to mark a set of papers.
8 Suppose that miraculously, we were able to reduce class size
9 in half; in other words, instead of 2.2 million teachers in
10 this country we would have 4.4 million teachers, and we would
11 need to bring in about one-half the college graduates in this
12 country to be teachers. It would still take 12.5 hours to
13 mark a set of papers, if you have half the class size you
14 have today--still not something the teachers are going to
15 go home three or four times a week to do.

16 So even if somehow, miraculously the teachers
17 appeared -- "Oh, we found all the money to hire the additional
18 teachers and to give them the higher salaries and to have them
19 teaching fewer hours of school" -- if all of this occurred,
20 it's still not doable within the current structure.

21 Now finally there is one more thing that we need
22 to do if we want to retract and retain talented people; and
23 that is, we've got to treat them differently. When I was
24 growing up as a kid and I would talk to my parents and say,
25 "Why are you going to work?" They would say, "You want to

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2 eat?" "You want a roof over your head?" That's what work
3 was to them; they were exchanging their sweat for money so
4 that we could eat and have a roof over our heads. They
5 dreamt in their thirties. They would have pressed a button
6 if they could have and given up life from 30 to 65 so they
7 could go right on social security. For them, social security
8 was heaven. It meant not going to a dirty, terrible, sweaty
9 job constantly.

10 Most people today don't feel that way. You go
11 out and ask people who work for a living, about 30 percent of
12 them still feel that way; they have dirty, dead end jobs that
13 don't pay very well, and they're still thinking of when they
14 can get out of it, but 7 out of 10 people who work today are
15 working because they get satisfaction from their job. They
16 are respected; they're allowed to exercise judgment; they're
17 allowed to do things their way; they get recognition for it.

18 Therefore we have to think of how can we organ-
19 ize a school in such a way that it's more in accord with the
20 current aspirations of an educated workforce that does not
21 want to work in an old-fashioned factory, constantly being
22 told what to do; but wants to be respected, and respect
23 means being allowed to exercise judgment on their own.

24 Now let's for a moment ask ourselves what would
25 happen if tomorrow we should get all these teachers and there

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2 were no problems. And this happens because a recession takes
3 place as a result of the use of technology and a lot of educa-
4 ted people are thrown out of work and they want to become
5 teachers. Ronald Reagan sits down with Gorbachev and they
6 get rid of nuclear weapons, and that means that we need a
7 much bigger army because our conventional forces are much
8 smaller than the Soviet Union's, and therefore we reinstitute
9 the draft and a lot of people want to become teachers again
10 because of that.

11 And then suppose that women who have become
12 doctors and lawyers and dentists and bank presidents have now
13 said, "Well, now we've shown that we can do it but we'd
14 rather be teachers because it's a nicer lifestyle and we do
15 want to spend a little bit more time with our kids at home
16 and so forth. Suppose all those things happen.

17 Then suppose we were able to do what all these
18 reform reports say: tight curriculum, no automatic promotion,
19 some support from the family at home, no automatic graduation,
20 teachers who are very well qualified; what would schools look
21 like?

22 I'll tell you what they would look like; they
23 would look just like the schools I went to in New York City
24 in 1939, '40, '41, '42, '43, that period of time. We had
25 great teachers; they waited eight years to get jobs during

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2 the Depression. By the time some of them got jobs, they had
3 three or four different degrees, and you had to pass a very,
4 very tough examination, and only those people who scored on
5 top ever made it; and the family was pushing those kids to
6 make it in school, and you had to learn your subjects and you
7 had to do homework.

8 What kind of an education was that? Was it
9 good? Is that what we want? Will it work for this country?
10 Well, I think it's a great education. Look, here I am.

11 However, if you go back to 1940 and take a close
12 look, you'll find that only 20 percent of the students gradua-
13 ted, 80 percent were dropouts. So I suggest to you that if
14 you take, if you go back to that system; we don't have the
15 parental support and family support today that we did in
16 1940 and '41, '42 and during that period. If you go back to
17 a tight system that requires what these reforms would require
18 in a very stiff fashion, the chances are that we will see a
19 fairly substantial increase in the dropout rate.

20 Now what happened after World War II? We
21 started telling kids "Hey, hang around in school. You really
22 need to graduate. You can't get anywhere in this country
23 without a high school diploma. As a matter of fact, we want
24 you to stay so badly that if you hang around long enough and
25 keep breathing, at age 18, we'll give you a diploma, even if

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2 you haven't learned very much.

3 So what has happened? If you look at the
4 scores of the national assessment of educational progress,
5 we are now not dropping out 80 percent of the kids -- by the
6 way, when 80 percent dropped out in 1940 there were no head-
7 lines, because graduating 20 percent from high school was the
8 highest point we had ever reached in students graduating high
9 school, it was a high achievement point.

10 Whereas today we say that 20 percent dropping
11 out or 25 percent dropping out is a national disaster, and
12 indeed it is.

13 But what we see in the national assessment of
14 educational progress results is that while we're keeping 80
15 percent of the kids in school, only about 20 or 25 percent of
16 them can write a decent letter, only about 20 or 25 percent of
17 them can read anything of any difficulty. Only about 26-27
18 percent can do a mathematical problem that involves two steps.
19 In other words, essentially, the kids who used to drop out are
20 learning more.

21 When I was a kid and asked my parents, "What do
22 you mean by illiterate?" They said he can't sign his name.
23 Well, that's no longer our definition of literacy. Our
24 standards of illiteracy have gone up. You have to know more
25 to be illiterate than you used to. So we've done well with

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2 a lot of people but basically, we are still educating only
3 about 20-25 percent of the kids.

4 Now, I took a look at what happens in England,
5 what happens in Germany, what happens in France and Italy and
6 Holland; and as I talked to teachers and educators and other
7 people over there, it's hard to get precise measurements; they
8 don't have the same curriculum, they don't have the same
9 examinations, you can't exactly correlate what happens there,
10 but essentially the number of kids who make it over there in
11 education is about the same; 20 to 25 percent make it and
12 the others go into various other tracks where they are not
13 deemed capable of going on to higher education.

14 Well, isn't that interesting? 20 to 25 percent
15 of the kids make it in the United States and in England and
16 in Germany and in France and Holland, all those places --
17 that should give us a clue that that's the way God makes
18 people -- only 20 to 25 percent of us are smart. And the
19 rest of them, there's not much we can do about it.

20 I'm not ready to buy that. As a matter of fact,
21 this argument is something like the argument that American
22 automobile manufacturers used to make. You would go to them,
23 you'd say: How come you sell all those automobiles and then
24 two years later you recall 150,000; you've got to do them
25 over again? And the American automobile manufacturers would

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2 say, "Well, that's the nature of manufacturing. Why, anytime
3 you make a product, something always goes wrong and then you've
4 got to bring it back and redo it. Anytime you mass produce
5 anything, that's going to happen."

6 Then along came the Japanese, and they decided
7 they would think about it long enough and hard enough, and
8 they would develop a process, and by and large the Japanese
9 now put out automobiles and other products where there's very
10 close to a zero point in the number of defects. It essentially
11 showed that the arguments that we were using about quality
12 control were wrong; that it is possible to develop systems
13 which will make major improvements.

14 Or perhaps another way of thinking about it or
15 looking at it is to ask ourselves, "Are we in the schools
16 doing something like what medicine did for a couple of
17 thousand years?" People went to doctors and they went to
18 hospitals and they hoped to get cured; but in many cases, they
19 were actually injured or in some cases they were killed
20 because for thousands of years doctors and nurses and people
21 in hospitals or places like that didn't realize that you had
22 to wash your hands and sterilize your instruments, and so
23 people who went there were very frequently, instead of being
24 helped, they were actually harmed.

25 Are there things that schools, that all of us do

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2 to kids because of the way we handle them in school that means
3 that millions of them fail? Is it that only 20 or 25 percent
4 of them are smart, or is it that only 20 or 25 percent of them
5 can survive the system that now exists, and if we had a dif-
6 ferent system we might get 35 or 40 or 50 or 60 or 70 to do
7 much, much better than they're doing now; indeed, perhaps to
8 do as well as the 20 to 25 percent who are doing well do today?

9 That is a key question, because that figure of
10 20 to 25 percent is so constant that we need to ask ourselves,
11 What is it that we do to kids in all of these countries that's
12 identical?

13 Well, let's think about it for a minute. All
14 these kids bring the kids in at 5 or 6 or 7 years of age, and
15 the major method of teaching is to get the kids to sit there
16 five to six or seven hours a day, and the major instructional
17 method is chalk and talk. We ask kids to do what I consider
18 to be an unnatural act; and that is to sit and listen for
19 five or six hours at a time. And then we say that those who
20 can't sit or listen for that period of time are disruptive
21 or they're stupid. Why should teachers all across the country
22 go home on Friday to figure out how to give a lesson on how
23 Eskimos live or how Indians live or how the Grand Canyon was
24 formed or what the Founding Fathers to each other before they
25 signed on when there are audio tapes, video tapes, all sorts

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of other materials that are much more interesting than a lecture, or at least they're different, so that kids who don't respond to a lecture could learn them that way.

We bring these kids all into the first grade and we put them all in seats, and the teacher talks to all of them and expects them all to understand, and we give them the same questions and the same materials to work on -- what are we saying to all those six year olds? We are saying to them all, "You're six years old, you're in the first grade, you're all expected to do the same thing because you're really all equal; you're the same."

Now, are they really equal and are they really all the same? Well, we only take them in once a year, and their birthdays are all over the place, so when you've got a class of kids in that first grade, you know that the oldest kid in that class is one year older than the youngest kid in class. Does one year make any difference at the age of six? It makes a tremendous difference.

What does research tell us? What has it told us for a long time? It has told us that the oldest kids in the class are most likely to succeed, and that sticks with them all through their lives. Then if you look at dropouts, if you look at kids who are failing later -- even, if you take a kid with a much lower IQ who is the oldest kid in the

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2 class, and the kid with a higher IQ is the youngest kid in
3 the class, the chances are that the kid who's the youngest
4 kid will find out that he's weak and he's slow and he's dumb,
5 because he is engaged in unfair competition. But a six year
6 old doesn't understand.

7 After all, we are the adults, we put them all
8 in the same room. We're asking them all the same questions.
9 We are compelling them to engage in unfair competition, and
10 we are permanently injuring the younger kid who decides that
11 he's stupid and he can't make it.

12 What do we do? I start asking the kids ques-
13 tions, and some of the kids, oh, their hands are always up
14 and they know the answer to almost every question. Those
15 kids get such great joy out of school. They would come
16 Saturdays, Sundays, holidays -- boy, is it a terrific place
17 for them. "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest
18 of us all?" They are.

19 But then I call on the other kids. I can't
20 just call on the ones who are always raising their hands,
21 I've got to get participation from everybody. And there are
22 four or five or six kids in the class. Every time I call on
23 them, boy, it really proves that there's always been prayer
24 in the schools -- they are praying that they're not called on.

25 (Laughter.)

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2 But from time to time, their prayers are not
3 answered, and I do call on them, and that kid stands and gets
4 very red in the face, and is either absolutely quiet or says,
5 "I'm sorry, I don't know and I don't understand it," or some-
6 times blurt out some sort of a wild guess, which usually turns
7 out to be a ridiculous response.

8 And I call on him today, and tomorrow I'll call
9 on him again, and maybe some day I'll call on that kid twice,
10 and it's not just one kid; it's four or five or six in the
11 class. What are we doing to a kid when we call on him every
12 day to be seen by 20 or 25 or 30 of his friends and peers and
13 every day he strikes out? How would you feel? Have you ever
14 been in a place where that happened to you? Sure, we all
15 have.

16 Years ago some friends took me out and they
17 said, "Al, today you're going to learn how to play tennis."
18 And I took the ball and I missed the first and I missed the
19 second and a third off into a lake and a fourth into a swamp,
20 and after I went through I don't know how many of them, I
21 decided something. I decided this is not my game. And I have
22 never, ever again played tennis or taken any interest in it.
23 It represents a very bad memory, and I assume that in front of
24 me sit many people who have some memory like that; not of
25 tennis but of something.

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2 Each one of us has been in a situation where
3 we tried -- and especially if others are watching. Probably
4 if I were out there alone trying to do it, I would have tried
5 longer and harder. It's a lot more difficult when your friends
6 are watching you.

7 So I've got to ask questions. Is there a way
8 of organizing a school so the kids don't have to sit all day
9 long and listen? Is there a way of organizing a school so
10 that there's a choice of different ways of learning, not just
11 lecture, but videotape, audio tape, peer instruction, textbooks,
12 games, all sorts of ways; not just one way so that we're not
13 just saying the only kids who are capable of learning are
14 kids who are capable of listening or learning from a blackboard.
15 A lot of different ways of learning and we're not going to say
16 that you're stupid or that you can't learn, if that's not the
17 way you learn, if there's another way.

18 Is there a way of organizing the school so you
19 don't all have to come in at the same time and do the same
20 thing? Why do they all have to come in on that same day in
21 September and August? Well, that's when the teacher starts
22 talking. You know, if somebody comes in a few months later,
23 it's like coming in at the end of the movie. You may not know
24 what's going on.

25 Is there a way of organizing it so those kids

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2 can come in at a different time and not come in in the middle
3 of the movie? Is there a way of getting kids to learn in
4 relative privacy so that if they don't have the answer or if
5 they're a little slower, if they're not quite up to the other
6 kids so they're not embarrassed, so that they're not humiliated?

7 That's what we're doing. We don't intend to
8 humiliate kids. If someone were to ask us as school board
9 members or as teachers, as educators, if one were to state
10 the general proposition that one of the best ways of getting
11 kids to learn is to humiliate them in front of their peers,
12 I don't think I would have a single person saying that's
13 right.

14 But nevertheless, the way we're organized,
15 that's the way we do it. And then you take some older kids;
16 kid comes in to high school, it's the beginning of the semester,
17 beginning of the year, and he asks the teacher, "When's the
18 final mark in? When are the final exams?" Teacher says
19 next June. Well, this is September. If I were that student
20 and this is September and the final day of reckoning is next
21 June, I'm no compulsive, I'm not going to do my homework that
22 night. How many of us would sit down and do something tonight
23 if we know we have nine months to do it? Very, very few.

24 It takes a tremendous amount of character, to
25 be developed over a long period of time, to realize that what

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you do each and every day accumulates at some distant point. Some people never get it. So what happens, a lot of these kids don't work the first day, they don't work the second; maybe they're even absent the third day, and the middle of October comes, and now they're hopelessly behind.

What's the rational thing to do if you're hopelessly behind and you know that there's no way of catching up? Well, you either stay and you're humiliated each and every day for the rest of the year, or you drop out. And if you drop out, when can you drop back in again? In most of our school systems, you can't drop back in again until next September. What are the chances that you will come back after having almost a year of freedom? And come back to a school where you're going to be put with a bunch of kids who are a year younger than you are after you've been told all your life that they are the babies and you've got to be with your group.

Well, we know what the answer to that is. Are there other ways of organizing schools? Well, there sure are.

I had an experience with my youngest son, who graduated high school but he didn't like school and decided not to go on to college, but he went to work in a restaurant. Started as a dishwasher, then made salads, then made soups,

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2 and then finally, after working for about a year and a half,
3 he came to me and he said, "Dad, I've decided on what I want
4 to do." I looked at him. He said, "I want to go into the
5 CIA."

6

7 So that was kind of shocking, and I looked at
8 him, I was speechless. He says, "No, it's not what you
9 think. I want to go to the Culinary Institute of America.
10 I want to become a chef." Well, he went there, and I wanted
11 to visit him two weeks after he got there because I felt that
12 he might be shocked. He thought it was a place where you
13 made souffles, and actually it's a place where you learned
14 about nutrition and profit and loss statements and how to
15 sign contracts with vendors and a lot of academic work in it,
16 and I thought maybe he'd get turned off.

17

18 So I called him up and said, "Can I come up
19 and have dinner with you tonight?" He said no. I said, "Why
20 not?" He said, "Well, I've got to study tonight." I said,
21 "You've only been there for two weeks." He said, "You don't
22 understand. Semesters here are three weeks long."

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24 Well, that concentrates the mind. Anybody who
25 is 10 minutes late from class has missed a major part of the
semester.

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(Laughter.)

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But it's got other advantages. You get some

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2 of these kids like kids in other places, they decide they've
3 met the person they love, and they're running off to Fort
4 Lauderdale, forever. And four weeks later, forever turned
5 out to be pretty short. A school that has three week semes-
6 ters you can drop out at any time, but you can drop back in
7 every three weeks.

8 Not only that, if you flunk a course, looks
9 what happens to all of us? That problem of what happens to
10 a kid who hasn't made it? We've got two choices, don't we?
11 We can promote them automatically; that's ridiculous, or we
12 can leave them back for a whole year, after -- what that does.
13 But if the semesters are three weeks long, flunking a course
14 means you only have to take three weeks over. Lot easier.
15 Doesn't present us with the same problem.

16 Well, what is it that we are talking about here?
17 We need to think of a school that is radically different. If
18 the automobile industry, which was so great all these years
19 and now is about to go out of business. Why? For years we
20 had great automobiles starting with the old Model Ts and
21 before that with Henry Ford, up until recently. But if we
22 keep doing the same thing in the automobile industry today
23 we won't have one. There won't be an automobile made in the
24 United States of America four years from now unless we make
25 major changes; not minor changes, not a difference in tail

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2 fins or a new stereo set or the paint colors or something
3 like that.

4 The Japanese are putting out a much better car
5 and they are manufacturing it in a totally different way. And
6 if we aren't able to totally revolutionize the auto industry,
7 we're finished in that. I submit to you that we have to
8 engage in the same type of thinking about schools. We've got
9 to ask, is it possible to organize a school in such a way that
10 some teachers, not all, could make \$75,000 or \$100,000. Is it
11 possible to organize schools in such a way so that teachers
12 do have the time to individually work with students and coach
13 them on writing and expression and critical thinking? Is it
14 possible to organize a school in such a way so that teachers
15 have the time to think about what they're doing, and to
16 develop new materials, to evaluate materials, to work with
17 their colleagues in terms of a collegial relationship.

18 Is it possible to organize such a school that
19 each and every teacher feels a part of a team and a piece of
20 the action in the same way that workers in a Japanese auto
21 plant feel that they are the inspectors and the creators of
22 the automobile and not in the way in which typical American
23 workers are in an American automobile plant? And is it pos-
24 sible to create a school which for students doesn't mean they
25 have to engage in unfair competition, provides them with

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privacy and provides them with a choice of different ways of learning and different adults to relate to?

That's another thing we do; we put a kid in a class with a teacher for a whole year. Sometimes people just don't like each other. There may be no rational basis. But when a kid and a teacher are locked together for a whole year and they don't like each other, there's a lot that happens in terms of the ability to teach or the ability to learn.

Such a school can be put together. We can have schools where students work with computers, videotapes, audio tapes, peer tutoring, individual counseling with individual tutoring with teachers, simulation games, books and other materials; and yes, there might even be a few lectures in the school for kids who can learn that way and for teachers who are good at lecturing.

And the adults would be working in a team; no self-contained classroom, but a teacher who is the head of a team. How do you select that teacher? On the basis of leadership ability and on the basis of national certification by a national board of professional teaching standards that says that this person really knows something.

Here I want to spend a minute or two saying that there is no answer to the problems of education unless we end the anti-intellectualism which is so pervasive in our

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2 field. You ask teachers, "Well, can you ever have some people
3 who are going to be called by one title and others by another
4 and some differentiation in pay and staff level?" "Oh, no,
5 it's too subjective. You can never tell."

6 You go to a principal and say, well, why does
7 this teacher do so and so? "Oh, it's all a matter of opinion
8 and all a matter of individual style." A parent comes and
9 complains to school board members, the same thing. We really
10 don't know very much about these things, and so different
11 people do it different ways.

12 I have never before seen any institution in
13 which so much money is spent where people think that they're
14 really defending the institution by telling the public that
15 they don't know a damn thing. Ignorance doesn't protect us.

16 Any institution, if it wants the public to have
17 confidence and faith and investment must say that "We're doing
18 certain things because we know what we're doing." Take a
19 recent question on the national teacher's examination -- this
20 is the so-called professional part of the examination. What's
21 the question: An angry parent walks into your classroom and
22 objects to a textbook that's being used. Which of the
23 following ways is the proper way to handle this? A) Blame
24 the school board. B) Say the principal bought the books.
25 C) Stand on your constitutional rights and refuse to talk to

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2 the parent. Or D) ask the parent if she has a better textbook
3 to suggest.

4 Now, notice that not one single answer assumes
5 that some intelligent person has analyzed and evaluated the
6 textbooks and picked one for a good reason, which could be
7 shared with the parent. They all assume political answers.
8 Do you want to get in trouble by blaming the school board?
9 Do you want to get in trouble by blaming the principal?
10 Do you want to get in trouble by being arrogant and not answer-
11 ing the parent? No.

12 The important thing is, "get her off your back
13 by saying, 'What do you have to suggest?'" That's the right
14 answer.

15 Imagine going back to a doctor after some
16 medicine you've gotten has had a bad reaction and you tell
17 the doctor that instead of curing you, you got a rash and the
18 doctor says to you, "And what medicine would you like me to
19 give you?"

20 (Laughter.)

21 The height of anti-intellectualism and non-
22 professionalism. So the purpose of this National Board, the
23 purpose of the assessments that are being worked on now is to
24 have the profession certify people who know what they're doing,
25 who know the research, who know how to evaluate books and

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2 materials and how to think about students; and you will have
3 a team of adults with a few people like that, and then you
4 will have some teachers who are licensed but who are not yet
5 nationally certified. You will have a paraprofessional or
6 two on it. You can even have some volunteers who have got
7 knowledge in certain areas but not in others, because the way
8 schools are now constructed as a self-contained classroom,
9 any outsider is an intruder in a self-contained classroom.

10 I'm giving my lecture to the kids and I don't
11 need any other adult there, but if you're not lecturing and
12 if you've got students individually working, learning in
13 different ways and learning at their own rates and learning
14 with some privacy, then all the members of this team can do
15 something.

16 Now since they are not spending all their time
17 lecturing they've now got time to evaluate materials; they've
18 got time to advise students as to what is a better road to
19 get a certain type of knowledge. They have time to individu-
20 ally mark papers and to coach and to deal with expression and
21 to deal with critical thinking.

22 Now this is the kind of institution that we need
23 to develop. Will it be easy? No. But if General Motors can
24 try to develop a Saturn project where teams of blue collar
25 workers are doing this, then we can. There are steel plants

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where this is happening.

We talk about empowerment of groups. I'm not saying that we should empower people to do -- the only empowerment that exists is on the basis of knowledge, as I've just indicated. Power should be given to those people who know how to do it.

Now if we had teams like that, teams with an outstanding one or two people at the head of each team, you wouldn't need the tremendous number of people that you have watching all the teachers who are there now. You know the system we've got right now is very simple: You hire a lot of people at very low salaries and very poor conditions. You know what happens when you hire people for low salaries? I know what happens if I hire people for a low salary. I then hire somebody else to watch them, because I don't trust anybody who would work for that kind of money and under those conditions.

So instead of hiring somebody that we trust in the first place, we hire somebody that we don't trust and then we add the money onto the inspectorial system.

Now in this new system, of course you are going to have a lot of people who are now assistant principals and administrators, supervisors, but they won't be watching teachers down there; they will in the future be the heads of teams,

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2 working with students and with other adults. They'll be
3 working up front with the entire group.

4 Now let me say to you that this is starting to
5 happen. I will share with you the fact that somebody called
6 me just two weeks ago and said, "I want to tell you about
7 something that's going to happen." He said, "I represent a
8 bunch of America's major corporations. We are about to start
9 a school in one of America's biggest cities, and the companies
10 are going to pay for it, so in a sense, it's going to be a
11 private school, but in all other respects it is going to be a
12 public school."

13 "We are going to put that school smack in the
14 middle of a typical neighborhood in this city, which means
15 that all the kids are going to be black and Hispanic. We are
16 going to spend exactly the same amount per pupil that that
17 city spends on its pupils; but we are going to organize that
18 school in a totally different way. We are going to organize
19 it the way you have been talking and writing, Mr. Shanker,
20 and a few other people that we have been talking to; the
21 teachers are going to be able to earn much higher salaries
22 because we're not going to have this whole administrative
23 overhead and we're not going to have all these bureaucratic
24 regulations that come from everywhere, because it's a private
25 school, and we're going to have a principal or headmaster and

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2 we're going to have a faculty, and collectively they are going
3 to design everything that they do in that school. We're not
4 going to hand it to them; we're going to give them a lot of
5 ideas. And we're coming to you because we'd like you to
6 help out."

7 That is an exciting prospect. You know in the
8 1930s we had a government agency, the TVA, as the yardstick
9 for private utilities. Now I think in city after city,
10 private companies are going to set up schools; they are going
11 to take the same kids who are in that neighborhood, tuition
12 is going to be free; they are going to pick the kids at
13 random so that there's no favorable selection or creaming
14 process; and we are going to cooperate.

15 I hope that across America that those of us in
16 public education don't wait for the private sector to do this.
17 In every state and districts across the country, why don't
18 we as school board members, as teachers, as administrators,
19 why don't we say that if General Motors can do a Saturn pro-
20 ject, if companies in our country can radically alter and
21 restructure their institution in order to meet the competition
22 that exists in the world today, that we in education have the
23 intelligence and we've got the vision, and we have the guts
24 to sit down and somewhere in our system create a project
25 which will rethink from the very beginning every single thing

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2 that we do in our schools and do it over again, and do it
3 much better.

4 Why can't we do that? I believe that we can.

5 (Applause.)

6 I would like to conclude by suggesting that
7 what's at stake is very important. The business community,
8 governors and legislators, have invested a lot. They've
9 invested their political reputation as well as money in the
10 last few years.

11 If a few years from now, instead of a better
12 school system we end up with one that's worse because in
13 spite of the money and the rules and regulations and reforms
14 we end up with teachers who are less qualified than the ones
15 we have now and who will be leaving, and if we get a higher
16 dropout rate and more problems, those very same political
17 forces are going to turn on us and they are going to say
18 "The public schools are hopeless. The school boards are too
19 political. Administration is inept. The teacher's unions
20 are too powerful and too rigid." They'll have enough blame
21 for all of us, and the next thing they will do, the backlash
22 that will come from this: after all they've done for us,
23 after all the commitment, after the additional money, after
24 trying to help, after putting us on front page all of this
25 time, if things get worse instead of getting better, they are

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2 going to say "The only answer is to break up this huge public
3 school monopoly, and let's have tuition tax credits and let's
4 have vouchers and let's have private schools."

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6 Now I need not say before this audience that
7 what's at stake is not just public education. What's at
8 stake in public education in this country is the future of
9 the country. Private schools will mean Jewish schools,
10 Protestant schools, Catholic schools, black, Hispanic, white,
11 Klu Klux Klan, Mr. Farrakhan, schools in different languages,
12 and the schools which really hold our country together by
13 giving youngsters a rich experience of being with others of
14 different races and religions and cultures, could become a
15 separate set of school systems for different groups; and not
16 only will public education be at its end, but our country
17 will face the kinds of problems that other countries face
18 when different peoples live with each other but do not have
19 the common experience of learning how to live with each other
before they do.

20

21 I hope that this vision is one which you can
22 share. If you don't like the answer but if you accept the
23 problems I have put before you; that basically in all these
24 countries that kids don't learn in the system; and that there
25 is no way of having 2.2 million people of the level that we
want. There's no way of doing it the way we've been doing it.

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If you don't like my answer, think about it and come up with some answers of your own, and let me know about them. I would be very interested.

I hope in the year or two to come that all across the country you and we will be able to establish partnerships to build a new and better public school system in America. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

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