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25th Annual Conference on Education

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INTRODUCTION

I.

I'm delighted to be with you today, and congratulate the City of St. Louis and all of the marvelous volunteers who have kept the conference on education in St. Louis such a vital and distinguished institution.

It's fascinating to recall that soon after this conference was launched--25 years ago--that:

- o The Soviets hurled a shiny satellite in space.
- o At that time the nation's confidence was shattered; and in response, President Dwight Eisenhower proposed the National Defense Education Act which linked the security of America to the nation's public schools.

In pushing this landmark legislation, President Eisenhower said to Congress:

- o "There is a compelling national need for Federal action <u>now</u> -- to help meet emerging needs in American education.
- o "If the United States is to maintain its position of leadership and if we are further to enhance the quality of our society, we must see to it that today's young people are prepared to contribute "the

maximum" to our future progress and strength and that we achieve the highest possible excellence."

Twenty-five years ago, a national emergency was met by strengthening the quality of public education.

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II.

Today's American crisis is graver than the one confronted when this conference was launched.

And yet the national response today is to reduce support for education. It is sadly ironic that at a time when productivity is being pushed, the term so often seems to mean simply the output of factories, mines, forests, and oil wells, as if such output can, somehow, be divorced from people.

This brings me to the focus of this conference: If this nation is to succeed, people must be the focus of our investment.

Let me give a few examples to illustrate the point.

First, it's essential that we from the very first understand that education and the future of this nation have been inextricably intertwined.

Over 130 years before the Declaration of Independence, the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law requiring every town and village of 50 or more souls to provide, at public expense, a school master to teach the children to read and write.

The Massachusetts Educational Law of 1647 also ordered that

- "where any towne shall increase to the number of 100

families. . . they shall set up a grammar schoole the master thereof being able to instruct youth so far as they may be fitted for the university. . . ."

The pioneer historian Ellwood P. Cubberly has written that these Puritan laws of the mid-17th century were "the very foundation-stones upon which our American public school systems have been founded."

Teaching a new generation is still at the heart of the academic enterprise -- and it would be a grave mistake for this nation to foresake the public schools where 90 percent of our children are enrolled.

Because of declining birth rates, school population will decline by 23 percent. We'll have fewer young people to do the nation's work. And this means that more--not less education--will be urgently required.

But, this is only half the story. Today only 27 percent of white America is 18 years of age and under. But over one-third of all blacks and nearly two-thirds of all Hispanics are 18 years of age and under. And this will have a dramatic impact on public education.

- In 1979, only 39 percent of all white households had school-age children.
- In contrast, nearly half (49 percent) of all black and 61 percent of all Hispanic households have school-age children.

With fewer school-age children, white America's commitment to education may decline. At the same time, minority parents historically have had less political and economic power.

Of special concern is the fact that black and Hispanic young people are precisely those with whom most of our nation's colleges and schools have been least successful. In 1979, 80 percent of white 19-year olds in the U.S. were high school graduates. However, the same year, only 64 percent of black and 60 percent of Hispanic 19-year olds held high school diplomas.

If minority students continue to leave school at the current rate, 150,000 additional young people--the equivalent of eleven entering freshman classes at giant Ohio State University--will by 1990 lose their opportunity for further education. An increasing proportion of our youth will be condemned to social and economic failure. To avoid such tragic human waste, the rising generation of Americans must be adequately prepared for the world they will inherit.

Here I insert an important caveat: We should rejoice in this rich blend of young Americans. Diversity is what has made this nation great. Driven more by fear than understanding.

Here then is my conclusion. The real problem we confront today is not schools--but students--whose lives will be shaped forever by the programs we provide.

James Angell wrote on one occasion that:

> "In every child who is born. . . the potentiality of the human race is born again."

Educating a new generation of Americans to their full potential is still our most compelling obligation. We must invest in the coming generation.

Investing in the classroom teacher -- Carnegie Study -- the heart of thermometer. The harsh truth is that the teaching profession is in serious trouble--spirling downward.

- o In just 11 years, from 1969 to 1980, the number of parents who say they would like to have a child of theirs become a teacher in the public schools dropped from 75 percent to 48 percent.
- o Less than 5 percent of last year's college freshman say they would like to be a teacher--that's down almost 40 percent from ten years ago.
- o More than one-third of today's teachers (37 percent) say they are dissatisfied with their current job.
- o Forty percent say they had no intention of remaining in teaching until retirement.
- o Almost one-half (45 percent) of the teachers in the public schools say they probably (32 percent) or definitely (13 percent) would not become a teacher if they could start again.

And today, despite tight economic conditions, teachers are resigning--and the ablest teachers are leaving first.

- o Between 1962 and 1976 the percentage of public school teachers with 20 or more years of experience was cut in half.

- One study of 437 Wisconsin high school graduates who became teachers revealed that 40 percent had left teaching after five years. Based on ability grouping, 72.97 percent of the low-ability students were still in teaching compared to only 59 pecent of the most able students.

A few weeks ago The Washington Post reported the story of Ben Eichelberger who left teaching because of a desperate feeling of being trapped. He said:

- "I had five classes and four different preparations. During one week I had to collect tickets at the basketball games on three nights. I had to beg for everything--even equipment for experiments--because I didn't have a budget. I never got to make any decisions," he said.
- Ben Eichelberger's life is different now that he's not in the classroom. He will earn about $30,000 this year as an electrician.
- Ben has learned the hard way that the best way to please the public is to fix light fixtures and unplug kitchen sinks, not stretch the minds of children.

There are, of course, still a host of superb teachers in classrooms from coast to coast. And yet, while serving students in imaginative and creative ways, too often they are portrayed as

overpaid and careless and unless we find ways to stablize the situation, many of our most gifted teachers will move out of the profession.

The key is better recognition and rewards--financial rewards.

Last year, teachers entering the profession with a bachelor's degree earn an average of $11,758, while salaries for entry-level engineers average around $20,000. Computer science majors begin jobs at around $17,000, and liberal arts majors earn an average of $13,296 at entry-level jobs.

A survey of Texas teachers revealed an average salary of just over $14,000 after 11.7 years of teaching. In the same state, a bachelor's degree graduate in petroleum engineering begins at $21,000.

More important, dignity and recognition for a job well done--U.S.O.E. students; Tim Healy.

Clearly, we must invest in the teachers of our children.

Third, to have excellence in the schools, we must invest in people and places beyond the campus.

The truth is that the teachers have changed dramatically in the last 40 years or so.

- No TV
- Steve: Sesame Street
- PEEAS--Mass Conviction

  Home less stable

  home-family

Workplace--McDonalds--U.S. Steele

Youth--more restless

Sidwell friends--service

Schools with a purpose--arts, science, community

Dear Ann Landers: I am a high-school teacher in the Fort Wayne, Indiana, public school system. Since 1967 I have watched sloppy, indolent, sassy, unmotivated students virtually sleepwalk through this school.

More than once I have been tempted to accept the label "teacher burnout" and change careers, but something made me stick around and encourage the students who were making a serious effort to get an education.

A few weeks ago, an act of God opened my eyes. Fort Wayne experienced the worst floods in our history.

Like thousands of others I went downtown to help--and what did I see? Hundreds of students whom I had written off as lazy, irresponsible goof-offs. They had come as volunteers to work in the sandbag lines, haul rubble and trash, help evacuate the elderly and stranded, do whatever needed to be done. Some were even ready to risk their lives if necessary.

I spoke with many at length and learned some lessons that aren't in the books. I discovered that trouble can bring out the very best in folks, and if we want our young people to amount to something we must give them a sense of purpose--of being needed.

These floods did a tremendous amount of damage, but they did a lot of good, too. They gave many young people a feeling of self-respect and personal worth. Please print my letter, Ann. I want these great kids in Fort Wayne to see it. Sincerely--Proud of Them.

Dear Proud: I saw those Fort Wayne teen-agers on TV and it was obvious that many, for the first time, were given the opportunity to give of themselves, to participate in something meaningful and important. Being part of a rescue mission is marvelous for building self-esteem.

How I wish we could develop the spirit of volunteerism in our young people. Why do we need a national disaster to turn them on? I hope every teen-ager who reads this will ask his parents, teachers and clergymen, "What can I do to help somebody?" And I pray that parents, teachers and clergymen will give them some good answers.

We must invest in people and education beyond the campus--sense of purpose.

III.

Finally, invest in clear purposes and goals.

When James Conant prepared his report twenty years ago, he said:

o "When someone writes or says that what we need today is to decide what we mean by the word 'education,' a

sense of weariness overtakes me." He goes on to say that "I am ready to define education as what goes on in schools and colleges.

All of us can share the discomfort of James Conant. Goal discussions do quickly turn to mush. And yet in the midst of our business, we are still left with the nagging feeling that something is not right. Can we define education simply as what goes on in school?

Thirty-five years ago, the German philosopher, Karl Jaspers, identified the goal of education as culture.

- o "Culture," Jaspers said, "is a given historical ideal (and)...a coherent system of associations, gestures, values, ways of putting things." The educated person, Jaspers concluded, was one for whom culture--so defined--had become second nature.
- o Today, a generation after Jaspers wrote, we find ourselves, as a nation, deeply hesitant about the aims of eduction.
- o In Jaspers' terms, what <u>are</u> this society's agreed-upon values and "ways of putting things"? What, precisely, would characterize a person of culture in our fragmented post-modern society? The absence of answers is haunting.

John Gardner said on one occasion that "the deepest threat to the integrity of any community is an incapacity on the part of the citizens to lend themselves to any worthy common purpose." Gardner goes on to reflect on "the barrenness of a life that encompasses nothing beyond the self."

In response to such barrenness, the belief persists that America's schools need an inner compass of their own. I'm convinced they must perform for society an integrative function, helping students to seek appropriate responses to life's most enduring questions.

When considering the goals of education, I think of Vachael Lindsay who wrote:

> "It is the world's one crime its babes grow dull.
> Not that they sow but that they seldom reap; not
> that they serve but have no God to serve; not that
> they die but that they die like sheep."

Investing in a new generation of students is still the nation's most compelling obligation.

Think clear, act with confidence and conviction.