

Education Q&A
September 10, 2000

Q: What are the findings of the “Prime Time for Juvenile Crime, or Youth Enrichment and Achievement” report released by Fight Crimes: Invest in Kids?

A: This report provides further data that quality after-school programs can dramatically reduce juvenile crime by offering young people opportunities to develop relationships with caring adults, learn good skills and values, and contribute to their communities. This is why the administration has continued to invest in 21st Century Community Learning Centers during the last eight years. Under the leadership of President Clinton and Vice President Gore, federal funding for these after-school programs went from \$0 in 1992 to \$453 million in 2000. Today, there are 3600 schools serving 850,000 students as 21st Century Community Learning Centers. The report also indicates the current supply of after-school programs is not meeting the growing need across the country. Last year, only one in seven 21st Century Community Learning Center applications could be funded. To address this problem, President Clinton has requested \$1 billion in funding in his FY 2001 budget for after-school programs. This investment would more than double the current federal commitment and help establish 8,000 schools as 21st Century Community Learning Centers.

Q: Is a \$1 billion investment in after-school programs really a cost-effective way of reducing juvenile crime?

A: Investments in after-school programs, especially for the children most at risk of sliding into delinquency or becoming victims of crime, do pay for themselves, not only in lives saved but even in tax dollars saved. Among the many findings in this report, a study by Vanderbilt University found that each high-risk youth prevented from adopting a life of crime could save the country between \$1.7-\$2.3 million.

Q: Does the public support such a sizable investment in after-school programs.

A: Yes, in fact in a poll conducted by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids shows that 68% of Americans say expanding child care and after-school programs is a higher priority than a tax cut.

Education Q&A
September 5, 2000

Q: On Tuesday, the Brookings Institution released a new *Brown Center Report on Education* which concluded that the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show “slow and steady gains are being made,” but are not “cause for national celebration.” The report also found that “the 1990s do not stand out as a time of great strides forward in academic achievement. Although achievement continued to improve, it did not accelerate in the century’s final decade,” with the scores of some age groups lower now than in 1980. Does this report validate the criticism of George W. Bush and others that the Clinton-Gore Administration has allowed education to stagnate and has not made the reforms necessary to improve student achievement?

A: The “slow but steady gains” cited in the report show that the reforms and investments made under the Clinton-Gore Administration are moving the country in the right direction. For example, the report states that “President Clinton’s recent call for all students to be able to read by the end of third grade has moved the nation.” As a result of insisting on high standards and accountability and investing in what works, student performance as measured by test scores, rigorous coursework, high school graduation, and college enrollment has improved, especially for students in our most disadvantaged schools. For example:

- In 1992, only 14 states had academic standards; today, 49 states have them and 48 have assessments to measure student progress.
- Math SAT scores are at a thirty-year high. The average SAT math score has gone from 501 in 1992 to 514 in 2000, and the average verbal score has gone from 500 to 505. These changes are particularly notable because more disadvantaged and minority students are taking the SAT than ever before.
- Since 1992, reading and math scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have increased for fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders, including those students in the highest poverty schools. For example, since 1992, reading and math scores for nine-year-olds in our highest poverty schools have improved by nearly one grade level.
- The percent of African American high school graduates taking a core curriculum (4 years of English, and 3 years each of Math, Science and Social Studies) went from 39% in 1990 to 56% in 1998, and over the same period, the number of Hispanic graduates taking a core curriculum went from 30% to 40%.
- More high school graduates than ever before are going directly to college – from 61.9% in 1992 to 65.6% in 1998.
- Under the Clinton-Gore Administration, we’ve nearly doubled the federal investment in education and training, and student aid has doubled to nearly \$60 billion, the largest investment in higher education since the G.I. Bill. More students are benefiting from federal student grants and loans – from 43% in 1992 to 59% in 1999 – and the maximum Pell Grant has increased by \$1,000, from \$2,300 in 1992 to \$3,300 in 2000.

Q: The report points out that “critics question whether the tens of billions of dollars spent on educational reforms have been worth it.” As Congress comes back into session, will President Clinton press for more education spending in the FY '01 budget? Is the President concerned that this money is being wasted on ineffective programs?

A: The gains cited in the report make it clear that not only have we been investing in the right priorities, but also that the Clinton-Gore reform policies of investing more in our schools, while also demanding more from them are working. As the report points out, scores for the 2000 NAEP exams are not yet available, however “state tests indicate that achievement continued to rise from 1998 to 1999.” Through their leadership, President Clinton and Vice President Gore have raised expectations for all students, required states to develop rigorous standards and systems of assessment and accountability aligned with those standards, and invested in proven strategies to increase the educational achievement of all students. According to Republican Governor Tommy Thompson, the Administration’s Goals 2000 initiative “changed the face of education as we know it.” In addition to funding state efforts to develop these standards and accountability systems, this Administration has invested in what works to help students succeed, including smaller classes, after school programs, early childhood education and high-quality teachers. In fact, nowhere does the report itself question the validity of the Administration’s investment in these programs, which research has shown to be effective. Indeed, it is by increasing our investment in proven reform strategies that we will speed up the pace of improvement. Federal funds are more targeted to low-income and minority students than either state or local funds, and these funds are making a difference for kids. The President and Vice President will continue to fight for our children’s education and insist on a budget that pays down the debt, and does not shortchange our children in order to provide irresponsible tax cuts that give 3,000 wealthy people another \$7 million each.

Q: The report also comes to some disturbing conclusions regarding student achievement in mathematics. In addition to finding that “a slump in math gains begins after fourth grade and extends through high school,” and that on international comparisons (specifically the TIMSS) “no other country has a sharper drop in math ranking than the United States,” the Brown Center report concluded that at the current pace of improvement in math achievement “it would take a little more than seventy-seven years before American eighth graders were performing at a level equal to their Japanese counterparts.” Is the Clinton-Gore Administration doing anything to help improve student achievement in math?

A: The report also cites increases in math scores for all grade levels, and labels gains by nine-year olds “impressive.” The average score on the math section of the SAT is at a

thirty-year high. President Clinton and Vice President Gore have fought for these gains by making math and reading major priorities in their education reform agenda. Not only have they continued to support and provide increases for the Eisenhower program that provides professional development in math and science, but they have proposed requiring states to ensure that middle and high school teachers are fully certified and qualified in the subject they teach. The number of public school math teachers who have a major or minor in math has increased from 77 percent in 1993 to 82 percent in 1998. The Clinton-Gore administration also initiated the America Counts program to improve mathematics teaching and achievement. As part of that effort, 500 colleges and universities across the country participate in a federal work-study program to provide volunteer tutors in the public schools to assist student in need with mathematics. The Administration also created the National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century, chaired by former Senator and astronaut John Glenn. The Commission will deliver recommendations for improving the recruitment, preparation and development of high-quality math and science teachers.

Q: The Brown Center report also harshly criticized the federal government's Blue Ribbon Schools program as recognizing many schools that had student achievement far below any level objectively considered "exemplary". The President has appeared at most of the Blue Ribbon Schools awards ceremonies over the years. Why does the President support a program with such disappointing results?

A: The Blue Ribbon Schools program rewards schools whose students show sustained high achievement across the board for five years or significant improvement over five years. The program is a positive way to encourage student improvement and reward schools that are helping our most disadvantaged students by giving formerly low-performing schools the recognition they deserve for significantly increasing achievement levels over a sustained period. Approximately 80 percent of the schools being recognized this year are receiving the award based on sustained high academic achievement, and 20 percent based on significant improvement over five years. Twice in the past five years, the Department of Education has conducted thorough reviews of the program, including evaluation by an outside entity, and raised the achievement standard schools must meet in order to qualify for a Blue Ribbon Award. The Department is currently evaluating the program, and may raise the standard yet again. Although high achievement is the goal, Blue Ribbon Schools also meet other research-based criteria that contribute to success. If the other areas included -- such as teacher professional development, a strong curriculum, family and community involvement, and effective leadership -- are ignored, eventually achievement will suffer.