

New Call For Support Of Clinton On Schools

By PETER APPLEBOME

ATLANTA, Feb. 18 — In remarks that reflected the delicate balance between Federal activism and local control in American education, Education Secretary Richard W. Riley, in his fourth annual State of American Education address, today urged support for President Clinton's ambitious program for the nation's schools and universities.

Mr. Riley began his remarks by paying tribute to President Jimmy Carter — seated in the first row at the Carter Center here — for his decision to create the Department of Education in 1979, despite criticism at the time that education was a local issue, not a national one.

Later, he pointedly argued in support of Mr. Clinton's call for a voluntary national test of fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math, noting that control of education remains local, but there is a legitimate national role as well.

"Reading is reading," he said. "Math is math. For these basics, let's not cloud our children's future with silly arguments about Federal intrusion. These proposed tests are an opportunity, not a requirement, a national challenge, not a national curriculum."

He also announced for the first time that the department will hold a national forum in the spring, "bringing together the nation's best teachers, public education leaders and members of the higher education community." The forum, he said, will explore ways to recruit the next generation of teachers and how to set new expectations for students. No date, location or participants have been announced.

The movement from Mr. Carter's creation of the Department of Education to Mr. Clinton's call for record Federal spending and a growing national presence in education reflects the slow, steady growth of a Federal

role in American education, a system that is more decentralized than that of most countries in the world.

Mr. Riley, was careful to pay homage to local control and local initiative in education saying the President's plan was "national in scope yet local in action because that's the American way." And he took pains to praise various local and state leaders, "Rick Mills and Rudy Crew in New York, Paul Vallas in Chicago, Gerry House in Memphis, Bill Rojas in San Francisco," and educational innovators like James Comer, Henry Levin, E. D. Hirsch, Deborah Meier, Ted Sizer, Marc Tucker, Gene Botoms and Robert Slavin who he said were coming up with original models for schools that work.

But both the setting of his remarks and the agenda that President Clinton outlined in his State of the Union address earlier this month reflected numerous ways in which the Federal Government is now seeking to play a larger role than ever. Included are

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various elements of Mr. Clinton's program like his call for voluntary national tests to compare students and states, his proposed Hope Scholarships to make a 13th and 14th year of schooling as universal as high school and his proposed \$5 billion in Federal spending to repair and rebuild decaying schools.

Lamar Alexander, a former Education Secretary and Republican Presidential aspirant, said Mr. Riley's agenda and President Clinton's program did not go far enough in reforming education and relied too much on a Federal presence. "Right church, wrong pew, too timid, too much Washington," he said.

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Riley
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Instead, he added, what the nation needed was radical reform based on taking all the money now spent on elementary and secondary education and giving it to parents to allow them to choose schools and on removing union and government regulations that hinder radical redefinitions of what schools should be.

Still, he admitted the conservative agenda of widespread school choice had not yet caught on.

"It does scare people," he said. "Sometimes when I describe it to an audience, they just stare at me."

But he said the nation needed a more dramatic change than Mr. Clinton is proposing. "I think we're learning to tolerate the intolerable," he said, "so I think what we should do instead, and it will take Presidential leadership, is to have a completely new public school system."

Mr. Riley, no doubt recognizing that polls indicate the popularity of the Democratic education agenda, said the President's agenda was a practical one geared to the needs of children, schools and parents.

"I'm into action and not talk," he said after his speech. "I've heard enough about all the rhetoric that takes people to the mountaintop and then leaves them there."

Riley: Close or reorganize bad schools

Americans should close or reorganize bad schools, even if it

- * means replacing teachers and principals, Education Secretary Richard
- * Riley said in his yearly speech on the state of education. He also backed President Clinton's proposal for national standards and said he would hold a forum on how to address a shortage of teachers.

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GET SMART

Dedication to quality education requires national resolve, action



**RICHARD
Riley**

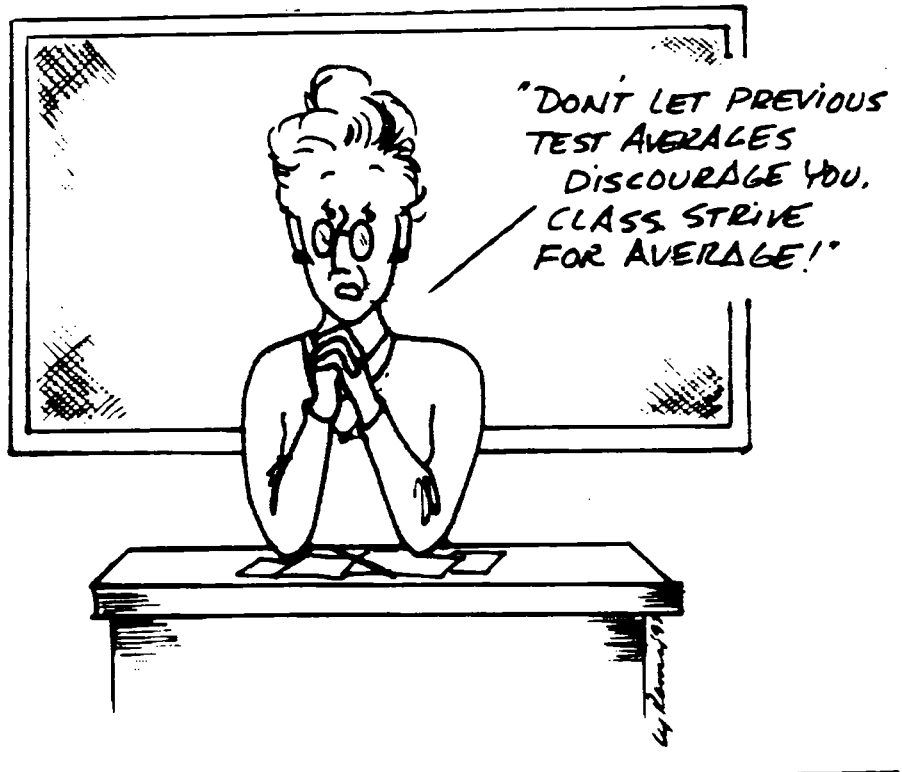
Americans can celebrate President Clinton's State of the Union call to action on behalf of educational excellence. The people of this nation are united in their belief in the crucial role of education in improving the lives and futures of each and every resident.

Because education is such a shared priority, and because we already know what creates a good school, we begin this crusade for American education with a strong foundation. Years of national and international studies reveal that the most successful schools are those that have clear, high standards of achievement and discipline. They are schools that are safe, that have talented and dedicated teachers in every classroom and that promote parent and community involvement.

To achieve this, we need a means of measuring at what level our schools are progressing. American corporations have already learned the benefits of "benchmarking" their operations against other firms that have demonstrated excellence. With a recently released report, the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, teachers, students, parents and communities have the opportunity to do likewise with their schools in math and science.

The TIMSS report studied 500,000 students in 40 countries, including 40,000 Americans, in what is by far the most ambitious and rigorous such comparison ever taken. The first part of the report released data on how American eighth-graders performed in comparison with their counterparts worldwide, and data on fourth-graders and 12th-graders soon will be released. The results were decidedly mixed. At the eighth-grade level, among all the countries, we were above average in science and below average in math.

But for the United States, in this education era, average is not good enough. We must strive to be the best.



Kids meet expectations

We can only do that if we look beyond the rankings and focus on what the report revealed about how to strengthen our efforts to create world-class teaching and learning. The TIMSS study revealed that our problem is not the amount of time U.S. students spend on mathematics and science, but what they do with the time they have. TIMSS has shown us that countries that do well on these evaluations set higher expectations for their middle school students. For instance, virtually all Japanese students take a heavy load of algebra and geometry by the eighth grade, whereas in the United States geometry is rarely in the curriculum in the eighth or even the ninth grade, and only students in high-level classes receive algebra in the

More...

GET SMART, continued...

eighth grade. We expect less from our children, and, to our dismay, they meet our expectations.

High standards are not a foreign concept to American teachers. TIMSS found, for instance, that 95 percent of all U.S. math teachers were aware of standards released several years ago by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. Unfortunately, a sample of videotapes of actual classroom teaching revealed that American teachers were still focused on less productive teaching strategies rather than challenging standards and the need to understand how to solve problems. (Paradoxically, Japanese teachers widely practiced what the American standards recommend, and the result was that Japanese students did very well in the TIMSS evaluation.) And this study found that high performing countries value teachers and give teachers the time and training to teach better and more rigorous lessons.

World-class districts

Many American schools already are working to implement these kinds of tests. In Illinois, for example, 20 school districts took the TIMSS test and placed first and second in the world. Other schools are well on the way to providing challenging courses so their students will achieve more, and the test scores and success rates of their students show it. Unfortunately, however, too many schools still expect too little.

In some states, more than 80 percent of the students meet state educational assessments, but less than 20 percent of these students make the grade when held up to higher standards of achievement based on excellence. That makes

no sense, and it is why the time has come to reach for national standards — not federal government standards — that define what our students must know to master the basics. Algebra is algebra in Plano, Peoria or Pasadena.

President Clinton's 10-point call to action for educational improvement will move us toward this goal. For the first time, parents and teachers would have access to a voluntary national test for individual students in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math if their states and local school districts participate. This test, to begin in 1999, will let each student, parent, teacher and community know how their children are doing and what they can do to meet these standards.

Reading challenge

Studies show that children who can't read well by the fourth grade are students who might be locked for the rest of their lives in

a struggle to learn. It is why President Clinton has challenged this nation to make sure every American student can read well by the end of the third grade. Similarly, eighth grade is a crucial time for our students to know whether they have mastered the basics of math, algebra and even geometry and have the foundation to take on the tougher math and science courses in high school that will prepare them for college and careers.

A recent National Assessment of Education Progress reading evaluation shows us 40 percent of our young people are reading below the "basic" level. And the TIMSS test revealed all too clearly that the only way to learn and succeed at world-class levels is to embrace higher standards of learning.

Although states and local school districts would have the option not to participate in the national test, they would have everything to gain by doing so — most importantly, a better understanding of what their students know and a ticket to standards of learning excellence in the basics.

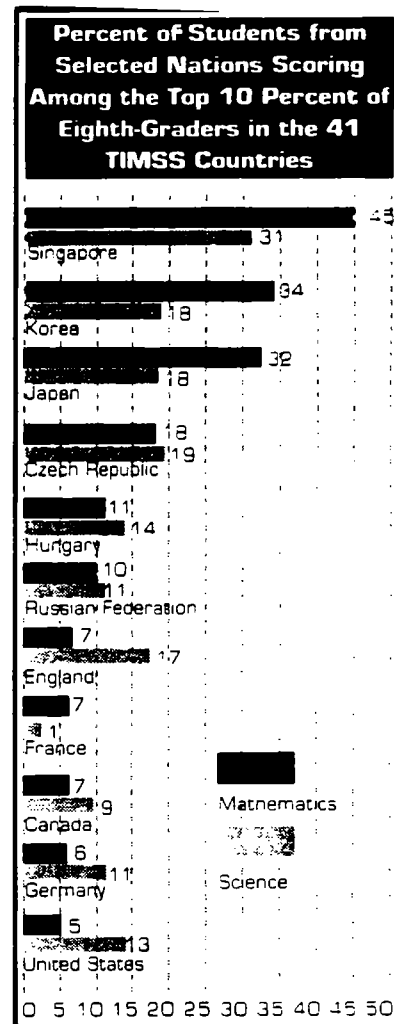
We must be, as the president

urged, shapers of events, not observers. If we do not embrace education as an issue of local action born out of national concern and national security, if we do not reach for higher standards of learning and develop a means of measuring student achievement at these pivotal points, then we will surely see too many young people left behind in this information age. They will be on the wrong side of the education fault line.

The president has made it his No. 1 priority to help every American have opportunity for a quality education and to help families pay for college. With this call to action, we have a clear means to reach these goals. But it will require national resolve and state and local action.

When we set our sights low, the results reflect underachievement. But when we aim high and challenge our students, they can be the best in the world. For our children to fulfill their promise, we must fulfill our promise to our children.

Richard W. Riley is the U.S. Secretary of Education.



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