

FOCUS/Vineyard/
Standards

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts)

Embargoed For Release
Until 10:06 A.M. EDT
Saturday, August 30, 1997

RADIO ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE NATION

Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning. This week a record number of American children will be heading back to school, reminding us of our greatest obligation, to prepare our children for the 21st century. We can't do that without a commitment to educational excellence for all those children, expecting them to meet high standards and testing to see if they do.

In my State of the Union address, I challenged every state to adopt high national standards of academic excellence, defining what every child should learn, and, by 1999, to join in a national test for all 4th graders in reading and all 8th graders in math, to ensure they have mastered these basics.

We know that challenging our students to achieve excellence works. This week, the College Board announced that SAT math scores continue to rise; and today, the National Assessment for Education Progress, the organization that issues what we call the nation's report card, announced that in recent years we have improved math and science performance at every age level. Most exciting, more high schoolers are taking challenging courses and college-level courses.

Still, we all know we have more to do to improve our schools and to raise learning levels for all our students. I've been working to improve education for nearly 20 years now, and I am convinced we can give our children the education they need to thrive in the 21st century only by setting high standards and by challenging students, teachers, parents and principals to meet them. National standards will help us to upgrade curricula, improve teaching, and target students and schools who need assistance.

I'm pleased that governors and mayors from all over

the country, business leaders and educators from states and

cities, big and small, people of both parties, are joining in this effort. We're working to make sure this doesn't become a partisan issue.

Some people worry that the federal government would play too large a role in developing the test. To meet that concern, I have instructed my staff to rewrite our proposal to make sure these tests are developed not by the Department of Education, but by an independent, bipartisan board created by Congress many years ago. This will make sure these tests measure what they should -- nothing more, nothing less.

Still, there are some in Congress who, even as our children are heading back to school, are working to undermine the very progress in education our children are counting on. They have proposed an amendment that would prevent us from developing a common test for math and reading, and therefore, would prevent your school district or your state or your child from choosing to take the test. That means you won't be able to find out if your child's school is meeting world-class standards.

The arguments they're using are the very same ones we've heard for years now. They amount to a determination to avoid accountability. Some say we shouldn't pay for test development even though it's being done by an independent body. Some say the test will be misused, even though participation is voluntary and is clearly designed to show how students and schools are doing and to show the way toward improving them.

Some say it's unfair to poor kids and kids of immigrant parents, even though many big-city school districts, including those in six of seven of our largest cities, say they want to be a part of the test and the national standards movement even if their states don't.

The fact is high standards are essential to providing our children the best education in the world, and I intend to do whatever is necessary to make sure we move forward.

The 21st century will be a time of remarkable opportunity. With high national education standards, we can make sure all our children have the education they need to seize these opportunities. Without them, our children will continue to pay for our own low expectations and our own limited vision for them. Our children, our schools, our future are far too important to be anything less than world-class. Let us move forward into the 21st century with high standards, and make sure we meet them.

END

POTUS/Oak Bluffs
Standard

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts)

For Immediate Release
September 3, 1997

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT OAK BLUFFS SCHOOL

Oak Bluffs School
Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts

11:53 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much, Dr. Cash, Mr. Benny, all the teachers who are here. I am delighted to have this chance to come by and visit with you. I know I'm on vacation, but when school starts, if I don't participate in some start-of-school event -- (laughter) -- I begin to have a nervous twitch, and I -- (laughter) -- and I was delighted to be invited to come by and to spend a few moments with you.

Let me begin by saying as you know, our family has been on vacation here now for a little over two weeks, and we have until the end of this week -- this is the longest time we've been away together in a very long time, and it's been a wonderful opportunity for us. We love it here. And it's especially important this year because this is the last family vacation we'll have before our daughter begins her next big educational adventure; so it's been great.

You know, every start of a school year is special because, as you well know, teachers come together with a new sense of dedication and energy and students show up wide-eyed in anticipation and parents pour all their hopes into what they hope will come out of the next year, that they're all truly wonderful. And I think they reflect the central premise of what you do for a living, and that is that our most important common enterprise as a people is clearly education. It's necessary not only for young people to grow up and be able to earn a good living, but perhaps more importantly, to be good citizens and even beyond that to live their own lives to the fullest, with a high degree of self-awareness and an ability to learn and absorb and grow throughout a lifetime. So it's always important.

But this year, I think it's especially important.
For one thing, we have the largest class of students in America,

ever. We finally now have a student body in the whole in America of over 52 million -- bigger than the largest years of the Baby Boom, which is a great burden for all of us aging Baby Boomers to have on our shoulders. (Laughter.)

For another, we have the most diverse student body we have ever had. We now have five school districts in America that have children from over 100 different racial and ethnic groups. And within a couple of years, we'll have a dozen school districts that have children -- but as you know, here in Martha's Vineyard, we're also diverse in other ways. We have massively huge school districts and we have very, very small school districts. And somehow, some way, we expect you -- all of you -- you and your counterparts throughout the country -- to work with our children and give them a world-class education and give them a shot to make the most of their own lives.

We also know that as we move closer and closer to the turn of the century and to the beginning of a whole new millennium, we're super attuned to the fact that we're living

increasingly in a global society as well as a global economy, where children in the smallest school on Martha's Vineyard, either now or someday soon, will be able to hook onto the Internet and do research and libraries in Australia or Asia, or talk to schoolchildren in Africa. And that's going to change the way we live and our perspective, and we have to be prepared for that.

It also means, frankly, that educational excellence at world-class standards is now more important than ever before. I can see a lot of very young teachers out there and then some of you who may be almost as old as I am, and those of you who have been teaching for a long time know very well that about 15 years ago, with the issuance of A Nation At Risk Report in 1983, our country began a serious national effort to reexamine the premises of public education and what needed to be done to make education better in our country.

And it's really been quite a moving thing for me both to observe and to participate in, even more when I was governor than now as President, because the states of our country have constitutional responsibility for our public schools. But I have seen the recommendations of that report back in 1983 slowly but surely and steadily making their way into the lives of schools all across America. Our schools are offering broader and deeper curricula now, our students are taking more challenging courses now, our schools, by and large, are much better run now. There tends to be more participation and cooperation between principals and teachers. More of our school districts are pushing more and more educational decisions down to the school level, and our school districts tend to be better run now. And there's a whole different sense I get in school districts of all

sizes as I go across America, and that's all very, very encouraging.

We also have begun to puncture some myths, and that is that you can't get an excellent education in a small school, or if you live in an urban setting in a difficult neighborhood, the kids really can't learn; we know that's not true, either. We have seen all these sort of fears that people had about coming to grips with the idea that we could establish a real uniform commitment to excellence in education basically evaporate with this school reform movement.

In 1989 I had the privilege of being one of the governors to meet with then President Bush at the University of Virginia, and when we articulated six national education goals. And I was sort of the designated hitter for the Democrats, and we stayed up all night long, drafting these goals which then all of the governors voted for and the President embraced, which basically were a lot like what Dr. Cash said -- we started with the premise that everybody ought to have an opportunity to have a good preschool experience, that we ought to have a very high and uniform requirement for a curriculum that encompassed all of the things that all children should study, that we ought to achieve international excellence in math and science, that everybody ought to have a chance to get education beyond high school and that we ought to have a system of lifetime learning, that our schools all ought to be made safe and disciplined and drug-free.

There was another part to the national education goals that was often overlooked because it was either inconvenient or in some cases outright opposed, and that is there was a long section that I had stayed up half the night writing and, therefore, had been a little bit peeved to see ignored all these years -- (laughter) -- which basically said that one of the ways that we have to implement these goals is to set up a system of uniform national standards, not federal government standards, but national standards that reading and mathematics and basic science is the same in Montana as it is in Martha's Vineyard, and that we should not pretend otherwise, and that we should not be afraid to be held accountable.

For years, the governors tried to do something about that, but the effort sort of fizzled out, because there were all kinds of people who were opposed to it. Now, we fast-forward. The Congress has just passed a budget which will bring our budget into balance for the first time since 1969, but also has the biggest increased investment in education from the federal level since 1965. Everything from Head Start to access to college. It has the biggest increase in aid to people that go on to get a college education -- people of all ages, including people that go back and get graduate education which could benefit many of you in this room today since the G.I. Bill was passed in 1945. It is an astonishing educational document. And that leaves out, therefore, in my view, the one major thing that we've been sort

of skirting since the National Education Goals were issued in 1989, and that is the whole question of national standards in measuring our children by them.

In the State of the Union Address in January, challenged all of the states to adopt standards that were national and indeed international in terms of their quality, and then to participate voluntarily in reading tests for 4th graders and math tests for 8th graders to measure these standards in 1999. The National Education Goals actually call for 4th, 8th and 12th or 11th grade exams at the choice of the schools in a whole range of subjects.

But I thought we ought to begin here. And the response has been quite encouraging. I made clear that this was voluntary, nobody was going to be required to do it, that the federal government would not develop or administer the test, but would only help to pay for it, and that the tests should not be misused, but neither should we pretend that it's not needed. Almost every school in every state has a lot of tests that children are given. But some of the state tests really do measure national standards and some don't. A lot of the individual achievement tests tell you where you rank on a percentile, but that's really not relevant. If we have national standards, 100 percent of the children ought to clear the bar. And if nobody clears the bar, the child who made the highest grade shouldn't be considered to have done enough. That is the difference.

There are certain basic things that all of our children should know. I've been very heartened at a large number of states. The Defense Department Schools, which educate a lot of children around the world, and something that would have been unheard of even in 1989 -- 15 big city school districts have come forward and said, we want our children to be a part of this even if our states don't join, including the school districts in six of the seven biggest cities in America have said we are tired of being told our children can't learn, we are tired of being told we can't overcome our obstacles. We expect to be held accountable, and our kids, if anything, need a good education more than anybody else, not less, and we don't want to make any excuses anymore.

To me, this has been an overwhelming thing, especially in light of the long effort we've had since 1989 in trying to get this off the ground. That's the good news. And it is very good news, indeed. But now, there are some people in Congress and in the country who don't want this to happen. They either say we've got enough tests already or the federal government's making a power grab or they're afraid that the tests won't be fair to people who don't do well on it.

I would just like to reemphasize, number one, these tests are voluntary; number two, the results are not to be misused, but it's helpful to know whether the children, individually or in a class, or in a school or in a school

district, do or do not perform at acceptable levels in reading and mathematics at the very least.

Today, we have basically two tests that measure us, our kids by national and international standards. One is the so-called National Assessment of Educational Progress, the NAEP test, which I'm sure a lot of you are familiar with; over 40 states participate in that. But only representative samples of the students do it, and the scores are given by school district, so they don't really address how the children are doing.

The other is the third international math and science tests, the so-called TIMSS test, which is only given to a few thousand students every year. But it should be very encouraging to us. This year for the very first time since those tests have been given, our 4th graders scored well above the international average in math and science, and the few thousand kids who take it are representative by race, by region, by income of the American student body; once again demonstrating that if you set a high standard and go after it, you can achieve it.

Now, also, to make full disclosure, our 8th graders are still below the international average, but that's, I think, because in large measure, so many of the worst problems in our society hit kids when they reach adolescence and in bigger school districts so many of our middle schools are still organized around the family and community structures that existed in the 1950s and the early '60s when, in fact, they probably ought to be as small as a lot of grade schools are today to really meet the needs and the challenges these kids are facing.

But the bottom line is, we know from this example, that we can make it. And I think it would be a terrible mistake for people who are afraid our children can't measure up or who have a misguided notion that somehow the federal government is trying to take over the direction of education in America to persuade members of Congress not to fund the tests. And that's basically an issue we're going to be fighting out over the next few weeks.

We have agreed and feel strongly that a nonpartisan board which has been established by Congress for over 20 years now should be in charge of the development of the exam. All we want the Department of Education to do is to have the funds to pay for it and to help the states or school districts who need it, to give it. And now that we've got all these kids out there whose educators say they want to participate and I think we have to do it.

I said in The State of the Union Address that if there's one place politics ought to stop in America, it's at the schoolhouse door. And I have been gratified that we've had Republicans and Democrats from all over America supporting this effort.

Just yesterday, the Secretary of Education went to Philadelphia, which has a remarkable superintendent named David Hornbeck, who used to be the Superintendent of Schools in Maryland, the State of Maryland and left the job to go to Philadelphia to prove that you could run a big-city school district and give educational excellence to all kids. And they've established a very rigorous standards program, and student achievement has risen among all students at all grade levels from all backgrounds in the Philadelphia school system. So it's just like everything else. Setting a goal means you're more likely to meet it than if you don't set it.

Those who say we shouldn't measure -- if I were to say, well, we ought to stop testing airline pilots because it might be offensive to some people, we would be reluctant to fly. If I were to say that we should end the rigorous evaluation techniques that the United States military has because it might be offensive to some people, you would say, "you must be out of your mind." The military is a place where more people from more different backgrounds, more different racial and ethnic backgrounds have found a way to achieve excellence than any other

institution in our life and besides that, they protect us better than anybody else is protected in the world -- why would you stop setting high standards in measuring to see if we meet them? That's all that I am trying to do.

So I hope that since Massachusetts is one of the first states to agree to voluntarily participate, I hope all of you will support this, and I hope that if you have the opportunity, you will encourage the members of Congress and your senators to support it, because to me, it's the last major step. I have done all I could to push more decisions down to the school district into the school level. We have dramatically reduced paperwork in the Department of Education, we have dramatically increased the ability of local school districts to spend federal money and states, according to their own designs, within the general framework of the intent of Congress, so I want more decision-making done at the local level, but I still think we ought to have national standards that give our children a chance to do well in the global economy. And I believe that they all can do well.

And I believe that the poorest of our kids, the kids that come from the most difficult backgrounds, need it more than others, because they look to you, they look to the schools to give them the chances that their own parents didn't have. I know it's harder for you and I know a lot of you have to contend with problems that these children bring from home that weren't there a generation ago, but every single thing you can mention just means that they need it more, not less.

So I expect this to be one of the major debating issues of the next few weeks when I go back home to go back to

work, and I came here to thank you for what you do, to ask you to continue to support the educational excellence and to send a clear message that you believe that excellence and accountability and high aspirations are for all our children, because we know they can make it and we know that for their sakes, we have to expect them to do so. Thank you and bless you. (Applause.)

(A gift is presented to the President.)

THE PRESIDENT: Let me say, I actually believe I could pass a history exam on Oak Bluffs. (Laughter.) This is one of the most interesting communities that I have ever heard anything about and its history over the last 100 years, particularly, is fascinating to me, and I always spend a lot of time here when we come to the Vineyard, and I'm grateful for this.

I also should tell you that someone gave Hillary and Chelsea and me that huge, 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle -- (laughter) -- and we did it. (Applause.) So I am now prepared for a detailed geography examination on Martha's Vineyard in general and Oak Bluffs in particular.

I also want to say, this is a magnificent school and just before I came in here, I was offered the chance by your principal to actually decorate one of the tiles. I have no doubt that mine will not be nearly as good as the students' or the staff's, but I'll give it my best shot. Thank you. (Applause.)

END

12:18 P.M. EDT

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

September 2, 1997

EDUCATION STANDARDS EVENT

DATE: Sept 3, 1997
LOCATION: Oak Bluff School Library,
Martha's Vineyard
EVENT TIME: 11:35 am-12:00 pm
FROM: Bruce Reed

I. PURPOSE

To underscore your commitment to education while America goes back to school, and to reinforce your call to Congress to support national academic standards by supporting national testing for 4th graders in reading and 8th graders in math.

II. BACKGROUND

You will be speaking to approximately 50 teachers and administrators of the Oak Bluff School. The Oak Bluff School is a public school for students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The staff is preparing for the first day of classes on Thursday.

This is an opportunity to reinforce the message from Saturday's radio address on national education standards. Later this week, both houses of Congress may vote on amendments to prohibit the Education Department from spending additional funds on the national tests.

This event builds on Secretary Riley's visit to Philadelphia on Tuesday, where he participated in an announcement of significant gains in student achievement tied to high standards and rigorous tests.

The Vice President will be visiting a school on Thursday where he will also reinforce the Administration's message on national standards and testing.

III. PARTICIPANTS

Superintendent Kriner Cash
Principal Lawrence Benney
Members of Congress tbd

IV. PRESS PLAN

Expanded Pool Press.

V. SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

- You will be greeted by Principal Lawrence Benney and Superintendent Kriner Cash.
- You will be announced into the school's library accompanied by Principal Benney and Superintendent Cash.
- Principal Benney will make welcoming remarks and introduce Superintendent Cash.
- Superintendent Cash will make remarks and introduce you.
- You will make your remarks and then depart.

VI. REMARKS

Remarks Provided by Jordan Tamagni in Speechwriting.

Attachments:

Background on Philadelphia academic achievement gains

Background on Philadelphia Academic Achievement Gains

The results announced yesterday are a strong indication that Superintendent David Hornbeck's three-year effort to raise standards and adopt rigorous assessments in Philadelphia (one of the first 15 cities to sign on your standards and testing initiative) is succeeding. Across the district, substantial academic gains were recorded in each subject (reading, math and science) and at each grade level (4th, 8th and 11th grades) tested. Some of the highlights include:

- Overall: an increase of at least 5 percentage points in the proportion of students performing at the basic level or higher in nearly all grades and subjects.
- Reading: an increase of more than 5 percentage points in the proportion of students achieving at the basic, proficient, or advanced level in each of the three grades.
- Science: increase of nearly 9 percentage points in the proportion of 4th graders achieving at least at the basic level.

As Secretary Riley said yesterday, these results are a clear sign "that doing the hard work of putting standards in place leads to progress" for young people.