

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

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doubled the percentage of its 8th graders scoring at the *proficient* or *advanced* levels. In Texas, the percentage of 4th grade students reaching the NAEP *proficient* or *advanced* levels rose by two-thirds.

Despite this improvement, we know that there are too many schools that are failing to provide a quality education to our children. While I am a strong supporter of public education, I am not a defender of failing schools. However, when our public schools are not working as well as they should, we have what I call a patriotic responsibility to fix them, not abandon them.

Fortunately, we know how to fix persistently low-performing schools. The same comprehensive approach that States and school districts are using to improve the performance of all schools is equally effective at turning around failing schools. Raising standards, better teachers, smaller class sizes, increased accountability, and greater parental involvement can turn around the worst of schools in a very short time. And to a key part of improving failing schools is making sure that every student gets the extra help he or she needs to get back on track academically.

I won't mislead you about the challenge we face: it takes hard work and a sustained commitment to turn around failing schools. The temptation is to look for a short-cut, a faster way to claim victory in the struggle to make every public school a good school. That is what makes voucher proposals so appealing: they promise improvement in the quality of education without the hard work of fixing our schools. The reality is that such proposals cannot hope to keep that promise, even for the small number of students who would be able to take advantage of vouchers. What vouchers would do is undermine public education by diverting critical resources from our public schools and diverting attention from the task of strengthening educational opportunity and excellence for all students.

In my view, it just doesn't make sense to risk derailing the strong momentum for effective education reform that is building in States and communities across the Nation. It especially doesn't make sense to replace an education reform agenda built on sound, research-based principles with a fad, about which the only thing we can be certain is that it undermines the very institution that helped build a Nation out of diverse peoples.

The real answer to the problem of failing public schools is not to abandon those schools but to pursue a proven reform agenda, provide the resources necessary to fix those schools, and help provide a good education to all students.

WHAT REALLY WORKS

Education researchers will tell you that there is no silver bullet for improving our schools. Successful districts and schools rely on comprehensive improvement strategies that reflect and respond to the specific needs of their students. This is why the Clinton Administration has developed a comprehensive set of program and funding proposals that provide the resources and flexibility needed to effectively support State and local improvement efforts. These proposals

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focus on high standards, mastering the basics, smaller class sizes, improving teacher quality, accountability, and school construction and modernization.

High Standards for All Students

The 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act marked a watershed in the history of American education. Along with the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the 1994 reauthorization helped end the tyranny of low expectations for poor children by placing high standards for academic achievement at the heart of education reform efforts. That bipartisan effort to raise expectations for all children spurred States and school districts to set high standards and establish goals for improving student achievement.

Nearly all States now have standards and goals in place, and the initial returns are promising. In addition to the NAEP improvements noted above, the National Education Goals Panel reported that between 1990 and 1996, 27 States significantly increased the percentage of 8th graders scoring at either the *proficient* or the *advanced* level on the NAEP math test.

Federal programs have helped bolster State and local reform efforts linked to high standards. For example, in a report on Goals 2000 prepared by the General Accounting Office, State officials described Goals 2000 as “a significant factor in promoting their education reform efforts” and a “catalyst” for change. The recently completed National Assessment of Title I reported that Title I had promoted State and local development of standards and assessments, and that Title I accountability requirements had encouraged the use of performance data to guide curricula and professional development. In addition, about half of poor school districts reported that Title I is driving reform efforts to a large extent.

Mastering the Basics

The move to high standards necessarily starts with mastering the basics of reading and mathematics. The achievement gap between economically disadvantaged and minority students and their more advantaged peers remains alarmingly large in these essential subjects. This is especially true for the key basic of learning to read, which is the prerequisite for learning all other subjects. The latest reading assessment from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) confirmed what many other studies have shown over the past several years: poor children are twice as likely as other children to read below the basic level.

Title I Grants to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) is the key Federal vehicle for closing the rich-poor gap in reading and math achievement. The National Assessment of Title I credited the program with contributing to improved NAEP reading and math scores by students in the highest-poverty public schools, which are among the primary recipients of Title I funds. The Administration has requested \$8 billion for Title I Grants to LEAs in fiscal year 2000 and would provide additional funds to the highest-poverty schools by allocating a significant proportion of the request through the Targeted Grants formula.

Another essential investment in mastering the basics is our \$286 million fiscal year 2000 request for the Reading Excellence program. This bipartisan initiative, which was enacted last year, supports extended learning time for children to strengthen their reading skills, teacher training in reading instruction, and family literacy activities. Reading Excellence is part of the President's America Reads Challenge, which calls for all children to read well and independently by the end of the third grade.

Reducing Class Size

Helping all children master the basics and reach high standards demands a great deal of personal, one-on-one attention from teachers, particularly for those disadvantaged, minority, and limited English proficient children who have further to go to reach State standards. Students are more likely to receive this attention in small classes of less than 20 children than in the overcrowded, 35-student classrooms so often found in today's schools and particularly in failing schools.

The Class Size Reduction program, currently funded at \$1.2 billion, would provide \$12.4 billion over 7 years to help schools hire 100,000 new teachers and reduce class size in the early grades to a nationwide average of 18. This initiative responds to a growing body of research showing that students attending small classes in the early grades make more rapid educational progress than students in larger classes, and that these achievement gains persist well after students move on to the later grades. The President is requesting \$1.4 billion for Class Size Reduction in fiscal year 2000.

Improving Teacher Quality

A key emphasis of the Class Size Reduction program is on hiring highly qualified teachers who are prepared to teach in smaller classes. Similarly, we cannot expect our students to reach high standards until every classroom is led by an experienced teacher capable of teaching to high standards. Research shows that qualified teachers are the most important in-school factor in improving student achievement, yet one-quarter of newly hired teachers are entering the teaching profession without full certification and over 11 percent enter the field with no license at all.

High-poverty urban schools are most likely to suffer from unqualified teachers. In high-poverty schools, more than 20 percent of all teachers are teaching out-of-field, or in a subject in which they lack either a major or minor degree. That's about twice the rate of teachers teaching out-of-field in low-poverty schools.

We made a good start on improving teacher quality last year when Congress passed new teacher recruitment and training programs as part of Title II of the reauthorized Higher Education Act (HEA). The President's fiscal year 2000 request includes a \$40 million increase for the HEA Teacher Quality Enhancement grants program, which would help States improve the quality of their teaching force, strengthen teacher education, and reduce shortages of qualified teachers in

high-poverty districts.

Our ESEA reauthorization would build on the improvements in the HEA to help ensure that all teachers are prepared to teach to high standards. A new Teaching to High Standards initiative would support new teachers during their first three years in the classroom and help ensure that all teachers are proficient in both academic knowledge and teaching skills. In addition, our reauthorization proposal would support high-quality teaching in high-poverty schools by requiring that all new teachers paid for with Title I funds be fully certified, and that all newly hired high school teachers be certified in the subject they teach.

Increasing Accountability for Student Performance

A key element of standards-based reform is a strong emphasis on accountability. Challenging State academic standards provide the bar by which to measure the performance of students, teachers, schools, and school districts. The purpose here is not and should not be punitive, but to identify weaknesses and help guide improvements. Many States have taken this to heart by establishing rigorous accountability systems that hold districts and schools accountable for student performance and providing support for those schools that aren't getting the job done. However, State progress in the area of accountability has been uneven, and we believe it is time to provide stronger encouragement at the Federal level. As I said in my reauthorization testimony earlier this year, there is both a moral and fiscal dimension to being more accountable. We cannot afford to lose the talents of any child, and we must ensure that the substantial resources entrusted to us by taxpayers are used effectively.

Our ESEA reauthorization proposal includes an Education Accountability Act, a package of measures to hold districts, schools, teachers, and students to high standards and help ensure that all students receive a high-quality education. This bill would encourage States to develop a single accountability system for all schools, including Title I schools, and to provide parents with report cards describing educational performance at the State, district, and school levels. It also would provide States and districts with additional Title I resources to help turn around low-performing schools and mandate strong corrective action if there is no improvement within two years. Our fiscal year 2000 request for Title I includes \$200 million to accelerate the pace of State and local school improvement efforts.

The reauthorization bill also would require States to put in place within four years policies ending the practices of social promotion and traditional grade retention, and to provide intensive and comprehensive educational interventions to students who are at risk of not meeting standards for promotion in a timely fashion. The President's fiscal year 2000 budget includes \$600 million for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, which can help students meet promotion standards through such interventions as extended learning time before and after school and during the summers.

School Construction and Modernization

Finally, States and school districts face a huge task in modernizing existing schools to provide students with a world-class education for the 21st century. The average public school is 42 years old, and the General Accounting Office estimates that one-third of all public schools need extensive repair or replacement. And the baby boom echo—which this fall brought an estimated 447,000 new students to our schools for a record total of 53 million elementary and secondary school students—means that States and districts must squeeze ever more students into these old structures. We cannot expect students to meet demanding new standards of achievement in dilapidated, dangerous, and overcrowded facilities. And both new and renovated schools should be designed them for the kind of education we know works best: smaller schools that create a sense of community and small classrooms in which teachers can provide lots of individual attention.

To help States and districts shoulder the financial burden of building and modernizing schools at the same time they are implementing standards-based reforms, the President's School Modernization Bond proposal would subsidize almost \$25 billion in construction bonds over two years to modernize up to 6,000 schools.

This proposal does not in any way inject the Federal government into local decisions about which schools are built or renovated. What it does is provide Federal help to address a massive national problem. If we can find the resources to build prisons, we should be able to help rebuild the Nation's schools.

FIXING FAILING SCHOOLS

High standards, the basics, smaller classes, better teachers, and accountability are not just slogans—they are sound educational reform strategies that are working to fix failing schools and improve the quality of public education all over America. That's why I disagree with the implicit assumption of voucher proponents that the only choice faced by parents and children—particularly poor children—is between bad public schools and good private schools. This ignores the efforts of millions of hard-working public school principals and teachers who provide a quality education to millions of students—and not just in the affluent suburbs.

However, that doesn't mean we can ignore for one moment the failure of some public schools to do right by their students. I have consistently called for quick action to turn around failing schools and for making available options for the students in those schools. You can put new leadership into a school, and give that leadership the authority to change the staff and implement wholesale reforms in school structure and curriculum. That's called reconstitution, a practice not unlike closing down a school and starting from scratch. In addition, we are proposing in our ESEA reauthorization bill to give school districts the option of allowing students in a failing Title I school to transfer to another public school.

Districts also may consider charter schools as an alternative to failing schools. Charter schools are a good example of public school choice, which I strongly support and which does not drain resources from our public school system. I just returned from Seattle, Washington, where I

heard a great deal about efforts to expand public school choice. The growing amount of choice in our public school systems is one of the untold stories in American education.

We also know, however, that it is possible to turn around failing schools very quickly. For example, just a few years ago Harriet Tubman Elementary School in New York City, where 99 percent of students come from low-income families, was one of the lowest-performing schools in the city. After being assigned to the Chancellor's District—a special school district created for the lowest-performing schools—school leaders, parents, and teachers devised a plan for comprehensive change, including an intensive reading program. In just two years, the percentage of students performing at or above grade level on the citywide reading assessment rose from 30 percent to 46 percent. As a result, Tubman Elementary was removed from the State's list of low-performing schools.

Similarly, at Hawthorne Elementary School in Texas, where 96 percent of students qualify for free lunch and 28 percent of students have limited English language skills, only 24 percent of students in the school passed all portions of the 1994 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Four years later, thanks to a rigorous new curriculum for students in the early grades, almost 63 percent of students passed the TAAS, with the largest gains over the period being made by African American students.

These schools share much in common with other high-performing, high-poverty schools. In a survey of 1,200 top scoring schools with at least a 50 percent poverty rate, the Education Trust found that 80 percent reported using standards to design instruction, assess student work and evaluate teachers. Similar percentages reported the use of systematic early intervention strategies as well as the use of extended learning time for students, particularly in reading and math. And nearly all schools dedicated significant resources to professional development for teachers aimed at changing instructional practices.

A Texas study identified similar approaches as responsible for the success of over 50 high-poverty, high-achieving schools. The study's authors observed that "there are good practices that would enable any high-poverty school to create an environment in which almost all students achieve high levels of academic success."

In addition, there are a variety of proven reform models that struggling schools can adopt—often with the help of Federal funds—"right out of the box." For example, many Title I schools have adopted Robert Slavin's *Success for All* program, while Gene Bottoms of the Southern Regional Educational Board has developed a *High Schools That Work* initiative. Representatives John Porter and David Obey have helped over 1,600 schools adapt these and similar proven reform models to their own specific needs through the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program.

Other Federal programs, such as the Class Size Reduction initiative, can provide the stimulus for efforts to turn around failing schools and give students the extra help they need. In Columbus, Ohio, the school district is targeting its Class Size Reduction funds to 13 high-poverty, low-performing schools. The funds will be used to hire 58 new, fully certified teachers

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in grades 1-3 in these schools and reduce class sizes from an average of 25 to an average of 15. The smaller classes are part of a broader strategy that includes implementation of proven early reading programs like *Success for All*, intensive teacher training in early reading, 90 minutes of reading instruction per day, and clear standards and assessments with benchmarks linked to the curriculum.

VOUCHERS ARE APPEALING, BUT FATALLY FLAWED

These examples show that successful educational improvement demands comprehensive approaches, a sustained commitment from everyone involved, and plenty of hard work. The appeal of vouchers, I believe, rests largely on the idea that you don't have to do these things. That there is some kind of parallel universe of superior private schools that is ready, able, and willing to take on the job of educating 46 million public school students. That all you have to do to fix the public schools is to leave them behind and subsidize private education instead. Well, I'm here to tell you that there is no such parallel universe. The only way to fix the public schools is to fix the public schools, not abandon them.

And that's not just me talking—the American people agree and have agreed for almost 40 years. In 1950, a *Life Magazine* poll asked Americans whether they favored Federal funding of schools run by churches or just the public schools. Only 30 percent favored giving Federal money to religious schools. In 1999, at a time when improving education is the top national priority and Americans favor increased Federal spending on education by a 3 to 1 margin, a new *Life Magazine* poll showed the same 30 percent support for giving Federal dollars to schools run by churches.

There is a lot of emotion in the debate over private school vouchers, over this plan in one city and that plan in another, but I would like to steer clear of the emotion and focus on the facts. And the facts say that vouchers cannot improve public education in a meaningful way.

Let me begin with the core assumption of voucher proponents: that private schools provide a superior education to public schools, and at lower cost. The truth is that if you control for family educational background and income, students in public schools perform as well or better than students in private schools. I won't deny that the very best private schools provide an excellent education, just as the very best public schools do, but on average private schools do not deliver the superior education promised by voucher supporters.

As for costs, research shows that nominal tuition charges at private schools substantially understate the real costs of private education. Most private schools rely heavily on special fees and fundraising activities to supplement tuition. In addition, most private schools do not provide the range of educational services found at public schools, such as special education, bilingual education, free transportation, and food and health services. The record keeping and reporting required to ensure accountability for public funds in a voucher system also would increase costs. Once these factors are taken into account, any cost benefits of private education largely disappear.

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It also is important to remember that a significant portion of any public investment in vouchers would go to students and families already in the private schools. Nationwide, for example, it would take some \$15 billion to pay the costs of the 5 million students already enrolled in private school. This substantial expense would do nothing to help students in public schools.

Another set of concerns is purely logistical. With over 90 percent of our children attending public schools, there just are not enough spaces to accommodate more than a small percentage of public school students in existing private schools. In California, for example, less than one percent of the State's public school students could expect to find space in private schools. It also seems logical to assume that the spaces that are available are likely to be found in second-tier private schools and not the best ones.

And getting students to private schools can require costly transportation subsidies. The City of Cleveland, for example, spent \$1.4 million in one year to pay for taxis that carried voucher students to school. Transportation is an often overlooked but unavoidable and very expensive extra cost of voucher programs.

A final area of concern is that many of the attributes that explain the appeal and the academic success of private schools are incompatible with the purposes of publicly supported education. For example, many parents turn to private schools because they believe religion should be an important part of their children's education. And most private schools use selective admissions procedures to screen out difficult-to-serve students such as some children with disabilities or behavioral problems. Private schools have been quick to recognize that participation in voucher programs threatens much of what gives private education its character and vitality. For example, a 1998 survey of 22 urban areas found that 86 percent of religious schools would not participate in a voucher program if it permitted students to opt out of religious instruction.

Many private schools also value their independence from the oversight that necessarily accompanies the use of public funds. This led 64 private schools in Miami to abstain from participation in Florida's statewide voucher program. While we can all appreciate and respect the determination of these schools to remain independent, their position underscores the difficulty of ensuring accountability for public funds in voucher programs.

All of these factors—the performance, capacity, costs, character, and accountability of private schools—suggest that the supporters of vouchers have not really thought through the real implications of their proposals. If they had, I believe that they would have to agree that private school vouchers just don't make sense as a responsible strategy for effective reform of the public schools. Voucher proposals can only distract the American people from the hard work of real education reform, drain critically needed funds from our public schools, and undermine support for public education.

CONCLUSION

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For nearly 7 years now, we have worked to develop and implement a comprehensive set of sound, research-based education reform programs. These programs are working to help States and school districts across America improve the quality of public education and turn around low-performing schools. This bipartisan, mainstream approach is based on a strong belief in the importance of public education for American society and democracy, high expectations for all children, and a commitment to ensuring that no child is left behind and denied the opportunity for a quality education. Vouchers would undermine public education and could derail this reform consensus while providing education of an uncertain quality to a small minority of students. The only responsible choice is to continue support for proven practices that strengthen public education for all children.

I will be happy to take any questions you may have.