

David, Mike, Jan, Kevin--COMMENTS????
Jennifer

History Standards Draft 1

Question: Many of us in Congress have heard a great deal about the proposed national standards for American history and world history. What is the situation with respect to the development of these standards? Will they be high standards for the study of history?

Answer: The nation's Governors and President Bush, when they established the National Education Goals, launched a movement focused on improving academic standards and student achievement.

As one of the follow-up steps to establishing the Goals, Then-Secretary Lamar Alexander and other members of the Administration funded several national standards projects in the areas of science, history, civics and government, English, geography, the arts and foreign language.

In 1991, Lynne Cheney, Chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities, in conjunction with Lamar Alexander selected the grantee and funded the history standards project. It is my understanding that the UCLA National Center for History in the Schools was selected because of its development of the much respected California curriculum framework in history.

The recently released history standards were produced with participation of a cross section of historians and teachers. However, the release of these documents marks the completion of only the first stage of a continuing effort. It is my understanding that the members of the National History Standards Project have scheduled a meeting with concerned critics of the standards to discuss needed changes and improvements to the standards. This is an important next step in the process of ensuring that these voluntary model standards represent the best scholarship and quality.

Let me be very clear, however, because there has been much confusion on this issue. These standards are, and will always be, voluntary. No law requires states or districts to use them. The Goals 2000 Act and the Improving American School Act asks that states develop their OWN challenging standards.

Ultimately, the value of voluntary national standards will be determined by their usefulness to communities, states and teachers who choose to use them.

What To Do About Education

2. The Schools

Chester E. Finn, Jr.

THE Clinton administration crowed this past spring about its success in getting Congress to enact an education-reform bill called Goals 2000. "Today will be remembered as the day the United States got serious about education," boasted the Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, within hours of Senate passage. Persons acquainted with this measure only through its boosters' rhetoric might suppose that something important had happened, that the country had actually begun solving its persistent education problem.

Yet Goals 2000 is no great advance. It codifies in statute the national-education goals that President George Bush and the 50 governors set four years earlier. It creates a new federal council to "certify" education standards. And it offers drop-lets of federal funds to states and localities that take (federally-approved) steps to meet those standards.

—In and of itself, this will cause few children to learn to spell, cipher, find Mexico on a world map, or comprehend the difference between phylum and species. More worrying, Goals 2000, particularly in concert with a far larger education bill nearing completion on Capitol Hill, could well make matters worse: chilling state and local innovation; intensifying federal regulation; discouraging testing and accountability measures; stocking the new national-standards council with "experts" and interest-group activists; creating plentiful opportunities for new litigation to redistribute education resources; focusing on school inputs (e.g., spending levels, class size, teacher training, textbooks) rather than pupil achievement; and signaling that Washington—rather than governors, community leaders, principals, parents—is the primary wellspring of change.

That scenario may be too gloomy. After all, past federal-education laws have had only a glancing impact on what is taught and how well it

is learned in the nation's 100,000 schools. And because Goals 2000 has even more pig-in-a-poke features than past legislation, its long-term effects cannot be forecast with confidence. But one thing is certain: administration hyperbole notwithstanding, Goals 2000 (and its vast companion measure) will not solve the education problem and thus cannot accomplish its primary purpose.

The essence of that problem today, as for at least the past twenty years, is that young Americans are not learning enough for their own or the nation's good. The evidence is so bountiful that I have space for no more than a few examples:

- On a host of international comparisons, the achievement of U.S. youngsters is at the middle (in reading) or bottom (in science, math, geography) of the rankings—test after test, year after year.

- Though nearly all who complete high school acquire rudimentary literacy and numeracy skills, only a fraction has the intellectual candlepower sought by employers, colleges, and policy-makers. In 1993, the National Education Goals Panel reported that "fewer than one out of every five students in Grades 4 and 12 have met the Goals Panel's performance standard in mathematics. One out of every four 8th graders has met the standard."

- Even fewer young Americans acquire an education that could be termed "world class." Thus in 1993, out of every 1,000 high-school juniors and seniors, only 85 took Advanced Placement exams in English, math, science, and history, and only about two-thirds of these received passing scores.

- On a recent (1992) survey of adult literacy, just 11 percent of U.S. high-school graduates could accurately restate in writing the main point of a newspaper article.

- A rising proportion of what universities teach is remedial. Many students spend the first part of college acquiring skills and knowledge they should have gained in high school. (They spent much of high school on what they should have learned in grammar school.)

- Many employers say they cannot find people to hire who have the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and habits needed to do the work; the result is another huge investment in remediation—and the export of skilled jobs.

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THE main symptom of our education malady, without doubt, is the weak academic achievement revealed by the foregoing facts, even among those who complete formal schooling. To understand the disease itself, however, other elements must be considered, not least because they have much to do with why this ailment has proved so resistant to treatment. I count a dozen such elements:

First, the equity issue. Besides millions of middle-class children emerging half-ignorant from suburban schools, our system of education attempts to deal with hundreds of thousands of underclass youngsters whose lives are askew in myriad ways, including (but surely not limited to) the fact that they are not learning much in school—from which many, in any event, drop out. The education debate moves confusedly between these two problems, the solutions to which overlap but are not identical.

Moreover, many remedies for the problem of suburban schools (e.g., higher standards) are opposed because it is feared that they will cause more poor and minority youngsters to fail, even though there is no evidence for this. And the near-meltdown of some schools attended by disadvantaged children, especially urban high schools, is so alarming that it blinds many people to the extent and severity of the middle-class problem. Authors like Jonathan Kozol have won fame, fortune, and the adulation of the education fraternity by getting teary about the former problem while pooh-poohing the latter.

Second, the schools' limited leverage. Formal education occupies a surprisingly slender portion of our children's lives. The youngster who faithfully attends class six hours a day, 180 days a year, from kindergarten through 12th grade, will, at the age of eighteen, have spent just 9 percent of his hours on earth under the school roof. The other 91 percent is spent elsewhere.

Under optimal circumstances, quite a lot of science, literature, and geography can be learned in that 9 percent. But such circumstances rarely obtain, and even when they do, the school still lacks the power to prevent AIDS, stop drug abuse, reduce the rate of teen pregnancy, or substitute for family and church. Yet more and more such missions are thrust upon the school every year, sometimes by desperate policy-makers, sometimes by activists keen to enroll malleable youngsters in some cause. ("Environmental education" is big these days; so is "community service," often highly politicized by the likes of Ralph Nader, and recently turned into another new federal program called AmeriCorps.)

Third, the enterprise lacks clear standards and expectations, what businessmen call "product specifications." One reason American students do not learn what they ought to is that the education system is so nebulous about what it demands of them. If Goals 2000 does any good at all, it will be by legitimizing some national-achievement

standards in core academic subjects. But few states and communities have yet specified the knowledge and skills that their youngsters should possess at the end of schooling, and few parents are clear about what and how much the schools expect their children to learn.

Worse, where states have tried to specify school "outcomes," the list usually turns out to be skimpy on fundamental knowledge and basic skills but lavish in its attention to attitudes, behavior, and interpersonal relations. This has then produced a political backlash against the very notion of standards, even in such "progressive" jurisdictions as Minnesota and Connecticut.

Fourth, we possess little reliable information about results. Not only have we had difficulty locating a clear destination for the education vehicle; we also have immense trouble erecting readable mileposts along the journey. The nationwide data are pretty good, but in most communities one cannot obtain timely, intelligible information about how well one's own children are learning, how their school is doing in relation to other schools, and how the community and state are performing in comparison with the rest of the country and the world.

Several factors have caused this data drought: testing is unpopular among educators (and civil-rights and child-advocacy groups, etc.); many of today's tests yield incomplete and misleading information; much of what one would like to know (particularly about the performance of individual children, classrooms, teachers, and schools) is never gathered; what is available rarely lends itself to comparisons; and nobody is responsible for an independent "audit" of educational results. Meanwhile, we are awash in data about spending, class size, and other "input-and-service" gauges beloved by educators.

FIFTH, young people see few real consequences. Even while lamenting the shoddiness of their applicants' preparation, not many universities and employers discriminate between those who take hard courses, learn a lot, and do well in school, and those who choose the path of least resistance, scrape by with C's, and learn very little. Only a small fraction of young people even applies to the handful of competitive colleges where prior academic performance makes a big difference. For the rest, the "real world" seems not to care much whether they hit the books or play around. (The practice of "social promotion" conveys much the same message to younger pupils.)

Children and adolescents being, in their way, rational creatures, it stands to reason that few see an imperative to study hard. To his credit, Albert Shanker, the president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), has tirelessly pointed to the "low-stakes" nature of American education as one of the leading causes of its mediocrity. Yet Goals 2000 bars the use of federal funds for

W.P. King
 "high-stakes" testing, and the federal Office for Civil Rights is harassing Ohio for tying consequences (receipt of a high-school diploma) to its own state tests.

Federal Standard
 Sixth, there is *no systemic accountability*. As former Secretary of Education William J. Bennett has noted, there are "greater, more certain, and more immediate penalties in this country for serving up a single rotten hamburger in a restaurant than for repeatedly furnishing a thousand school-children with a rotten education." And as another former Secretary of Education, Lamar Alexander, has observed, "Teaching is the only profession in which you are not paid one extra cent for being good at your job." Those managing the education system slough off all accountability for that system's results, good or bad. No rewards come to the successful, or unpleasantness to those who fail. This is partly because—

Seventh, *power rests with the producers, not the consumers*. One might suppose that "public" education was designed to serve the public interest and to account to the public for its performance. But one would be wrong. Most effective power today resides within the education establishment, an interlocked directorate that includes the two big teachers' unions, the National Education Association (NEA) and the AFT (much the most potent and reactionary forces in U.S. education today); principals and superintendents; a dozen other employee groups; surprisingly docile state and local school boards; textbook and test publishers; and colleges of education. Even groups that we might expect to look after "consumer interests" are coopted. Thus, the PTA serves primarily the interests of educators; business groups entrust responsibility for school reform to establishment fellow-travelers; and many legislative education committees are chaired by present or former educators (whose candidacies were generously assisted by the teachers' unions, etc.).

Eighth, that same school establishment enjoys *near-monopoly control*. In any community, there is but one public-school system, attendance is mandatory, and the particular school a youngster attends is normally assigned by someone downtown. Only the well-to-do can loosen the monopoly's grip by taking up residence in another jurisdiction or paying for their children to attend private schools.

Monopolies, as we know, are seldom responsive to consumer preferences; *government monopolies* are even less so. Nor are they inclined to relent. This is why even such canny reformers as the Wisconsin legislator Polly Williams and Governor John Engler of Michigan have had huge difficulty in extending the principle of school choice. It is also why the education establishment threw millions of dollars against the California voucher referendum in 1993.

Ninth, not surprisingly, *education decision-making is gridlocked*. The monopoly's chief goals are to preserve itself, its clout, and the status quo

that it embodies: to increase the resources at its disposal; and to ensure that each constituent part retains its share of power, status, and money. Moreover, the complex layering of local, state, and federal regulations, the bloated, lethargic bureaucracies that run the school system, and the so-called "stakeholder" groups that must assent before any change is made—all these forces make for inertia, repel reformers, and allow each part of the system to blame others. It is a vast "no-fault" enterprise.

Tenth, we are afflicted by what might be termed *retail complacency*. Most Americans think their own school is fine, even if "the nation is at risk." On the 1994 Gallup education survey, for example, just 22 percent of respondents gave honors grades to "the nation's public schools," while 70 percent conferred high marks on "the school your oldest child attends." This discrepancy arises from many sources, including the falsely positive reports pumped out by local and state education systems, the inability of parents and taxpayers to get reliable outcomes data that they can compare to standards, and, perhaps, a disinclination to alter our own ways. The upshot is that most people seem to think the necessary reforming should happen across town.

ELEVENTH, *our schools were designed for the 19th century*. Even our "good" schools are not nearly so effective as they should be, because practically all of them follow an archaic formula. This is true of private and public institutions alike. (Private schools do produce somewhat better results, but their margin is surprisingly thin.) We have a school year shaped for the agrarian age; a school day built for the era when most mothers were home at 3 P.M.; primitive instructional technology; obsolete notions of how children learn; dull materials; a bureaucratic-management system that prizes uniformity and conformity; and a tendency to judge quality by how many adults are present and what services they provide rather than by what children actually learn. The model itself is woefully antiquated.

Finally, *the education profession is awash in bad ideas*. By and large, educators—at least many of the so-called leaders and experts among them—swear by precepts that have placed us at risk. Among these precepts:

- There is really not much wrong with the schools.

- Whatever may be wrong is the fault of the larger society (parents, TV, Republicans, etc.).

- Competition (among students, schools, states, countries, etc.) is harmful.

- Knowledge is passé; what matters are "cognitive skills."

- A child's sense of "self-esteem" counts more than what he knows.

- What children should learn—and from whom—depends on their race and ethnicity.

- Students should never be grouped for instruction according to their ability or prior achievement.

- Only graduates of teacher-training programs should be permitted in the classroom, and none but products of administrator-training programs should be allowed to lead schools or school systems.

But the main precept by which the education establishment and its friends in high places swear is that the ills of American education, such as they are, can be cured by generous applications of money. One difficulty with this prescription is that it is expensive. Another is that, for the most part, it is wrong.

There is no doubt that some school systems are impoverished. Nor is there any doubt that some teachers are not paid enough. (Some, however, may be overcompensated for the results they produce.) Some schools have leaky roofs, antiquated textbooks, dank gyms, and no Bunsen burners in their chemistry labs. And certainly there are sizable fiscal discrepancies among communities and among states.

Nevertheless, American education, taken as a whole, is spending plenty of money. Per-pupil expenditures in the public schools have tripled *in real terms* since the 1950's, have doubled since the mid-60's (when, by most gauges, our troubles began), and rose by about a third during the Reagan-Bush years of the 80's. Teachers' salaries went up 27 percent (in real terms) during that same decade. Meanwhile, class sizes have fallen: the median U.S. elementary classroom had 30 students in 1961, 24 in 1986. The public schools employed six adults for every 100 children in 1960, ten in 1981, and eleven in 1990.

As for international comparisons (a statistical swamp), U.S. public expenditures per pupil for kindergarten-through-12th-grade education surpass those of such allies and competitors as Japan, Germany, Britain, France, and Canada. A study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found that, in 1991, the U.S. spent 7 percent of its gross domestic product on public and private education at all levels, exceeded only by Canada. And, at 14.7 percent, we are one of the top three nations in spending on public education as a percentage of total public outlays, tied with Finland and surpassed only by Switzerland.

Yes, some of the changes we may need to make (e.g., a longer school year) are apt to carry a price tag. But the prior questions to ask are why we are not getting a better return on the money we are already spending, and whether, as our education outlays continue to rise (a seemingly ineluctable trend), we will find ourselves plowing the extra money into more of the same. As the economist Eric Hanushek concludes in a forthcoming book: "Strong evidence shows that continuing the policies of the past is extraordinarily expensive and unproductive. Expanding upon them would be worse."

THAT it is hard to solve this tangled nest of problems is abundantly clear. The politics of education are as intractable as any in the land. To implement change may be even more daunting, considering the vastness, sluggishness, decentralization, and ingrained beliefs of this huge enterprise and the layers of contract, custom, ideology, regulation, and law that envelop it.

Yet it is not difficult to imagine what a radically improved education system would look like. So long as we beware the simplistic "magic potion"—the single treatment that would supposedly fix everything—we can even visualize how the main reforms that need to be made would reinforce each other. As I see it, six of these are key.

Power. We need major shifts of authority and control over resources from producers to consumers and from experts to civilians. That entails cracking the establishment monopoly, and giving parents, voters, taxpayers, elected officials, and community leaders far greater say over what schools must accomplish, how they will be held accountable for doing this, and how children and schools will be matched to one another. The professionals should retain responsibility—and gain greater authority—for decisions about the *means* of education, but the laity needs to determine its ends. And those ends must serve the interests of consumers, not providers.

Such a shift of attitude, priority, and authority is the prerequisite for everything else. It may lead us to new forms of educational governance—for instance, handing control of the education system directly to mayors, city councils, governors, and legislatures rather than the semi-autonomous board-and-superintendent structure that prevails in most places. (Most of the boldest reforms in U.S. education today are the work of "outsiders" like Governor William Weld of Massachusetts and Mayor Kurt Schmoke of Baltimore.)

The needed power shift may also mean breaking vast school systems into smaller and more manageable units—and perhaps consolidating some tiny, dysfunctional units. It surely includes allowing individual schools to make many decisions heretofore made by bureaucracies, deeper involvement of parents in school governance, and far greater accountability on the part of managers at each level for quality and efficacy.

Above all, the needed power shift means knocking the props out from under the monopoly; enabling people to select from among alternatives; ending coercive assignment of pupils to schools; rewarding (with students, money, etc.) those schools and educators that do a good enough job to attract "clients"; and ending the disgraceful custom of guaranteeing pupils—and the resources and jobs that accompany them—to bad schools that would sit empty if people could vote with their feet.

Standards. Any well-functioning enterprise begins with clarity about its expectations. Successful institutions can describe with fair precision what they are trying to accomplish, what their markers of quality are, and by what indicators they determine how they are faring. So, too, with education. The quality revolution must start by spelling out what young Americans will know and be able to do if the schools perform their job properly.

At a minimum, this means ambitious high-school-graduation standards that consist not of courses taken or time spent but of demonstrable skills and knowledge. These must be supported by synchronized standards at several check points along the way. The six national education goals set by President Bush and the 50 governors in 1989—including the specification of five core subjects and check points at grades 4, 8, and 12—were a good start down this path. (Regrettably, the mangling—and expanding—that the goals received from Congress this year leaves them rather less satisfactory.)

Current efforts by national-professional associations of "subject-matter" experts may help flesh out these expectations, though we ought not expect too much from this process. (Some stress "thinking skills" and downplay knowledge; others tend toward political correctness; and—in addition to the core subjects of English, math, science, history, and geography—these efforts now include such dubious entrants as "social studies" and "teaching English as a second language.")

But *national* standards are not the point. They are not essential. They may even turn out to be harmful. In any case, what is done at the national level matters far less than the goals and standards spelled out by each state and locality. If they are to be enforceable, they must be set by those with real authority over schooling, which again means states and localities. And if community concerns about such touchy matters as values and character are to be resolved in acceptable fashion, it is also at the local level that they must be worked out.

This is an arduous process, to be sure, and one that policy-makers dare not hand over to education "experts." Taxi drivers, thoracic surgeons, accountants, and clergymen should have at least as much to say about what the children of their communities need to know and be able to do as curriculum directors, university professors, and teachers' unions. But there is no need to start from scratch. Much good material is at hand—like E.D. Hirsch's grade-by-grade sourcebooks on "cultural literacy"—and more appears daily.

Accountability. For standards to have a real impact, we need good tests and other assessments of student and school performance vis-à-vis those standards. We need trustworthy information about how we are doing. And we need accountability mechanisms that include real stakes and consequences for everyone involved.

No enterprise that has avoided accountability

up to now will welcome its imposition. Countless reasons will be given as to why it is unfair, even cruel, to hold anyone responsible for his own or anybody else's results. The opponents of testing will also raise a thousand objections to the use of any given measuring tool. (The federal intervention in Ohio's graduation test is based on slightly discrepant passing rates by black and white youngsters.) It will take great determination to break through all this.

A true system of accountability has several essentials: exams that mirror the desired goals and standards of the state or community; a blend of teacher-designed assessments (vital for diagnosis and classroom correction) and external tests, prepared and administered—like an independent audit—by people other than the school system's own managers; speed and intelligibility of test results, together with their comparability over time and across jurisdictions; and the employment of other gauges of success, such as attendance, graduation rates, and the incidence of discipline problems.

The purpose is not bean-counting. It is to alter pupil and educator behavior so as to produce better results. Which means that stakes and consequences must be tied to those results. This implies, for one thing, that students should be promoted (or graduated) only when they have met specified standards, that universities should adopt explicit (and unvarying) admissions standards, and that employers should do likewise. But consequences should not apply only to the students. Teachers, principals, superintendents, and other responsible adults should also be rewarded for success, penalized for failure, and—ultimately—dismissed if they or their institutions cannot get the job done.

Supply-side pluralism. All schools should embrace a common core of skills and knowledge, but they should also be encouraged to vary along other dimensions. Children differ in learning styles, temperament, and personal preference. Families differ in the educational experiences they want for their children (particularly in such domains as values, ethics, and character). Educators differ in philosophy, passion, and expertise. Communities, states, and regions have distinctive traditions, priorities, and concerns. America is too big and diverse a country to expect a single educational model to fit everyone.

Hence, rather than trying to standardize our schools, shackling them with regulations, and punishing them for deviating, we should welcome educational pluralism and the freedom and competition that accompany it. Let schools vie with one another on the basis of their distinctive features; let them do all they can to attract students and families—and to satisfy those they attract.

In addition, we should encourage diverse "proprietors" to create and manage schools. It is time, as the Minnesota analyst Ted Kolderie says,

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to "withdraw the exclusive franchise." Instead of supposing that all public schools must be the creatures of large, bureaucratic systems, we should encourage entrepreneurship by teachers and other educators, by various public and private institutions, even by the business sector. And instead of awarding geographic monopolies to particular schools or systems, let them compete on one another's turf. Define a public school not as something administered in uniform fashion by a government agency but, rather, as a school that *serves* the public, that accepts the core standards adopted by its state or community, and that agrees to be accountable for its results.

The appetite for such innovation is vast. Though the Massachusetts legislature—heavily lobbied by teachers' unions, school boards, and administrators—limited to 25 the number of "charter" schools* that could be started under the Commonwealth's reform law, on the day that charter proposals were due, state Education Secretary Piedad Robertson received 64 such requests. More have since flooded in.

Educational diversity also means welcoming the creation of "break-the-mold" schools based on wholly different models of what a first-class education might be. Some of the Massachusetts charter schools promise to incorporate new designs when they open in 1995. So do the nine projects supported by the New American Schools Development Corporation, the Edison Project (with which I have been associated), the Coalition of Essential Schools, and other public and private ventures. A true revolution in education means more than fixing up the schools we already have; it also means creating schools we have never before imagined.

Demand-side choice. School choice is no panacea but it is the essential lubricant of a reformed education system. Families must be able to select their schools from among all available offerings. They must have the right to leave one school for another if they change their minds. And the array of schools from which they may choose should be as broad and variegated as possible.

Myriad details must of course be worked out as education shifts from a monopoly-and-coercion system to one based on pluralism-and-choice. Nor, given our constitutional history and political sensitivities, is it a simple matter to decide whether all extant private schools, including church-affiliated institutions, should be able to participate in a tax-funded choice system. But it is not difficult to establish some crucial precepts by which educational choice should operate.

Begin by redefining public schools in the manner suggested above, then granting private schools the right to "opt in" so long as they are willing to accept public standards, accountability, and a modicum of regulation. But they must also be free, if they prefer, to remain wholly private, unregulated, and unsubsidized. Parents, too,

need the right to educate their children at home if they wish. Whether or not this is wise education policy, home-schooling is a needed escape valve for social and political steam.

Regulations for participating schools should be kept to a minimum: health, safety, nondiscrimination, accountability for results, financial probity, and not much more. But any marketplace works best when the customers have ample information about alternatives. In education, it is the public's proper business to ensure that such information is accurate. Especially valuable are "school report cards" that parents can understand. Some families will also benefit from help in analyzing such information and making decisions.

As with testing, the opponents of choice throw up a hundred reasons why it should not even be tried and insist that dozens of conditions be met in advance. A few such conditions are reasonable—working out a transportation arrangement, for example—and advocates should try to meet them. But the critics will never be content. They demand that proponents of new arrangements meet far more exacting standards than ever are laid on the status quo. Reformers should therefore concentrate on establishing the principle of choice—without losing another decade.

Professionalism. No school is ultimately better than the people who work in it. Great educators, accordingly, are a precious asset, worth locating, engaging, rewarding, and retaining. They should be treated as professionals, not as hired hands. In return, they must conduct themselves like professionals, which is a long way indeed from the behaviors typically displayed at the collective-bargaining table.

Professionalism involves ceding to individual schools a wide array of decisions historically made "downtown," including matters of instruction, staffing, resource allocation, schedule, school "climate," and discipline. So long as these decisions yield the desired results—and the customers are satisfied—the school's staff should be free to organize itself and its work as it thinks best.

Outstanding educators can be found in many places, not just among graduates of teacher-and-administrator training programs. Multiple paths into the classroom (and principal's office) need to exist, including ready entry for capable but inexperienced individuals who know their subjects, want to teach children, have sound character, and are prepared to learn on the job. The states that have already adopted "alternative-certification" schemes have made a start on this.

Once hired, one's compensation should be based on the effectiveness of one's performance, as well as the scarcity of one's specialty, the complexity of one's assignment, the breadth of one's

* Charter schools are independent public schools, often run by a group of teachers or parents, innovative (or traditional) in content, and free from most regulations and external controls.

responsibilities, and the difficulty of one's work environment. Uniform salary schedules that treat everyone alike, whether good, bad, or mediocre, have no place in any true profession.

Similarly, a professional needs opportunities to remain current in his subject and up-to-date on broader developments in education. Our institutional arrangements must provide for these, as well as for reasonable vacations, sabbaticals, etc. But professionals must also expect to work year-round and all day—and to take work home with them at night.

Those who falter should have a chance to solve their problem. But if it remains unsolved, they have no right to continue engaging in educational malpractice. This enterprise must run for the benefit of its customers, not its producers. Practices such as lifetime tenure are antithetical to bona-fide professionalism.

It is conceivable that the teachers' unions could transform themselves into professional associations that could live with these precepts.* But in most places the unions are throwing their considerable might against such changes and therefore must be combated through all available means. What counts is not what Albert Shanker and his NEA counterpart Keith Geiger write in their paid newspaper columns; it is what their hundreds of state and local affiliates do at the statehouse and the bargaining table.

OBVIOUS as these recipes may seem, few are cooking from them today. The entrenched forces of the status quo contend that radical change is unnecessary, even damaging to "public education as we know it." Furnish them with more time, more money, more leverage, better parents, and a society more committed to education, and whatever may be awry today can—so they tell us—easily be set right tomorrow.

Better still, they would have us believe, the added resources will enable them to broaden the school's responsibilities to include day care, birth control, drug-abuse prevention, health care, and suchlike. That the essential nature of "public education as we know it" is itself a large part of what is amiss is, not surprisingly, quite beyond their ken.

Meanwhile, the Clinton administration and its acolytes murmur that Uncle Sam will take care of everything, so long as everyone does what he says. From time to time, they give a rhetorical boost to ideas like charter schools, even the private management of public schools. (To the astonishment of his staff and the consternation of his union allies, the President personally penned such an endorsement into the 1994 State of the Union address.) But the administration's main education strategy is for the federal government to solve most of what is wrong via something it calls "systemic reform," by which it means an array of spending programs, regulations, and "state plans" subject to approval by the Secretary of Educa-

tion. Though committed to goals and standards, the administration is also bestowing renewed credibility on inputs and services, and it steadfastly refuses to attach real stakes or consequences to student results.

The giant Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization nearing completion in Congress makes further mischief. In addition to what has already been noted about it above, the version passed by the House of Representatives emasculates the independent, nonpartisan governing board that supervises the "national assessment of educational progress." It turns this sensitive testing program over to political appointees and government careerists disposed to probe deeply for revealing "family-background" data (one way to let schools off the hook) and to adjust test results to compensate for state differences in racial composition.

But Washington is not the only arena where the principles of sound reform are under fierce assault. Nor does the attack come only from the Left. "Silver-bullet" conservatives would have us believe that school vouchers, enabling people to attend private schools at public expense, are both necessary and sufficient to reform U.S. education. In recent months, they have trumpeted that conviction from California to Michigan, from Phoenix to Harrisburg.

Unfortunately, the voucher enthusiasts are only half correct. Wide-ranging choice among schools is indispensable, and—thanks to both the fervor of its advocates and its popularity among parents, especially those trapped in urban school systems—we are going to see more and more of it. But vouchers cannot do the job alone. Not, in any case, so long as there is no parallel supply-side effort to diversify, modernize, and deregulate our essentially uniform schools, private as well as public, and not so long as we have no clear "product specifications," no good consumer information, and no accountability mechanisms other than the marketplace.

ALSO firing from the Right—and one of the most worrisome developments of the past few years—is a tireless cadre of people who are striving to obliterate the theory and practice of "outcomes-based" education. They are right to be upset, yet their alternative would set back the cause of educational excellence a long way.

There are really only two ways to gauge educational quality and efficacy: in relation to school inputs or in relation to pupil achievement. Either we judge a school by what is learned there, or we inevitably find ourselves evaluating it by how much is spent there—or by kindred measures such as hours devoted, courses taken, and the ratio of teachers to pupils.

It was our decades-long preoccupation with inputs that placed the U.S. at educational risk

* See my article, "Teacher Politics," in the February 1983 COMMENTARY.

and forced belated attention to goals, standards, and results. As elected officials and business leaders came to realize in the mid-80's that added expenditures were not getting us anywhere, and that clarity about standards and accountability for results were vital ingredients of the reform recipe, they took steps to refocus the debate from inputs to outcomes. The national-education goals adopted by President Bush and the governors (and now enshrined in Goals 2000) are the most conspicuous legacy of this changed way of thinking. But even more important decisions were made at the state level, where one legislature, commissioner of education, or state board of education after another decreed that precise standards would be set forth, that children must study until they meet those standards, and that schools and their employees would henceforth be judged by their effectiveness in producing that result. Variants of that policy are now law in South Carolina and Florida, in California and Michigan, in Colorado and Illinois, in Kentucky and Pennsylvania, and in many other jurisdictions.

So far, so good. But the devil lurks in the details. Proclaiming that there shall be standards is not the same as spelling them out and, more often than not, responsibility for doing that was handed to educators with a radically different conception of what school is for and which results are desirable. Rather than itemizing the basic skills and knowledge that well-educated children should be able to demonstrate in core academic subjects, the lists of outcomes that were actually drafted had more to do with social attitudes, ideological positions, and interpersonal relations. Sometimes this was the product of committees and task forces created within the state; sometimes it came from itinerant vendors of pre-packaged "outcomes-based" programs, strategies, and curricula that are heavy on what educators call the "transformational" role of schooling and light on the "three R's" that are what most legislators, parents, and taxpayers have in mind.

This development was bound to alarm many parents, particularly when such dubious outcomes were mandated for all schools and children in the state. It is one thing for a private school or charter school to be forthright about instilling values and attitudes in its students. Nobody is forced to sign up for such a school. But it is another matter altogether when a state decrees that nobody can graduate from any of the schools within its borders before acquiring and demonstrating certain values and attitudes.

When the neighborhood school teaches children behaviors or beliefs that parents deem abhorrent, even sacrilegious, those parents can be expected to become forceful in trying to alter the situation, the more so if they have no exit to another school that is closer to their world view. The result, beginning in Pennsylvania but rapidly spreading across the land, has been a storm of protest against outcomes-based education.

The protesters' position has considerable merit. But it must also be noted that, for some people of a fundamentalist orientation, schools err when they teach children to reason independently, think critically, or weigh evidence objectively. While one can share the dismay of parents over a state-sanctioned educational institution teaching doctrines that offend their deepest beliefs, one cannot agree that schools, especially public schools, should forgo all "higher-order" intellectual skills. This conflict poses one of the most vexing dilemmas of contemporary education policy.

Because of these disputes, even the word "outcomes" has become tainted, and most prudent policy-makers and elected officials now eschew it. School inputs are getting a new lease on life, thanks to a wholly unexpected (and surely unintended) marriage of political convenience between fundamentalist parents and an accountability-averse education establishment.

But we will be making a big mistake if we turn away from setting goals and standards or from the principle that students, educators, and schools must account for their performance vis-à-vis those standards. Perhaps the conflict can be modulated by recalling several ingredients of the reform recipe outlined above: "compulsory" outcomes that are confined to a core list of broadly accepted skills and knowledge; families encouraged to choose from an increasingly varied array of schools that approach that core (and other matters) via different routes; and private schools and home-schoolers free to shun even those elements of the academic core that clash with their beliefs.

WHAT has been recommended here is conceptually straightforward, even obvious, but politically it constitutes an immense undertaking. Elected officials and community leaders who seek conscientiously to solve the nation's education problem will have to take on one of the largest and most entrenched sets of interest groups in the land. They will also have to urge a series of changes in attitude and practice that will not prove universally popular among their constituents, particularly those who find their complacency jarred or lives altered by the need to face the education music in their own households and local schools.

There are two reasons why this is worth doing anyway. First, as a matter of politics, it is clear from innumerable surveys that most Americans do agree in principle with the measures suggested here. With the benefit of time, leadership, and accurate information, they are likely to come around in practice as well.

Second, as a matter of public policy, nothing is more fundamental or important than education, save for national defense. In truth, a sound education system can fairly be termed the domestic equivalent of a strong national defense. Getting such a system will take vision, courage, and persistence. But the rewards will be immense.

DRAFT
M. Cohen
12/17

Response to Checker Finn article
(Commentary Magazine???)
(December 1994???)

To the Editor:

Checker Finn's article "What To Do About Education: The Schools" contains his usually penetrating insights into the nature of the weaknesses facing our school system and the steps necessary to address them. Regretably, it also contains his all too familiar partisan and deliberately misleading attacks on the Clinton Administration's efforts to improve education. (--mostly along lines Checker has personally advocated in the past.

Checker makes a strong case for the need for a fundamental overhaul of our school system, in order to substantially boost academic performance, among the highest as well as the lowest achievers. And his prescription for improvements are reasonable. Setting clear and challenging academic standards, describing what students should know and be able to do, are at the heart of his proposed remedies.

Key points:

1. Show basic similarities between Checker's prescription and Goals 2000

- but also highlight differences--emphasis on professional development, curriculum improvement, alignment to standards & requirement for broad-based, grass roots involvement.

Finn remedy:

1. Power--shift from producers to consumers (choice) and from experts to civilians (over standards)

2. Standards--demonstrable knowledge and skills; state and local more important than national; arduous process--easier said than done, should not be in hands of experts--exactly who last administration turned them over to--our job now is to get these initial cuts from the profession into lay hands--broad based goal 2000 panels provide a basis for this; so does the requirement for ongoing public engagement in Goals.

3. Accountability--need stakes and consequences for students and system and professionals

4. Supply-side pluralism--flexibility, charter schools, choice,

nasdc, edison, etc. We agree, and also think you need to invest in capacity--professional development key and that's what we do in ESEA.

5. demand-side choice

6. Professionalism--decentralization, alternative certification, compensation--states asked to address in goals 2000, but not told how to

note--this is systemic reform,--basing reform on comprehensive approach, addressing multiple features of system all linked to focus on standards and student performance. what's the big deal.

- highlight importance of state and local standards, and marginal importance of national standards. Agree with Checker on this. Point out that the leading proponent of national standards was Lamar Alexander (advised closely by Checker) when he was secretary, and that Lamar, Diane and Lynn Chaney hand-picked the experts who have been bringing us the national standards, including those in history.

2. Describe Goals 2000--state standards, reform, broad-based grass roots involvement; Fed models, funds and flexibility. Link back to summitt call for flexibility and waivers from federal government; that Lamar tried to get on demonstration basis and failed; and that we have gotten on unlimited basis, including Edflex--and succeeded. Explain fundamental shift in ESEA toward higher standards for all kids, also waiver authority.

3. Respond to Checker point-by-point:

- o new federal council to "certify" standards
 - o needed to provide quality control after alexander picks;
 - o certification purely voluntary--sends messages to states about whether to pay attention to particular standards. Explicit provision (unconditioned state participation) that prohibits linking certification to federal funding.
 - o Council first proposed by NCEst, on which checker served, along with campbell, hatch, porter and cheney. These guys walked away when they were out of power, playing politics with the domestic equivalent of a strong national defense.
- o droplets of money to states and localities that take "federally approved" steps to meet those standards
 - o meet their own standards, not federally approved standards
 - o federal approval necessary for fiscal accountability--can't give out money for nothing. However; steps to be taken are nothing more than addressing interrelated set of issues that everybody agrees must be addressed, based on

experience of cutting edge local and state reforms (Massachusetts, Michigan??, Vermont, Washington, Kentucky among others). Review and approval process with a "light hand" reflecting fact that plan is for using all resources, and feds in general and goals in particular provide fraction of a penny. Review carefully calibrated to reflect balance of state/federal responsibilities.

- o funds modest, and likely to remain so in this Congress and budget era; currently at 100 million, 400 million next, and never likely to go above 1 billion--more likely to state in the 500 range. Modest but important funds; they provide impetus for reform, time to think, plan, etc.
- o Goals 2000 could make matters worse:
 - o "chill state and local innovation"--wrong, will support and spur state and local innovation, with funds
 - o "intensifying federal regulation"--wrong, more flexible than any existing federal education program--block grant in nature plus no new regulations to implement grants program to state. He's ignoring reality and playing on general fear of federal government. Does he really expect the new congress to push for more intervention?
 - o "discouraging testing and accountability (and ban on high stakes testing)". wrong--law requires states to develop testing and accountability for results, linked to standards. Stuff about prohibiting high stakes testing is simply inaccurate. Title II program--small, competitive grants program for a few states and districts bans high stakes for 5 years--consistent with how long it takes to phase in a testing program, from standards, to test development and field test, to leaving it in place long enough for kids to first be exposed to curriculum before being held accountable--just common sense. Title III grant funds to states simply have no such restrictions, and these are the funds that count most nationwide, since they potentially touch all states. Checker either didn't read the law carefully, or just picked out one part to use for a political mugging, regardless of the consequences.
 - o "stocking national standards council with experts and interest group representative"--balanced council, including experts, educators, business, and public. Who the hell should be on a council--out-of-office republic critics?
 - o "creating new opportunities for litigation"--wrong; litigation is based on school finance disparities (which checker acknowledges) and state constitutional provisions. law has specific provisions stating no standards as the basis for litigation--checker ought to

- try reading it for once.
- o "focusing on school inputs"--wrong again--focus is on academic standards, and everything is driven by it.....
- o "signalling that washington is wellspring of change" this legislation is empowering of states and local communities. When alexander was secretary, he announced america 2000, inviting communities and states to sign up and develop their own approaches to meeting national education goals. they introduced legislation that would support this, with funds for training teachers and principals, and to support innovative (new american schools--nine models funded out of a corporation in suburban virginia--i was one of those). biggest difference is that they couldn't get legislation passed, but we could. Passing federal legislation doesn't mean that washington has all the answers, though its easy to believe that if you don't carefully read the bill. IF this overall principal were true, than alexander/bush voucher bill would have inevitably lead to washington takeover of private schools--clearly not their agenda.
- o Ohio OCR investigation--based on complaints; collected information to check out the complaint; found that state had done no wrong, supported state testing program, including the high stakes, found that state was taking all the right steps to provide all kids a fair shot at passting the test. Only new step urged by OCR was to expand testing program to earlier grades, so kids would start getting the signal sooner, and so that needed interventions could begin at a younger age. Does this in reality sound like an effort to undermine testing or student accountability? Try sticking to all the facts.
- o "Administration steadfastly refuses to attach consequences to student results." Only insofar as we view this as state and local matter, not federal policy.

NEED TO GET IN HERE THE POINT THAT CHECKER IS TAKING SMALL DIFFERENCES IN DETAILES, MAGINFYING THEM BEYOND RECOGNITION, ALL FOR POLITICAL SPORT AND MUGGING. WE'VE LEARNED THAT EDUCATION REFORM MUST BE SUSTAINED IN ORDER TO BE EFFECTIVE, THAT IT MUST BE BIPARTISAN AND BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER RATHER THAT TEAR THEM APART, AND THAT IT MUST EXCHEW FIGHTING ABOUT NOTHING AND ABOUT BULLSHIT.

To the Editor:

If you work long enough in the education reform business, you expect to make some enemies--change is rarely pleasant, and when people are being asked to make fundamental changes in what they are accountable for, how much authority they've got, and how they work, they often get angry. So opposition is not surprising.

What is suprising--still, even after two years--is being attacked by people who share much (though not all) of your view of the changes that are need, have advocated similar approaches in the past, but who increasingly see education reform as another wedge issue to drive partisan politics, rather than a cause that can unite the country in the drive to achieve shared, nonpartisan goals.

In his article "What To Do About Education: The Schools" Checker Finn takes just such an approach. It's another xxxxx in the well orchestrated political mugging of Goals 2000 and the Clinton Administration's approach to education reform. It is also deliberately misleading, distorted, and intellectually dishonest, concealing as it does Checker Finn's role in promoting many of the ideas he is now attacking.

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