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I can't think of a time in the recent history of American education when we have had such grounds for solid optimism. Beyond the immediate context that Lou Harris described, I think that the grounds for optimism are based largely on the fact that for the first time there is this very basic and radical reconsideration of what the public schools are like and what they might be.

I know that public school people are sometimes, and I would say usually, rather defensive about any criticism or attacks -- and I'm no different from the others in that respect. But at least in the last few years, and certainly underlined and in bold in the Carnegie report, we are essentially saying that we have a system that has basically not changed for a couple of hundred years; that there is a conflict within that system between two basic purposes -- the educational and the custodial; that whenever there is that conflict between the two, the custodial wins out and the educational loses; that the process of schooling has not been thought out for a long time, if indeed it ever was; and that if somehow we had never had schools in this country, if we had been a poor Fifth World country and had somehow discovered some great wealth recently, and we were here as a committee trying

to design an institution to educate our children, and someone proposed that we bring them all in the same day and have them sit still and be quiet and listen to somebody for a certain number of hours, and have them then at the end of the year answer certain little tests by responding one, two, three, or four, or A, B, C, or D, that about two minutes into the description of the institution that we were about to create someone would probably say, "I don't know of any kids who would sit still that long," and somebody else would say, "I don't know of any adults who would want to be locked in a room with them all day." There would be all kinds of objections, and we would find some other way to do it.

Now, it's also very quickly dawning on us that, yes, we have a very great and special problem in terms of the ineffectiveness of the schools, in terms of minority achievement. But that isn't the only problem we have. We'd be kidding ourselves if we say that is the only problem and, all right, we'll work away only at that.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress tells us that even if we forget about the 20 to 30 percent who have dropped out, of the 17-year-olds who are still in high school and about to graduate, under 5 percent can read anything that has any technical material in it and can understand an airline or a bus or a railroad timetable. These are the 17-year-olds still in school. And of the 17-year-olds still in school, only 20 percent

could write a letter to a prospective employer showing any critical thinking or reasoning in stating to the employer what previous experiences they have had which would qualify them for the job. And only about 25 percent could do a simple mathematical problem which requires more than one step.

Is there anybody who really thinks that just getting a teacher who is a little better or a textbook that is a little better or adding a few minutes on to the school day, or hours on to the school year, will move those numbers substantially?

So we start -- the optimism is that we have finally understood that we are now only reaching 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 percent of the students. And the dropout problem, or those who have left us, is not the only dropout problem that we have. We don't count as dropouts those who come in every month, once a month. They are still registered. We don't count those who only come in the morning to be marked present and then disappear. And we don't mark the millions who sit there and don't listen and don't do anything. And somehow we end up with a system of priorities that says the first thing we are going to do is the hardest: we are going to go find the one who has run away instead of dealing with the one who comes to school and is sitting there but we don't know how to reach him.

Well, by thinking these things and by realizing that we are not just dealing with marginal problems or bits of

incremental change but with the structure, the overall structure of an institution that needs to be re-thought -- when you reach that, that is a major ground for optimism. Because then there is a chance of doing something precisely because we have stopped thinking in incremental terms and in terms of making minor improvements in a system that essentially doesn't work.

By the way, there is something that we can learn from the Japanese system. The Japanese system really takes care of all the problems that we talk about in this country; that is, they have got parents who care and work away at their kids from birth, or even before. They have a competitive system to get into nursery schools and into schools that prepare you for nursery schools. And they've got a required curriculum which is taught all across the country. And they've got not only parental pressure and societal pressure, but the peer pressure is all to perform in school. All the other kids are putting the pressure on the others in their classrooms to do it. You have all those things going for you, and you do get a much higher average; you do get much higher math scores and so forth.

But there are two things wrong with it for us. One is, we are not Japanese and we are not going to do it that way. But the other thing is, would we really want it if we could? If you walk into a high school class in Japan, yes, they read and they count, and you don't have

illiteracy and you don't have much in the way of dropouts. But has anybody walked into a class in Japan and tried to start a discussion about any issue or problem?

We ought to look at the Japanese reform reports and realize that they are striving to get some creativity and some thinking and some ability to judge and evaluate [into their system.] (Their system is not as perfect as some would have us believe.) And then, of course, in that system the kids have been pushed so far through elementary and high school and are so torn up that they waste their four years of college and they don't get anything done there.

But essentially the Japanese system tells us what we would do if we could solve all of our problems and continue doing things the way we have always done them -- and it tells us we don't really want to do it that way.

Now, what is it that we need to look at for the future? First, a word of warning: and that is that we have accomplished a great deal in setting a stage and developing a number of understandings about the nature of the problem in launching the board. I think it would be terrible, however, if we underestimated the resistance [to this effort] and if we didn't think that this year, next year, the following year, and the one after that, that groups that maybe didn't like the idea of a board in the first place, or certification, will strive to make

the certification as meaningless as possible or try to adapt it and adjust it to maintain the current system.

That could be done easily. The board could be made into a little technical blip that is out there. But those of us who were on the task force viewed this as a major leverage point for bringing about change in the schools, a way of bringing acceptability and credibility -- an acceptable intellectual basis -- for the career ladder, and a way of getting around the political problems that existed before: a way of transforming schools, not merely a way of labeling different categories of people. And we've got to be very careful that it not be turned into just a ladder -- that 10 or 15 or 20 years from now we have exactly the same system except that a certain number of people in it walk around with a slightly different certificate.

So, I'd like to conclude with several points. One is that we view this not as anything other than a point of leverage designed to bring about major and radical changes within the school system. Otherwise, the board isn't worth it and the certification system isn't worth it.

Second, I'd like to touch on a point suggested yesterday when Claire Pelton talked about "Waiting for Godot." I think we are now in the middle of a game called "Waiting for Carnegie." Everyplace I go you have a lot of people sitting around waiting to hear about the

board, and after they understand it a little bit they say, "When is Carnegie going to do it?" It reminds me of the days when collective bargaining just came in, when teachers felt that when collective bargaining comes, some metaphysical object will fall from the universe and take care of everything for them. That is what it meant for them. It was kind of a Messianic view of what was about to happen.

It seems very important that we communicate the message that, like collective bargaining, and indeed like democratic processes, that what we are putting out there in the form of a permanent institution is more of a do-it-yourself kit than a permanent answer or a structure. Therefore, it was very nice to have here people like Pat Tornillo and people in the audience from a number of places -- Rochester and Cincinnati and other places -- that aren't waiting for Carnegie to come and do it. They understand that the board and its aims will in the future give greater legitimacy that will enable us to do things in a more accurate way and justify these things in a better way. But the things that we are trying to get at can be done now, and indeed need to be done now. And it would be a terrible thing if the country waited five years for this assessment, seven years for another one, and X years for something else in order to do something. We would be doing precisely the opposite; we would be doing nothing. Just listen to Debbie Meier's

analysis of what has been going on in her school and what she's done -- all without "Waiting for Carnegie."

It seems to me that we need to multiply that. Instead of waiting for Carnegie, we need to say that Carnegie means start now and later there will be developments as a result of what we are doing that will enable you to do what you're starting now better. We are starting on a parallel line. You can begin now with a sort of seat-of-the-pants approach because you know that if you make a few errors now, there will be tools coming which will enable you to do it better later on. But don't wait.

I was therefore also very much impressed with and encouraged by what Superintendent Tirozzi started, and that is the development of an assessment program. It may be far short of the program that we hope we'll end up with years from now. But this is not going to be a single assessment which will be developed and in place for a time -- the Bar exam today isn't what it was 20 years ago, and there are no medical exams today that are what they were 10 or 20 or 30 years ago (and they will be different years from now). We are talking about a process and not a product that we are coming up with.

The collaboration and cooperation started in Connecticut. They have already developed some very impressive assessment tools. Perfect? Of course not. Better than anything we have up to now? Yes. Can we

start using them tomorrow and not wait for what we are doing here? Sure, and we should.

There are two parts to the Carnegie report, and the optimism that we can leave here with stems not from the fattest part of it which deals with a lot of specifics. Many other reform reports were accurately summarized in the press because they really consisted of a bunch of simple things like lengthen the day and test the teachers and give the kids this, and do that. When you finished with that laundry list, you had it all.

But at the very beginning of A Nation Prepared, there was something that some people skipped. If they skipped it, they didn't understand the rest of it. And that was a vision. And the vision was one of a school totally different from the one we have today; an institution that understands more about the nature of children and how they learn, more about the nature of adults and what their role is; a vision of an institution with different kinds of adults, and not standard materials or standard products; and a vision of an institution where there were goals that were common for everyone but many roads leading to those goals -- it gave lots of people choices; indeed, an institution that was not only much more effective but simultaneously much more humane for both the adults and the children within that institution.

Our optimism is warranted, if we concentrate not on the techniques and the technology and the certificates

and the boards, but on the vision. I must say that over this last year, working with the board, we could have gone astray, we could have narrowly defined a lot of issues. I can say that as a result of this year's experience and under the great leadership of Jim Hunt and with Marc and David Mandel and all the members of the board -- I can tell those who have worried about different interest groups that one of the most wonderful things about this board is that if you come in from the outside and you listen to the discussions, you can't tell what the affiliations of people are, where they came from. They are people thinking about a problem and moving toward a common goal. If we can keep that, we will do very well, indeed. [Applause]

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