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REMARKS OF ALBERT SHANKER
TO THE
CALIFORNIA COMMISSION ON TEACHER CREDENTIALING

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Thank you very much. I'm very happy to have this opportunity to share some ideas with you on the task that you're trying to accomplish.

Before I get into some specifics, I think it's extremely important, essential, that there be a proper setting for the questions. For the most part, issues dealing with licensing, certification, credentialing and various accountability measures all assume an acceptance of the current system of schooling, the current structure, for both students and teachers, and they're essentially efforts to either slightly improve or perhaps to standardize in some ways things that we're already doing, systems that are already in place. That would be all right if we had a system that was working pretty well, if we had schools in which 65, 75, 85 percent of our students were moving up to the standards that we believe are reasonable and that we have set for them. Then to say that you could probably move from 65 or 75 or 85 percent to something that's closer to where we'd want to be by slightly tightening up and slightly improving the system we have would be a reasonable approach.

On the other hand, if we have a system in which the success rate is more like 5, 10, 15 or 20 percent, to put into place a series of structures that would merely slightly modify what happens now would be a terrible thing to do because a system in

which we're succeeding with only 5 to 20 or 25 percent of the students would need a radical overhaul. And to put into place something which essentially reinforces the current system rather than something which radically transforms it would be very counterproductive.

So the first question we really need to ask before we get into the questions that are before you is, are we by and large succeeding or are we by and large failing? Now this is a tough issue for most of us to deal with because we're all sensitive to attacks against public schools and against teachers, and in a way the answer to that question is a dual answer. We are doing much better with many more students and types of students than we ever did before in our history. So that's the good news. The bad news is that from the point of view of where we need to be and in any reasonable standards, we're failing terribly.

What are the signs of failure? Well, I won't go into all the various types of exam scores where you have to know the difference between a 334 and a 509 and this and that. Those scores don't mean much to most people, except we know it's good when they go up and it's bad when they go down. But, fortunately, we do have some extremely valuable information that comes to us from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and I hope that soon legislation will pass which will give us similar indicators on a state-by-state basis and even on a local basis.

Let's take a look at a few of the key indicators which will answer for us the question as to whether we need reform or whether we need something that's essentially revolutionary and transformational. Let's take the issue of literacy. The good

news is that everybody can read an exit sign or a stop sign. Practically everybody can read a simple comic book or can open a box and follow very simple instructions or read a very simple newspaper. When we get to the point where we ask 17-1/2-year-old students -- mind you, we're only testing those 17-1/2-year-olds who are still in high school and are about to graduate, so we've already lost 20 to 25 percent of those who have dropped out and whose performance is probably not as good as those who remain -- we have a favorable selection here so the news ought to be pretty good, but it isn't -- only 37 percent of the students remaining can read any nationally-syndicated columnist in a good newspaper and understand what that person is saying. And when you get to how many can read an airline timetable or bus schedule or train schedule -- you might say that's not important because all you have to do is pick up the phone and ask what time the plane leaves. But that means you can't open up a world almanac and understand the population trends; you know, you can't understand the chart which has a heading and some words at the bottom or along the side; you can't look at that and make sense of it, a very important skill. It's 4.9 percent of the kids who are still in high school at 17-1/2 years of age who were able to understand that -- 4.9 percent!

Now let's move over to writing. The most difficult writing sample that was assigned to youngsters was to ask them to write a letter to a prospective employer -- 17-1/2-year-old students. They were not tough on the grammar and they weren't tough on the spelling; you could make a substantial number of mistakes and the letter could still be considered satisfactory. What they

were really looking for was to see whether the student could connect, that is, could he figure out what the employer wanted; that he wanted somebody who would come to work on time and be reliable; that he wanted somebody who could handle money -- you know, two or three or four things. Could he be persuasive? Could that person muster some evidence in defense of the proposition that he ought to get the job? What percentage of youngsters still in school and about to graduate could do that? Well, 20 percent.

The percentage of youngsters who could do simple mathematical problems that require two steps is under 30 percent. No difficult numbers, just the idea that first you multiply and then you subtract or something like that.

Does anybody in his right mind really believe that by slightly modifying licensing or credentialing standards, that by getting a slightly better system of teacher training, that by getting a slightly better textbook, that by lengthening the school day an hour, that by lengthening the school year a few weeks, by doing all the mechanical things, by putting in some form of merit reward -- take the whole laundry list of things that have been proposed in the last five years as reforms -- does anybody believe that if we were to put all these reforms into place that we'd be able to move from 4.9 percent or 20 percent or 37 percent up to 65 percent, 70 percent, 80 or 85 percent? Well, if you believe that, I have a little experiment for you.

We once had schools like that, that is, we had schools with really outstanding teachers in terms of academic standards. The schools were able to select from a large number of outstanding applicants. Parents pressed students to do homework, and they

got plenty of homework. There was a core curriculum made up of materials that had cultural value. You had no automatic promotion. You had all these things going on. Well, what was that? It was the public school system of the Thirties and Forties.

We had everybody waiting in line from the Great Depression of the Thirties. Some people waited eight or nine years to get teacher positions. Some of these people had law degrees; some of them had one or two doctorates. They had nothing to do during the Depression except stay in school -- there wasn't anyplace to work -- and wait until they got either a teaching job or some other job in the Civil Service. So we had good teachers, family support, a good core curriculum, tough standards, everything else.

What were the results? The results were excellent; here I am. [Laughter] But how many of us graduated in 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943? Well, about 20 percent of the kids graduated in 1940. The first year in which the majority of students graduated high school in this country was 1953.

So essentially what we've had in this country is kind of a pendulum swing. First you had a tough school system with standards, with outstanding teachers, with parental support, with everything else, and we educated about 20 percent of the kids. Then, after the war, we kind of all whispered to the kids, "Stay in school. It's very important." And we essentially gave them incentives to stay in school. We kind of whispered to them in all sorts of different ways that if you stay until you're 18 years old and just breathe, even if you haven't learned anything, we'll give you a diploma. So 80 percent of them stayed. But according to

these figures still only about 20 percent of them were learning.

Now it's true that those who used to drop out, if they stay longer, are learning more than if they would have dropped out. There's no doubt in my mind about that. Unfortunately, we don't really have good comparative figures but we're not getting large numbers of students up to what we ought to consider minimum standards.

I wasn't talking about writing Shakespearean plays; I was talking about writing a decent letter to a prospective employer. I wasn't talking about complicated mathematics but reading a world almanac. These are things we ought to be able to expect of students.

So I think the first thing that ought to be on the minds of a group like this is that whatever you come up with should not merely be an effort to slightly improve the current system, because if that's all you do, and if you succeed, we remain in a state of disaster. And, as a matter of fact, the extent to which you slightly shape up the system or make people feel that it's really going to be better or make them satisfied with what they have, you're doing a disservice. If you have something that is really not working and it's so broken that it ought to be totally changed, don't give people the impression that it can be fixed because if it can't be fixed, if it's a total lemon, the greatest disservice you can do is to operate on that sort of a view.

I'd now like to spend a few minutes talking about the issues that you face, first from the point of view of the problem of teachers, and secondly, from the point of view of students. It

seems to me that what was really shown in 1940 was that even if you have outstanding teachers, a terrific curriculum, parental support and everything else going for you, if you don't get the kids to buy in, you can have all sorts of outstanding things happening all around you but -- there was a great joke some time back about a dog food company where the chief executive officer brought everybody in and everybody sat around a table like this. The first person was the nutritionist, who said, "Hey, this dog food has the greatest number of vitamins and minerals compared to any other." The second one got up and showed the TV commercials and how much better they were than all the other dog foods. The third person got up and explained the radio advertising. Each one had something, and they conclusively, when they were all finished, showed that, boy, this was absolutely the best.

Then someone said, "Well, why isn't anybody buying it?" Someone in the back got up and said, "Because the dogs don't like it." Ultimately with the dog food, none of the other things count if the dogs don't like it.

In education -- I'm not calling kids dogs, but if kids aren't learning -- the lesson plans can be good and the certification can be beautiful and the training can be terrific, but ultimately we really have to deal with the question of student achievement. There's something in the current system that is terribly wrong, and I'll get to that shortly.

Now I want to assert, as sort of a piece of this picture, that an honest analysis of the teacher situation will essentially show there is no way of solving the problems that are faced in terms of having an adequate supply of teachers within the current

structure. There's no way to do it. If you take the major problems, the major slogans -- and I must say that throughout most of my life I was a sloganeer, and I was a sloganeer as long as I believed in the slogans. When I stopped believing in them, I had a little crisis. I had to sit there and say, "Well, do I keep saying them because I've always said them? Do I keep saying them because others want me to say them? Or do I say some other things that maybe will not be acceptable, maybe not even to my members, but which I now believe to be true?" I chose the latter course.

The usual answers to problems of teacher quality and teacher effectiveness run along very traditional lines. One is that you have to pay teachers enough so that you get a supply of very good people. Please don't leave here saying that Al Shanker said that teachers should not be paid well. That's not what I'm about to say. What I'm about to say is that we employ 2.4 million people in education and we're going to need 23 percent of all the college graduates each and every year for the next 11, 12, 13 years, and to give 2.4 million people a \$1,000 salary increase is \$2.4 billion. That's a lot of money, and it doesn't count social security costs, pension costs or other costs.

A thousand dollars won't get you much in terms of quality. You'd probably have to raise salaries about 50 percent, from the current average of about \$25,000 up to maybe \$36,000 or \$37,000. The cost of that is about \$30 billion. It's extremely unlikely to happen, and even if it did happen you're not dealing with a static world. Suppose that all of a sudden mathematicians and physicists and chemists and other people started heading our way. IBM is not about to say, "Well, then we will do without mathematicians

because now teachers earn more." They'd raise their salaries and they'd change their incentives and the number of people we'd actually move over into teaching by trying to do that might not be very big at all. We might end up making a lot of people who are now underpaid paid better, which is all fine, but we wouldn't necessarily move a lot of people from other occupations into this one.

Therefore, we really have to make a decision. We either are going to keep a lot of people not very well paid and therefore face all the problems we have today, or we're going to reorganize schools to look more like an engineering firm or accounting firm or law firm or hospital, or lots of other institutions where some people, on the basis of accepted standards, make more and others make less but everybody has an opportunity to make more. People become lawyers and they hope they're going to be the heads of a law firm. They don't all get to be the heads of law firms but the practice of law is benefited by the fact that a lot of people go into the field on the basis that there's advancement within the profession. And the same is true of other professions.

Let me leave that for a moment and go to a second reason why you need some form of differentiation. Class size is another very important issue. I know it's especially important here in California where your class size is much higher than it is in the rest of the country. And I'm not now going to refer to any particular study saying that all you have to do is reduce class size and the button is pressed and the scores will go up. But let's go to the writing results where only 20 percent of the successful kids can write a decent letter.

We know the reason for that, because that same survey asked students, "How often do you get writing assignments and how often does somebody read your writing and correct it and then spend three or four or five minutes with you and coaching you?" "Johnny, what was this essay about?" And Johnny says, "It was about...." "Well, gee, that's great, but look what you said here in your first sentence. That's not what you said. What you said is a lot better, isn't it? Could you rewrite that and put that sentence in as the lead sentence? Now, Johnny, let's take a look down here. You see what you say here? If you were to read that to the class, would most of the kids in the class agree with you?" And Johnny says no. "Well, why did you put this in there? What are your reasons for that?" And Johnny says, "Oh sure, that's true," and he gives you one, two, three. "Johnny, you just told me some great reasons. Why don't you put it in there? Could you redo it?"

If he does that two or three times a week, I assure you that by the time Johnny is 17-1/2 years old he'll get that letter off without any difficulty at all. But Johnny doesn't do that two or three times a week. Why not? Well, if you're a teacher and you've got 30 kids in a class five periods a day, you've got 150 kids, 150 papers, and if it takes you five minutes to mark one paper and five minutes to coach each kid, that is 30 hours. How many times are you going to spend 30 hours -- 15 of those hours you take home with you, it's after school; 15 of them have to be done while you're supposed to be talking to the kids? Or you're going to have to ask the kids to stay after school or visit in their homes to coach, and it's just not possible.

Well, you say the answer to that is to reduce class size, right? Wrong. Again, please don't go around saying that Al Shanker is against reducing class size. I'm not. But I am saying that reducing class size nationally as an answer to this problem is not an intelligent answer. It's not only not intelligent, it's just plain downright dumb. It's downright dumb because if you reduce class size in half, you'd still have 15 hours of work to do. You still can't do it. And instead of taking 23 percent of all the college graduates in this country, you'd have to take almost half of them. But this country also needs doctors, lawyers, businessmen, generals, all sorts of other people. You can't say, sure, you could build an ideal school system if society had no other needs. But society does have other needs, and it's not rational to say that all talent in this country should go into one institution, even a very important one, even the most important one. It's just not rational.

We're complaining now that we can't get an adequate number of teachers when we only need 23 percent. Just think of what would happen if you hire more. If you hire more, you're not going to get better people to leave their other professions to come in here. The more you hire, the more you're going to have to lower your standards. So you're going to go deeper into the talent pool and you're going to get dumber people. The tradeoff is that you'll have more people and they'll have a little more time to do their stuff, but they'll be the kind of people that you don't want near your kids. So it's not an answer.

Does that mean we shouldn't teach kids to write or that there shouldn't be a better pupil-teacher ratio or there shouldn't be a

way of doing it? No. But it means you cannot accomplish this by hiring massive numbers of people and having massive reductions. You'd also need a construction program and smaller classes. You'd have to do all sorts of things. It's basically not possible. It's the "tooth fairy" approach, you know. It's the wish.

Now the third thing that all teachers say they need and want -- and they're absolutely right -- but which they cannot get as long as schools are structured the way they are now structured, is they are essentially saying they need more time. They need more time to think and to plan and to talk with their colleagues and to get away from the isolation. One of the reasons people don't come into teaching and one of the reasons they leave teaching is that, by and large, most intelligent adults don't want to spend their entire lives locked in a room with a bunch of kids. They need human contact. Kids eventually will become human; that's part of what education is all about. But they're not quite there yet.

You say, well, that's easy. Instead of teaching five periods a day you get the teachers to teach four. That means you need more teachers, right? -- a lot more. And you get right into that same issue again of money and who are you going to get and are you going to lower standards. What I'm saying is that from the point of view of doing the things that almost all of us say we ought to do, that to get better people and keep them you need a better reward structure, that you need to be able to have kids write and have their papers read and have time for coaching, or otherwise the most important things -- writing isn't just writing, it's persuasion, expression, communication, the organization of thought. If I had to select one single test to give a kid to

decide whether he should graduate or not, it wouldn't be one of those idiot multiple-choice tests. It would be a lot more like writing something to see how a person can think and express themselves and organize thoughts.

We're not succeeding there, so we have to ask ourselves the question, is there a way of organizing schools differently so that teachers can be paid more, so that teachers do have the time to assign a lot of writing assignments, mark the papers and coach kids, and so that they do have the time to talk to each other? By the way, in other professions -- in a law firm, engineering firm, accounting firm, in a hospital -- the business of people talking to each other and sharing ideas and calling on each other is the most important and effective accountability program that you can have. There's no inspection program that you're going to have. There's no system where somebody is going to walk in and look at somebody perform one or two or three hours a year. There's no initial training program. There's nothing that's a substitute for the day-to-day contact of people involved in the same enterprise shaping each other up. There's nothing you can build into a system.

So you've got to ask yourself, how can we get this tremendous in-service program that every other profession has, and which we don't have, because there's no substitute for it? You can beef up your program. You can have a better teacher assessment program. You can have some observation program. None of those will substitute for the richness and creativity that comes out of the contact of people with each other trying to solve a common problem.

I want to get away now from the teacher aspect -- I'll get back to it in a minute -- and get to the student aspect. I said a few minutes ago that the evidence is not only strong but it is uncontradicted and it's very clear that essentially we're succeeding with only between 5 to 20 percent of the youngsters in our schools in terms of any reasonable set of expectations. Well, there are several hypotheses that one can offer. One of them is that that's the way God makes kids: only 20 percent of us is smart, and aren't we glad? And maybe we're losing out with 1 or 2 or 3 percent of them that we could still get if we were a little better. And, by God, here you can include Darwin and environment as well as heredity. But, essentially, if we say, well, that's the way we get them and we can't do much with them after we get them because they're fixed one way or another, then there's no reason for us to be here. I don't accept that and I know that you don't.

But then we have to ask ourselves, why are the results so poor? I can tell you it's not because school boards don't care and it's not because administrators don't care and it's not because teacher training institutions don't care and it's not because teachers don't work hard and care. So if everybody cares, almost everybody -- we obviously have our share of lemons and our share of ordinary people, but we also have a good share of very extraordinary people who are very committed -- why are the results so poor?

I think we essentially have to ask ourselves the question: Is the institution fundamentally wrong in the way it's structured? Well, if 10 years ago you had gone to the heads of General Motors

and Chrysler Corporation and Ford and said, "Hey, how come every year you have to recall 500,000 cars?" they'd say that's the nature of mass production. There's no way of turning out 2 million cars virtually free of defects.

There's that famous recent story about the Japanese, the Frenchman and the American who were out on a safari and they were captured by a bunch of cannibals and were all told they'd die in one hour but were granted a last wish. The Frenchman's wish was to be able to sing his national anthem for the last time, and he was granted his wish. The Japanese man said his last wish was that he wanted to be able to one last time give his famous lecture on quality control. He was told he'd be granted his wish. The American was asked what he wanted, and he said, "I'd like to be killed before I have to listen to his lecture on quality control again." But, unfortunately, that's the subject.

Let's think of it this way: that for 2,000 years, until very recent times, most people who went to doctors and hoped they'd be helped in some way in many cases were actually hurt or killed, because until very recently doctors didn't realize you had to wash your hands and sterilize your instruments. So while they might have done all sorts of interesting things and might have worked very hard to cure the patient, there was something that was part of their standard operating procedures which essentially was destructive to their clients and patients.

I think what we need to do is ask ourselves, are there things we're doing in public education -- and private education, too, I might add, because if you walk into a private school it looks just like a public school; the only difference is that a private school

frequently does better because it's like those hospitals that don't take sick people in -- you know, they take people in who are pretty healthy. The old Humana(?) chain which was doing so well for a while was essentially a chain of hospitals that decided they would take people who are very easy to cure and the success rate could be very high. And schools that are like that, of course, show they do very well, too, but they don't prove anything educationally except if you take healthy people in they'll continue to be healthy. Private schools show a lot of the same. But are there things that we do in schools which, instead of helping kids learn, actually turn them off?

Are we about to credential or certify teachers on the basis of things they shouldn't be doing? That is, if all those years we were certifying doctors on the basis of a whole bunch of things but we never did anything about them washing their hands or instruments, we -- that is, those who were in that field of certifying those people -- were really doing something that was really very much beside the point.

So I'd just like to spend a few minutes sharing with you the kind of things that I think we have to think about in the school structure. I'll share with you up front the reason that only about 5 to 20 percent of our kids are making it. It doesn't show that only 5 to 20 percent of them are smart. Essentially, we only give kids an opportunity to learn in two ways in our schools. You either learn by listening to me, your teacher talk, or you learn by reading something. If you learn in any other way, that's too bad. Schools don't teach in any other way. We don't give kids a chance to learn from other kids; we don't give them computers to

work with; we don't say, "If you can't learn from my lectures, here's a VCR and you can see how Eskimos live or you can actually see a Shakespearean play or production." We don't give them audio tapes or all sorts of other things they can do. Essentially, we say you either learn by my talking or reading, and if you can't learn that way you're a failure and you're dumb. We say if you can't sit still and keep quiet for six hours a day -- which most adults can't do -- then you're disruptive and there's something wrong with you.

Then we do some other things. We take a whole bunch of kids in in September or August and say, "You're all in the first grade," and we give them the same work to do. These kids start comparing themselves with each other: mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the brightest and who's the fastest? But these kids aren't all six years old. How did they get into that class? Well, they had a birthday that came on or after a certain day -- there's a cutoff day -- and there's a whole year of kids in that class, and the oldest kid is a year older than the youngest kid.

Does a year make any difference at that age? Wow! It's not like the difference between being 60 and 61; it's more like the difference between being 30 and 50. It's about a quarter of the kid's intellectual life. And to put a 7-year-old or 6-1/2-year-old in with a 5-1/2-year-old kid and to get them to feel that they're honestly competing with each other is like putting a heavyweight and lightweight boxer into a ring and saying, "Go ahead, you're both prize fighters."

The research shows that on average the older kids, even if they're much lower in native ability, do a lot better. They

have great self-esteem. They feel they're smarter and swifter and stronger. The younger kids feel that they're dumb, even if they're smarter, and it stays with most of them throughout their entire lives.

By the way, why do we have to have all the kids come in on the same day? Well, that simple: that's when the teacher starts talking. You wouldn't want them to come in towards the middle of the movie, would you?

So, is there a way of organizing schools so that kids don't learn just by listening to someone talk or reading? Is there a way of saying that there are a variety of ways of learning? Is there a way of organizing schools so kids don't all come in on the same day?

Let's take one more. One of the things teachers do every day is ask kids questions. Some kids love it; their hands are up all the time. They would come to school on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Their egos are boosted. Every hour of the day they know it all and show it to their peers. There are others who know it sometimes and don't know it other times. Then there are some engaged in an unconstitutional act: they're sitting there praying that they not be called on. But I do call on them because, after all, I want to know if they're learning anything, if they're listening. What happens every time I call on them once, twice, three times a day and they don't have the answer; they don't have it the first day, second day, third day, the twenty-first day, the sixtieth day?

What am I really doing to that kid? It's an act of humiliation. I'm humiliating that kid in front of his peers. How many times can I do that to you before you decide, "This is not my game, I'm not interested, I'm deeply hurt, I resent it, I'm going to get my kicks some other way by throwing things or by not showing up," or doing something else. Is it possible to organize a school, especially during the early grades when kids haven't yet developed any thick skin, so that learning is not humiliating and is relatively private? I know if I'm doing something publicly I get humiliated very quickly if I'm failing. But if I'm doing it privately and nobody notices, or just one or two people that know I'm just learning and that are being helpful to me, that's a lot different than doing it in open view.

Well, let's look at one more. Let's take a look at the kid who gets into high school in September and he knows the final exam isn't until next June. What does that mean? It means, "Why should I do my homework tonight -- I've got until next June -- or tomorrow night?" Now, that kid isn't being evil; he's just like the rest of us. How many of us have developed such strength of character that we realize that every little thing that we do today is going to have some long-term effect? If we had that strength of character, there wouldn't be any overweight problem and we'd be able to give people their salaries a year in advance knowing they'd be all right the rest of the year. [Laughter] But we know we can't do that. We know this is an extremely difficult characteristic to develop in people.

Yet, when we have schools that are organized on an annual basis we're really saying that those kids who are not able to

realize how important it is to do each day's work each day are going to become failures, not because they're stupid but because they don't happen to have that ability to budget. So what happens is that about this time of year, late October or early November, some of these kids who foolishly thought they had plenty of time have now fallen so hopelessly behind that every day they're humiliated. And they have the choice now of staying there and being humiliated and not learning anything or dropping out.

And if they drop out, when can they drop back in again? Next September, after they've had a year of freedom, and they come back in with a bunch of kids who are one year younger than they are, which they've been told all their lives is to be put in with a bunch of babies. So they're humiliated again. So how many of them come back? Very few.

Is it possible to organize schools differently? Well, it sure is. I'll just give you one example. I don't necessarily recommend it, but it's better than what we do.

My youngest son, Michael, went to high school and graduated. He didn't like it very much and decided he wouldn't go to college. He went to work in a restaurant, starting as a dish washer and worked at that for about eight months. Then they asked him to make salads so he started doing that. Six months later they had him making soups. He came to me about a year later and said, "Dad, I've decided what I want to do with my life." I said, "What's that?" He said, "I'd like to go into the CIA." I looked at him, and he said, "It's not what you think. I mean the Culinary Institute of America. If I'm going to be in this business, I might as well be a chef."

So off he went. He applied and got in to the Culinary Institute of America. I was very worried he wouldn't make it because he thought it was a place where you make omelets and souffles, and I knew that in addition to that you had to learn nutrition, culinary French, names of wines, negotiating with vendors, hotel management, restaurant management -- a big academic program in addition to the hands-on vocational program. I said, "Boy, Michael is really going to be floored by this. Especially for the first six months it's practically all theoretical."

I called him up a week after he got to school and said, "Michael, I'm going to be driving by Hyde Park. Can we have dinner tonight or tomorrow night?" He said, "No, Dad, I'm sorry." I said, "Why not?" He said, "Well, I've been up until after midnight every night doing my notebook and studying with some of my colleagues." I said, "Michael, you've only been there for one week." He said, "Yes, Dad, but the semesters here are three weeks long."

Well, a place where the semesters are three weeks long, if you're late for class 15 minutes you're suspended because you've missed a major part of the semester. No teacher tells a joke that's more than five seconds long. But just think of it: if a kid meets this beautiful girl and they decide to run off to Ft. Lauderdale together because they know it's forever, and five weeks later they break up, the kid can drop back in every three weeks. Furthermore, if you flunk, you haven't flunked a whole year.

Just think of the tragic problem that we have in schools. Do we automatically promote a kid and shatter him or do we leave him back and shatter him? We have two horrible alternatives.

Leaving a kid back for three weeks is not the same, not the same at all; it's totally different.

What I'm saying is that we need to think of credentialing not for a system that we have that doesn't work, but we need to think of what would be the appropriate credentialing for a system that needs to be brought into being. Or, at the very least, we ought to think of not doing it exclusively for the current system -- which would actually strengthen a system which is not very good by making it look a little better -- but at least whatever we do with credentialing needs to be broad enough so it permits schools to try to build a future as well as lock themselves into the past.

Now what would this sort of school look like? And I raise what it would look like because I think now I may get a little closer to its direct relationship to the credentialing and certification problem. There may be many different ways of building institutions that conform to the standards that I'm talking about. But I'm talking about the fact I want to have a school in which some teachers can earn \$100,000. I want to have a school in which teachers have the time to read kids' papers often and coach them. I want to have a school in which all the professionals and adults have the time to talk to each other and to shape each other up as kind of an accountability and in-service program. I want a school in which kids do not have to come in and compete with each other unfairly on the basis of an arbitrary cutoff date. I want a school in which kids, especially younger ones, are able to learn without exposing their trial-and-error effort and being humiliated in front of anyone else. I want a school in which, if a kid can't learn by reading or by listening

to somebody talk, there are a variety of different ways in which a kid can learn something, lots of different ways of doing it. Those are some of the attributes.

I'd add one more, and I should have given this a few minutes ago but I don't want to leave it out because I think perhaps it's the most important of all. We have a curriculum which is terrible, and to certify teachers on the basis of how well they do teaching the current curriculum is just nonsensical because the whole thing does not work.

I guess the best way to describe what's wrong with the current curriculum is to share with you a story by that greatest of American educational philosophers, Father Guido Sarducci. Father Sarducci, one evening on "Saturday Night Live," presented a proposal in which he said he had opened up a college which offers a Bachelor of Arts degree and that you can complete the entire program -- courses, final examinations, graduation ceremony, etc. -- in one day for \$400. Everyone of course laughed, but he said, "No, this is a real educational program. I'll tell you how I do it. I go around the country and meet people who have graduated from college two or three or four years ago. For instance, I will go up to you and say, 'When did you graduate?' And you say, 'Oh, I graduated four years ago.' And I say, 'Did you take Spanish when you went to college?' You say, 'Yes, I took three years of Spanish.' I say, 'Will you please tell me everything that you remember from your three years of Spanish in college?' And you'll say, 'Well, to tell you the truth, about all I can remember is Como esta usted? Muey bien.'" So he says, "Okay, then that becomes my course of three years of Spanish. As soon as you learn

that, you get credit for three years of Spanish because that's all you're going to remember three years from now anyway. Then we go on to American history."

Why is that funny? Because, unfortunately, it's true.

One of the most important educational influences in my life was to be involved in the Boy Scouts as a scout and as a scout leader many years ago. I thought of how a teacher would teach about birds. A teacher might put the charts of birds around the room and have flash cards and go through them with the kids. Then the birds would be divided into different groups as to sections of the country. Then maybe you'd have to memorize which were in the mountains and which were water birds and which ones were in the plains. Then you might have some families, etc. The kids would memorize all these and you'd give them the examination. There'd be two outcomes: one is that they'd come to hate birds, and the other is that they would forget them very quickly -- the Sarducci syndrome.

Many of us who were in the Boy Scouts, however, took something called Bird Study merit badge. Now, with Bird Study merit badge you actually had to go out and see 40 birds, observe them and keep a record. Pretty soon you find out you cannot see 40 different birds by walking across the street to your local park. Somebody gives you some advice. They say, "The only way you're going to do this, Al, is to get up at 5:30 in the morning and go out to some lake or watering hole and just sit around there -- and do that every morning. Then later on you should go up to some mountain place at dusk. You have to get to different habitats."

Well, I'm kind of scared to get up at 5:30 in the morning and

go out to the woods, so I get two or three friends who want to do it with me. We go out there, and the first thing we notice when we pull out the binoculars is that a bird through the binoculars at 6:00 in the morning does not look like a stuffed bird in the Museum of Natural History. You can't see the whole thing. You may see a red crest or a white stripe. Or you may see a tail that moves in a certain way, or you may notice that it hops a certain way. But you see things that are called field marks. And you start looking through those binoculars. Then your friend says, "That's it. Look at that: the red crest and white mark." And your other friend says, "No, dopey, the book says Texas. We're in California." You keep moving through.

After a while, you start walking down a street with your mother and father and you notice something moving in a tree that neither of them even see. You say, "Look at that. See what's in that tree?" And they look but can't see anything. They think it's the wind moving the leaves. You say, "Look closely. You're going to see a dark brown bird with a little red stripe along the side." You have a sense that you can see things. You notice things that no one else notices around you. I've never known anyone to go through that experience without maintaining an interest in birds and without feeling they'd become a bigger person, a better person, a smarter person.

So part of what we have to do is to think of how can we do things in school which don't just leave us with Como esta usted, muy bien, but which transform the individual because anything that doesn't transform the individual and become part of them isn't worth a damn. All you've shown is that a person can stay

up and memorize something for one examination and forget it the next week.

How do you transform the curriculum? Well, the school would look a lot more like a Boy Scout troop. Just think of it: a scoutmaster has 40 to 60 different kids, and every one of them is doing something different. He cannot lecture to them. He can say to this kid here, "See if you can do these knots from the book. I'll be back here to help you in a few minutes." And he says to this one, "You want to do first aid? He'll help you do bandages. Go over there." So you have peer tutoring. Then he goes and takes a model out of the closet and says, "Look at this," or a game or something else. In other words, education is not made up solely of lecturing or reading; it's a whole bunch of connections which includes lawyers in the community, judges, your local swimming pool -- that is, all sorts of connections with people.

The other thing is that in school I lecture to those kids. Any outsider, any volunteer, anybody from the community who comes into that class is an intruder. He's going to take away from my lecturing. The kids are going to be looking at him instead of at me. Or he's going to be a witness when something goes wrong in the classroom. I don't want him there. I want the privacy of my room. But in a Boy Scout troop, every adult can help. Every parent can be in that troop, and every one of them can be helping by working with one or two or three kids on some particular project.

Suppose we had schools organized so that kids were learning from books, audio tapes, videotapes, computers, older kids, volunteers from the community. And suppose we had a credentialing

system which credentialed certain teachers who were outstanding lead teachers. You now have a team of adults. You no longer have one self-contained classroom with a bunch of kids and with a teacher talking.

The lead teacher is a person who is something like a doctor: He's figured out that, "Mary, I think you should learn this by reading the book. You're a good reader and I don't think you'll have any trouble understanding it." "Jimmy, that book's going to be a little too difficult for you. Why don't you see if you can learn that by watching this videotape. It's got the same sort of stuff. Then I'll come over and talk to you in a few minutes." In other words, it's more like the doctor who prescribes certain courses of action.

Suppose you don't learn it by reading the book. I come over and say, "I'm sorry. I gave you the wrong suggestion." I don't blame you, as we now do when we call on kids who don't know it. We sort of say, "You didn't learn it. You're dumb. You failed." But it's more like the doctor who says, "Gee, I'm sorry I gave you that pill. I see it had a bad reaction. I tried, but we can't be certain of these things. Here, try this other one and let me know how that works." So you take the heat off the client and off the patient, and you accept the responsibility yourself.

You have a team of adults, and the head of that team could be paid \$100,000. Then you could have people who are not outstanding but are pretty good. I think the distinction between certification and licensing is very important here. The state ought to have a certain licensing standard which is a minimum standard for anybody to exercise professional responsibility with

children. But then there ought to be higher standards like a board-certified surgeon or a board-certified anesthesiologist or a board-certified allergist. Now, any general practitioner can do any of those things. He's got a right to do it. But if you're smart, you'll go to a board-certified person, or your health plan will insist that it be a board-certified person.

Let's think of more than one standard in a credentialing system, and let's think of those standards as being there for several purposes: one so that you can have a reward structure that makes sense, but secondly, so you can have a team working together. You know, if everybody who worked in hospitals in this country had to be a doctor, you'd have 7 million doctors in this country and they'd all earn teachers' salaries. And you can't get 7 million people who have the same qualities as you can get 500,000. They'd be poor-quality people. So we need to think of a differentiated structure.

Now, if you had the kind of structure that I'm thinking about, kids are now involved in their own learning, the teacher isn't lecturing, the adults have the time to read the kids' papers, they have the time to coach the kids, they have the time to talk to each other because the only way you're ever going to be able to do all these things is to get teachers away from the constant talking and lecturing which they do all the time now, and which doesn't work. Remember, only from 5 to 20 percent of the kids are learning anything through this system. So we've got a system that's no good for the kids, and it ties the teacher down, prevents the teacher from working with other adults, prevents the teacher from marking papers, dealing with persuasion, expression,

critical thinking or any of these other things. It forces the kids to go through an unnatural act, which is to sit still and be quiet for six hours a day. That is the context.

I think I'll stop here to allow time for questions in terms of how this applies to the specifics of some of the questions that you're dealing with. I hope that I've been helpful. But all across the country I see people trying to grapple with important issues like the credentialing issue, but they're doing it on the basis of what is the best way to credential people for the system that exists now; that is, how do we know that a teacher is going to know the subject, be able to stand in front of a class, control the class, give a well-organized lesson?

Well, kids do not learn from well-organized lessons. So you're going to credential people who are good at doing something that's no good for kids. They may be nice or smart adults who have gone to college and who are accustomed to sitting and listening to people. We could sit there and say, "That was a brilliant lecture." But if every teacher gave brilliant lectures across the country you'd still have 80 percent of the kids not learning anything because most kids don't go for brilliant lectures. People who are successful in college do.

We've got to stop measuring the way kids learn by the way we learn. We're an exception, a minority. That's why we're here. If we're talking about reaching out to kids who are not making it now and haven't made it in the past, then we've got to talk about developing a different sort of institution.

I want to thank you for this opportunity.

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