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Draft

Challenges to Parents and Schools Talking Points for the President

I challenge parents and teachers across this country to take responsibility and ^{to} be clear about ^{ways} how they can work as partners to support a student's learning at school and at home. To do this, I challenge every school, teacher, and parent to sign a written compact outlining the responsibilities and expectations for teachers and parents to help every child learn to high standards.

Moreover, I challenge teachers and schools:

To get serious about setting high standards in the basic skills: Every school district and school should hold their students to high national standards in the basic skills of 4th grade reading and 8th grade math, and measure progress toward meeting these standards through national tests to be available in Spring 1999.

To make high standards real for students and parents every day: Schools must [→] ^{This increased productivity & more time spent on learning, less on explaining} communicate clearly to parents what their children are expected to learn and be able to do in the core academic areas at each grade level. And schools should provide examples of student work that meets high standards so that parents can understand the level of work expected of their children, and so that students can see clearly what good work looks like. Just as athletes can clearly see what an excellent performance looks like, so should students. ^{I used this & found work increased in quantity & I spent less time answering administrative questions & more on developing quality work.}

To make the school family friendly: Schools should make it as easy as possible for working parents and teachers to communicate with each other, through steps such as setting aside time before and after school for teacher-parent conferences; holding school-related meetings in the evenings, on weekends, and in locations convenient for parents; taking advantage of new technologies (including the Internet and voice-mail) to communicate with parents, and provide teachers and parents the training they need to fully take advantage of these new technologies.

To show parents and taxpayers that education dollars get to the classroom: We must all work to ensure that, to the maximum extent possible, education dollars flow to the classroom to support teaching and learning, rather than supporting large administrative structures. School systems must examine carefully and provide parents and taxpayers with clear information on how education dollars are being spent.

I Challenge Parents to:

Insist that your school sets/uses high standards: Ask your school district to adopt challenging national standards and participate in national testing to measure progress toward these standards. Ask your child's school to show you how its curriculum will prepare your child to reach high standards. And, ask your child's school to show you clearly, for each grade level, what your child is expected to learn and be able to do.

Make sure your child learns that effort and hard work, more than ability or luck, leads to academic success: Have high expectations for your child. Never say to your child that their teachers and schools are expecting too much. And demonstrate your belief that if your child works hard, he or she can master the material the school expects him or her to learn.

Get and remain involved in your child's school, from kindergarten through high school graduation: Students of all ages understand that the things their parents spend time on and are involved in are important. Your child will work harder and do better in school if you stay in regular contact with your child's teacher; attend school functions and events such as parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings; volunteer in school when possible; and participate in the school's decision-making process.

Be involved with your children: Take the time to talk with them regularly; read together; use TV wisely; know where your children are, especially teens; talk directly to them about the values you want them to have, and about the dangers of drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

POTUS speech at VP Family Conference

To raise the standards and abilities of America's schoolchildren we will need more than the commitment of teachers to help our students meet these goals. We need teachers and parents to create partnerships that are focused on finding ways that both groups can help children reach the high standards required on the President's testing initiative. A successful partnership will allow teachers and parents to work together to communicate the importance of high standards and hard work. This will help ensure that all of America's children have the skills to make a successful contribution in the 21st century. Here are some simple ideas that parents and teachers can use to work together for the same goal of helping children learn the important skills they need.

Points to Make to Parents

1) Make visiting your child's teacher your highest priority

- Your child's teacher is your most important business partner
- Give the teacher as much, if not more, credit than you give your child. Meaning take your teacher's word in addition to your child's.
- Come to the conferences with an open mind. No one wants to hear that their child is not performing to a teacher's standards. However, no teacher wants to break that news to a parent. Teamwork is most important in this situation. You are both working to the benefit of your child. you might not agree about the best way to benefit your child, but work on it. Bring the principal and other counselors as appropriate to the situation. Be patient.
- Give your child's teacher every possible way to contact you --your home telephone number, your work telephone number, your E-mail address, and your fax number.
- Return the teacher's calls
- Ask the teacher what his/her learning standards are and for specific ways you can help your child meet them.

2) Establish and stick to routines for children of all ages. Children need stability.

- Make a "homework place" for your children.
 - good lighting
 - good working space, flat writing surface
 - No TV or other noisy distractions (including siblings or noisy parents and the telephone)

- Have a family meal -- either breakfast or dinner WITHOUT TV and/or a family conference time (Sunday nights) where everyone talks about what they are doing, what they need help with, and what family resources need to be allocated where.
- Do not move your child to another school in the middle of the school year, unless absolutely necessary. This disrupts the stability that a child needs.

3) Be an "Uncool Parent"

- Even if your child says that he or she doesn't want you to go to parent-teacher conference because it isn't cool, go anyway.
 - This proves to your child the importance you place on your child's education. Besides, you might come home with good information from your child's teacher that you can pass on to the child that you can pass on to the child. The child might not act like this influences him or her, but it does make a difference.
- Do Not abandon school involvement during Middle and High School.
- Go to child's events including awards ceremonies, sports events, plays, recitals, science fairs, etc.
- Offer to help at those events (run concessions, organize parking for events, etc.)
- Use your skills to contribute to your child's school

Points to Make to Teachers

1) Don't give up on parents or parental involvement

- Think of simple ways you can get parents involved in your school
 - Weekend conferences (I'm not sure how unions will feel about this.)
 - Plenty of advance notice for meetings and events so parents can put them in schedule
 - Remember to be as patient and sensitive with parents as you are with your students. Don't talk down to them or use a lot of educational jargon (acronyms, etc.)

2) Clearly communicate your classroom standards to both parents and students

- Classroom posters
- Notices mailed to parent's home and employment
- Notify parents and students immediately when they are not meeting standards, suggest specific things parents can do to help child reach standards.
- President will clearly communicate his standards and the standards of America's teachers with his national tests and he needs the teacher's to help him get the word to the parents on specific ways they can help their children meet the President's standards. The President has standards for Physical Fitness, which P.E. teachers help students work towards, the same could apply to his academic standards.

3) Become a leader in making your school "family friendly"

- Organize non-academic school events that provide a casual way for parents, students, and teachers to interact. ex. fairs, plays, jamborees, history day, career day, etc.
- Establish a "parent center" a sort of lounge or resource room where parents are welcome to pick up literature and tips on children's health, learning, or even job hunting skills. It could also be a less intimidating place for parents to wait for a meeting with a teacher or principal.
- Have colorful welcome signs in all the native tongues of the parents
- Create bonuses for parents who get involved. Pizza coupons or work with local merchants to get discounts on clothing, sneakers, food things that families need. (This is sort of bribery and I hate to use it in my classroom. You want people to be motivated for the right reasons, but motivation for any reason is better than no motivation at all!)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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To: Mike Cohen

Date: 8/20

Fax #:

Pages: 3, including this cover sheet.

From: Terry K. Peterson/Lidice Rivas

Subject:

Mike -

this is additional information - punchier

for ~~more~~ possible use by the POTUS

regarding families + Educators working together.

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There are steps all families can take at home to help improve their children's learning:

- **Read together.** Only 30 minutes a day makes a huge difference (READ*WRITE* NOW! 1995).
- **Use TV wisely.** Academic achievement drops sharply for students who watch more than 10 hours a week, or an average of 2 hours a day (U.S. Department of Education 1987).
- **Establish a daily family routine.** A national survey of children highlights the importance of families eating dinner together and spending time discussing events of the day (Mass Mutual June 1994); other studies show the academic benefits (*Teacher Magazine* February 1995).
- **Stay in regular contact with your child's teacher and schedule daily homework times.** Establishing a routine at home that includes time for homework is important to students succeeding at school (Clark 1988).
- **Monitor out-of-school activities.** High school students involved in organized activities have higher grades, higher educational aspirations, lower delinquency rates, and a greater sense of control over their lives (Medrich & Marzke 1991).
- **Talk with children and teenagers.** It could literally save their lives.
- **Communicate positive values and character traits, such as hard work, and responsibility.** Students with low test scores who spend substantial time on homework get as good grades as students with more ability who do no homework (U.S. Department of Education 1987).

There are things that schools can do to improve family involvement in children's learning:

- **Train teachers to work with parents.** Most states do not require teachers or administrators to engage in much study of family involvement or to develop many skills to promote it in the course of their training (Family Research Project 1995). Both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association are developing inservice training programs to address this problem.
- **Create a welcoming environment.** Often parents have had a bad experience in school themselves or did not attend school in our country and are unfamiliar with our school customs. Signs posted in the front of schools like, "Visitors report to the front office," can be very threatening to some parents.
- **Expand opportunities for contact.** Many schools are beginning to hold morning, evening and weekend meetings and conferences before and after school to accommodate families' work schedules. Some schools are offering conferences at work sites or neutral settings like churches.
- **Extend the learning day.** The National Education Commission on Time and Learning (1994) recently recommended extended-day and extended-year programs to help students learn more. The schools in Murfreesboro, TN, are now open from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.,

offering enrichment classes beyond the normal school day.

- **Communicate often and without jargon to parents.** At times, parents feel that educators talk down to them or speak in educational jargon they do not understand, while the majority of teachers feel that parents need to be more engaged in their children's learning (Hart 1994). Reaching families whose first language is not English requires schools to make special accommodations.

Employers can take a complementary role in helping families and schools improve student's learning through family involvement:

- **Create and promote policies that make it possible for employees to be involved such as flextime, work-at-home arrangements, job-sharing, or release time to volunteer.** In a national survey of employers, 92 percent reported a dramatic reduction in both absenteeism and tardiness when employees were given a flextime option. After 3 years, turnover reductions were reported by 2/3 of the employers.
- **Support parent employees through worksite programs such as parenting seminars, newsletters, resource libraries, and worksite PTAs.** A study at John Hancock Financial services found that implementing family-friendly policies resulted in a year's savings of almost \$600,000.
- **Work to improve childcare and schools through internal and community programs such as on-site childcare or satellite schools, child care referral and subsidies, school-employee partnerships and volunteer programs.** The Child Care Action Campaign, a New York-based advocacy group reports that child-care related absences cost employers \$3 billion annually. Across three national surveys, employers reported that recruitment and reduced absenteeism were the two most strongly perceived benefits of company child care initiatives.
- **Work with schools to help better meet the needs of employed parents through volunteer programs, employee-friendly scheduling of school events, translation of parent materials, and sponsoring family resource centers in schools.** A Council on Economic Priorities survey reported that 78% of persons interviewed had switched brands and altered their buying habits because of information on companies' involvement in their community.

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I understand that the President may be looking for recommendations and information for how families and educators can work together, and announce at the VP's reunion next week.

Attached are ideas for Families and Educators from which you can work from

Subject:

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respect each other

WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A FAMILY MEMBER

Actions that make a difference:

imp. of ed. TV

violent & inattentive kids

- **Take the time**--those moments talking at evening meals, singing and listening to music together starting in the earliest of years, and visiting the library, museum, or zoo make a difference.
- **Read together.** It's the starting point of all learning. Read with your young children, starting in the earliest of years. Share a good book with your teen. Together, write letters or emails to relatives. Help them get a library card and use it regularly.
- **Use TV wisely.** Limit viewing to less than two hours a school day. Support more education programming on television.
- **Stay in regular contact with your child's teacher.** Encourage your child to take challenging courses at school. Check homework every day.
- **Participate in the life of the school.** Volunteer in school when possible. Participate in the school decision-making process. Help connect community resources to the schools--colleges, cultural and scientific institutions, community based organizations, employers, libraries, etc.
- **Know where your children are, especially your teens.** Encourage them to be involved in sports, arts, academic clubs, and youth and religious groups. Support community efforts to keep children safe and off the streets after hours.
- **Talk directly to your children** about the values you want them to have and about the dangers of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco--it could literally save their lives.
- **Join with your child's teachers and principal** to compare your school program against high standards of excellence so your children can reach their full potential. With other parents, teachers, and the principal develop a report card on how your child's school is progressing. Include standards of excellence raised by the President in his Call to Action. Does your school:
 - Set clear standards of achievement, discipline, and accountability.
 - Welcome parents, provide parent education, and, where appropriate, offer early childhood programs.
 - Make sure there is a talented teacher in every classroom and a Nationally Board Certified Master Teacher in every school.
 - Ensure children reading well and independently by the end of 3rd grade. Will your school participate in the national reading tests at grade 4 in 1999?
 - Prepare middle school students to achieve in math and science by taking algebra and

teachers can do this

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even geometry in middle and junior high school. Will your school participate in the national math test in grade 8 in 1999?

- Encourage and offer students in high school a wide range of Advanced Placement courses and "tech-prep" courses of study -- these classes prepare students for college.
- Connect every classroom to the information superhighway.
- Prepare middle school and high school students with the skills and work habits for at least two years of college and make college attendance possible for anyone who applies themselves and makes the grade.
- Provide safe and drug-free schools, including extended learning opportunities that offer reading tutoring and mentoring in math and science, art, music, and supervised recreation, and homework and computer centers.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR OR TEACHER

- **Avoid jargon.** Speak to parents in clear language. Listen to what parents have to say. Send home materials that are easily readable. Reach out to those families whose first language is not English through translated materials and translators at school meetings.
- **Make the school family-friendly.** Be welcoming to families and reach out to families before problems arise. Be friendly and respectful in all your interactions. Home visits can be helpful. Schedule parent-teacher conferences at convenient times.
- **Encourage parental participation in school improvement efforts, including the setting of standards of excellence.** Offer rigorous courses. Create safe and drug-free learning environments. Make the acquisition of computer skills a priority, and include families in the school decision-making process. Assess how well your school is doing on the following standards of excellence set forth in the President's Call to Action. Does your school:
 - Set clear standards of achievement, discipline, and accountability.
 - Welcome parents, provide parent education, and, where appropriate, offer early childhood programs.
 - Make sure there is a talented teacher in every classroom and a Nationally Board Certified Master Teacher in every school.
 - Ensure children reading well and independently by the end of 3rd grade. Will your school participate in the national reading tests at grade 4 in 1999?
 - Prepare middle school students to achieve in math and science by taking algebra and even geometry in middle and junior high school. Will your school participate in the national math test in grade 8 in 1999?
 - Encourage and offer students in high school a wide range of Advanced Placement courses and "tech-prep" courses of study -- these classes prepare students for college.
 - Connect every classroom to the information superhighway.
 - Prepare middle school and high school students with the skills and work habits for at least two years of college and make college attendance possible for anyone who applies themselves and makes the grade.
 - Provide safe and drug-free schools, including extended learning opportunities that offer reading tutoring and mentoring in math and science, art, music, and supervised recreation, and homework and computer centers.
- **Give teachers the tools to reach out to families.** Provide teachers with the training they need to help teachers understand the benefits of family involvement and show them how to remove barriers to parent involvement.
- **Sponsor safe and drug-free extended learning opportunities.** Help develop and sponsor affordable and quality after-school, weekend and summer learning through community learning centers in the school that include reading tutoring programs, mentoring for middle school students in math and science, computer centers, arts and cultural events, and

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supervised recreational activities in a safe and drug-free environment.

- **Use technology to link parents to the classroom.** Invest in creative new technologies from interactive voice mail systems, to homework hotlines, to take-home computers, to educational CD-ROM programs. Provide teachers with telephones in their classrooms.
- **Encourage communities to join school-family partnerships.** Enlist parents, community residents and law enforcement officials to solve safety and drug use problems. Call on community and religious organizations to help support extended learning opportunities, such as after-school reading tutoring programs or mentoring efforts to prepare children for college and career by stressing the importance of algebra and geometry. Call on businesses to help with internships and work study experiences in their places of employment. Invite colleges, libraries, and museums to join with you to expand learning partnerships in the school and community.
- **Establish reading tutoring programs.** Be part of the *America Reads Challenge* and establish an after-school and summer reading tutoring program so that all children can read independently and well by the end of third grade. Set a literacy goal for your community--for students to read and write 30 minutes a day, five days a week. Start community learning projects where older students tutor younger students.
- **Provide more education choices for families.** Working with parents and teachers, ask for more personalized education that meet community needs. Charter schools within schools, New American Schools, and magnet schools all offer more choices to families to meet their needs and achieve high standards.