PRESENTATION BY ALBERT SHANKER

PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION

OF TEACHERS BEFORE THE NATIONAL

SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION ON APRIL 4,

1987

DOROTHY FITZGERALD
Stenotype reporting
3114 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016
Telephone: (202) 244-0101
MR. ALBERT SHANKER: Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be with you this morning, and to have an opportunity to give what will be a personal view and an organizational view on how we got to certain conclusions in the Carnegie report, and what the context of that report is.

Unlike many other reform reports, which can be read as a list of recommendations or items or new regulations, Carnegie's recommendations make no sense unless one first has an in depth picture of what the analysis was that went into it, and then what kind of a vision there is for the future.

Now all of us remember how we got here. We went through the '70s, a period of time during which we lost substantial ground; we became less important in a sense in American society; parents of children became a smaller percentage of the voting population; SAT scores went down, and the annual Gallup polls indicated that the schools were getting worse and worse marks from the general public each year.

Then something very good happened, and that is the reform movement—not totally good; we don't have to agree with all the reports and all the recommendations; many of them were in many ways wrongheaded. But what was right about those reports was that here we had governors and legislators and top business people in this country saying and saying out loud, and I must say, now saying over many years, that we
be interested in rebuilding our factories or rebuilding our bridges and roads; that unless we invest in the human infra-
structure of this country, unless we invest in children, all the other investments are not going to amount to very much.

Indeed, these people didn't just speak words or write reports. If we look across the country, there indeed has been very substantial economic investment in education over the last four years, and that trend has not stopped.

Now, I am sorry to say that in spite of the fact that I have and most of you have supported the thrust of the reform movement; that if one deeply analyzes what is likely to happen as we carry out the reforms that are in place now and the reforms that are envisioned, I'm sorry to say that one cannot really predict that any major or substantial improvements will be brought about as a result of these reforms unless we go beyond this first phase of reform into a second phase.

The reforms that have been given to us mostly imposed by state legislatures and sometimes state education departments, are very, very muchanical; and what they tell us to do is to lengthen the year a little bit, lengthen the day a little bit, have minimum competency tests for teachers, required curriculum, some homework, no automatic promotion, no automatic graduation—hard to quarrel with any of these things.

But we will in a few minutes. I will t
to an analysis of these issues. I would like to approach the reform question by raising two major issues; one is the teacher issue, the staffing issue, and the second has to do with students.

One of the key aspects of this round of reform that we've had is that unlike many earlier rounds of reform there is a recognition in every one of these reports that nothing is going to work unless we have an adequate number of well-trained, highly competent, motivated classroom teachers all across the country.

So we have to ask ourselves, what are the prospects. And then we have to ask ourselves if, somehow, we should manage to figure out how to do that, how to get a staff of teachers all across the country, good teachers and keep them, but if we maintain the current system in terms of what we require of students, would it work? What would the prospects be?

Let me begin with the teacher side of it. By this time, we're aware of the fact that there will be one-half of the nation's teachers leaving within the next six years. 1.1 out of 2.2 million will be leaving. It will take 23 percent of all the college graduates in this country each and every year for at least the next 11 years and perhaps beyond that in order to maintain the current staffing ratio:
without any improvements; 23 percent.

We are in a period of time that the colleges are in the baby bust period, and there will be very great competition for talented people from the armed forces, from business, from other professions throughout our society; so they are not just going to be standing out there waiting for us.

Now, it's easy to get 23 percent if we're willing to settle for the bottom 23 percent, the bottom 23 percent don't have too many options or alternatives, and as a matter of fact, in many school districts, we are selecting from that bottom 23 percent now. Or if not selecting, at least we're settling for them.

Well, what are our prospects? Three years ago when college students were asked, "How many of you want to become teachers?" only 4 percent said they were heading our way--and remember, we need 23 percent. Last year, we were up to 6 percent who said that they wanted to become teachers and I think that there is a more recent poll which brings us up to 8 or 9 percent.

Nevertheless, most of the evidence out there indicates that the numbers are insufficient; and secondly, that the largest group within that group who say they want to become teachers, of course there are dedicated and outstanding and bright people just as there have always been, bu'
largest group within that are people who are in the bottom 23 percent.

What do they look like, that bottom 23 percent? Well, they are the people who come to here in California and take the C best exam, or to Florida and take an exam, or in many other states represented here today; and you know these exams we give teachers today are really a terrible disgrace. The kind of exam that we give to teachers would be the equivalent of giving a high school biology examination to somebody who is going to be a doctor.

What do we ask of an elementary school teacher? Well, we ask that that teacher be able to get a 65 percent on a sixth grade arithmetic test. Imagine. Well, thank God we've got a standard, right? And that we don't have those who only get 50 percent on a sixth grade test, or 40 or 30.

Think of a person who becomes a teacher with a 65 percent, and he stands in front of a class, this is a very good class, the kids are getting all the answers right, but the teacher marks every third one wrong because the teacher only gets 65 percent, gets one out of every three wrong; and the kids go home at the end of the year and say to their parents, "I never will understand arithmetic."

Or we get situations such as the one we had in one big city where a number of the applicants for teaching were
clearly shown to be illiterate and yet when September rolled around, the teachers, prospective teachers who had been told that they would not be hired were indeed hired because there just wasn't anybody else around.

So we do have very serious problems in terms of quality and in terms of numbers. Now, a lot of people might say, "Well, why not hire these teachers the same way we always have?" The world is filled with ex-teachers; everyplace I go somebody is always waving at me, whether it's outside Mosconi Center or at the airport or at the hotel: "Hi, Al."

I turn around, they say, "Oh, you don't know me. I used to be a teacher." I never meet anybody who used to be a surgeon, but "I used to be a teacher."

So there are lots of people who used to be teachers. Half the world, maybe. Why don't we round up the usual suspects and fill these positions the way we always did? Well, you can't. We got a lot of people into teaching in past years not because they really wanted to become teachers but they were running away from something else. They were running away from the Great Depression of the '30s; many men from the end of World War II until 1975-'76 preferred to fight in Chicago or Brooklyn to Vietnam or Korea. We don't have the draft anymore.

Of course women had no other opportunities until
recently, but if you look at the number of baccalaureates and
master's today being awarded in other fields to women and
minorities, you see that they are no longer headed our way.
So we have got a very serious problem.

How do we handle this problem? The usual way of
handling it -- let me just add one other thing. No institution
can function unless it gets a fair share of the best and
brightest people around. You don't need everybody to be the
best and brightest; there's no law firm, there's no hospital,
there's no architecture/engineering firm, there isn't any
institution that's totally made up of everybody who's on top,
but every institution needs its fair share of those people,
and it needs to put those who are the best and brightest in
some sort of relationship with the other good people in the
institution; and they shape each other up and they shape the
institution up.

So if we don't get a fair share of the people
who are the best and brightest, we are not going to have
schools that amount to very much.

When you think of that 23 percent that we need,
almost one-quarter of all the college graduates in the country,
and think of the fact that we don't want the bottom 23 percent
because they're the ones who can't spell and they can't count
and they can't read and they can't understand and they can't
think critically and they can't express themselves. Basically they shouldn't be teachers. They are still people who need further education themselves.

Well, suppose we decided we would take people just from the top half of college graduates. That might be a reasonable thing to do because after all, college admissions are pretty open in this country where you have a lot of grade inflation. In order to take from the top half, we would need to take into teaching almost one-half of the top half of all the talent in the country.

Can this country afford to spare that amount of talent for one institution in our society? Namely, elementary and secondary education. Well, just thinking about it for a second as an indication of how impossible that is, you can't devote all that talent to one institution.

So the usual approach is well, how do you attract and retain a substantial number of good teachers? Well, salaries. I am certainly not here to talk against higher salaries for teachers. I've supported them my whole life, I still support them, I still think that that's a major part of the answer. No question about it; and there are many localities where the money is there and they're behind, and they ought to be doing it, and there are many localities that have been doing it.
But speaking now on a national basis, there are 2.2 million teachers. A $1,000 salary increase for each teacher in America, which wouldn't solve many problems, a $1,000 increase is $2.2 billion. To raise teachers' salaries all across the country from last year's average of $24,000 to let's say $35,000 or $36,000, a 50 percent increase, which would not make teachers rich people but which would certainly be noticed out there, if you add social security costs and pension costs and other fringe benefit costs related to those salary increases, that would be a cost of $30 billion to do that.

What's the likelihood that that will happen? What other large group of 2 million people in our society has ever had a 50 percent increase that cost that kind of money? I don't believe it will happen; and I think that if we count on trying to get 2.2 million people by finding $30 billion somewhere, we're not going to get very far.

Now, what else do we need if we're going to attract and retain people, and if we're going to run an effective institution?

Is there a better pupil:teacher ratio. Why? Well, not because the research is all that consistent on it, but common sense is. What are we all about? Why are we so active in this? Why do you give so many days and months and
years of your life? Is it so some kid can do a little bit better on some idiotic multiple choice examination? I hope not. After we graduate school, the chances are we'll never bump into another multiple choice test again, or not very many of them.

We're doing it because we want think; we want people who can express themselves. We want people who are able to muster arguments for their point of view, who are able to understand other arguments. You want people who can express themselves, communicate, who can think critically, who can exercise judgement. These are the things that we need.

We need them in our economy, we need them in our democracy, and indeed individuals need those things if they want to fully enjoy life. That's what we're about.

How do you get students to the point where they can do these things? Well, if you want to get them to think and express themselves, you've got to get them to write, to put their thoughts and expressions on paper. And then you've got to read what they've written, and you've got to mark it, and then you've got to spend five minutes with each student, coaching them. There is no way of expressing to an entire class how to improve thinking or writing. You've got to spend a few minutes with each of them.

So if you're in a secondary school and you've
got 30 kids in a class, 5 periods a day, it's 150 students, and if it takes you only 5 minutes to mark a paper and 5 minutes to talk to each one of those students, that's 25 hours per set of papers. Nobody's going to do that.

As a matter of fact, the National Assessment of Educational Progress tells us that it's not being done, and that students aren't learning how to write and to communicate, because it's just not possible.

So how do you solve that problem? All these years where I have said and what you have said and what others have said is well, smaller class size. I just said that we can't find the teachers that we already need merely to maintain the current class size. How are we going to find more teachers to reduce class size? If at a time when you can't even find the people that you need to maintain the current situation, you go out there and try to get more -- where are you going to get those additional teachers from? Are they going to be from the top of the college list? No. If you are going to get more, you are going to go lower and deeper, and you are going to get people who are dumber.

The result is that the tradeoff is going to be that you will have more teachers out there, but you might not want some of them to be anywhere near kids. So you can't do it because they're just not around.
Now once again, some organizations go around saying, "Al Shanker is against raising salaries and he's against lowering class size." No, you may be in a community where you can find more teachers and where you can lower class size. If you can, go ahead and do it.

I am saying that on a national basis -- and if we are trying to find 1.1 million teachers and we can't find them now and we've got very low standards of entry, that if instead of 1.1 million we're going to need 1.4 or 1.5 or 1.6 or another 2 million, that our standards are going to go very, very low indeed, and that we cannot do it on a national basis.

Furthermore, even if you go out and get some of these people, and we are able to find them with additional money or something else, we have got to remember that as we improve salaries and working conditions, so is IBM, so is Hewlett-Packard, so are all the other institutions that need these very same people. It is not a static situation.

Now am I saying that we therefore should give up on the idea that we should have a better pupil:teacher ratio or higher salaries? No, I am saying that it can't be accomplished as long as schools are structured the way they are now structured; and what I'm going to get to eventually is that all of these things can be accomplished if we change the structure of what we are doing. Not that these things are
not worthwhile doing or that they should not be done; rather, that they must be done but they can't be done the way we're organizing education today.

Now what's a third thing that's usually talked about in terms of attracting and retaining teachers? Well, the third thing is to give teachers time for professional development; time to talk to other teachers, time to see what other teachers are doing, time to think about what they're doing, time to perhaps engage in some experimentation.

We know that we cannot attract and retain very many good people unless they have a life with other human beings; they don't want to be locked in with kids for their entire lives -- and kids will eventually become human beings; that is what education is all about, but they're not there yet.

(Laughter.)

Other professions, yes. You have a client, you have a patient, but you also have a life with other doctors or other lawyers or other architects or engineers. You're not always with the laymen or with a patient or with a client.

Well, once again, how do you accomplish that? Well, you accomplish that by hiring more teachers, so a teacher won't have to teach five periods a day, only teach four or three. Well, again, if you're going to get more
teachers, you're going to go lower, deeper into the talent pool, and you're going to lower standards once more and bring in people who should not be in.

Now, even with the class size question; you know it now takes, if you have 30 students per class and five periods a day it takes 25 hours to mark a set of papers. Suppose that miraculously, we were able to reduce class size in half; in other words, instead of 2.2 million teachers in this country we would have 4.4 million teachers, and we would need to bring in about one-half the college graduates in this country to be teachers. It would still take 12.5 hours to mark a set of papers, if you have half the class size you have today--still not something the teachers are going to go home three or four times a week to do.

So even if somehow, miraculously the teachers appeared -- "Oh, we found all the money to hire the additional teachers and to give them the higher salaries and to have them teaching fewer hours of school" -- if all of this occurred, it's still not doable within the current structure.

Now finally there is one more thing that we need to do if we want to retract and retain talented people; and that is, we've got to treat them differently. When I was growing up as a kid and I would talk to my parents and say, "Why are you going to work?" They would say, "You want to
eat?" "You want a roof over your head?" That's what work
was to them; they were exchanging their sweat for money so
that we could eat and have a roof over our heads. They
dreamt in their thirties. They would have pressed a button
if they could have and given up life from 30 to 65 so they
could go right on social security. For them, social security
was heaven. It meant not going to a dirty, terrible, sweaty
job constantly.

Most people today don't feel that way. You go
out and ask people who work for a living, about 30 percent of
them still feel that way; they have dirty, dead end jobs that
don't pay very well, and they're still thinking of when they
can get out of it, but 7 out of 10 people who work today are
working because they get satisfaction from their job. They
are respected; they're allowed to exercise judgment; they're
allowed to do things their way; they get recognition for it.

Therefore we have to think of how can we organ-
ize a school in such a way that it's more in accord with the
current aspirations of an educated workforce that does not
want to work in an old-fashioned factory, constantly being
told what to do; but wants to be respected, and respect
means being allowed to exercise judgment on their own.

Now let's for a moment ask ourselves what would
happen if tomorrow we should get all these teachers and there
were no problems. And this happens because a recession takes place as a result of the use of technology and a lot of educated people are thrown out of work and they want to become teachers. Ronald Reagan sits down with Gorbachev and they get rid of nuclear weapons, and that means that we need a much bigger army because our conventional forces are much smaller than the Soviet Union's, and therefore we reinstitute the draft and a lot of people want to become teachers again because of that.

And then suppose that women who have become doctors and lawyers and dentists and bank presidents have now said, "Well, now we've shown that we can do it but we'd rather be teachers because it's a nicer lifestyle and we do want to spend a little bit more time with our kids at home and so forth. Suppose all those things happen.

Then suppose we were able to do what all these reform reports say: tight curriculum, no automatic promotion, some support from the family at home, no automatic graduation, teachers who are very well qualified; what would schools look like?

I'll tell you what they would look like; they would look just like the schools I went to in New York City in 1939, '40, '41, '42, '43, that period of time. We had great teachers; they waited eight years to get jobs during
the Depression. By the time some of them got jobs, they had
two or four different degrees, and you had to pass a very,
very tough examination, and only those people who scored on
top ever made it; and the family was pushing those kids to
make it in school, and you had to learn your subjects and you
had to do homework.

What kind of an education was that? Was it
good? Is that what we want? Will it work for this country?
Well, I think it's a great education. Look, here I am.

However, if you go back to 1940 and take a close
look, you'll find that only 20 percent of the students gradua-
ted, 80 percent were dropouts. So I suggest to you that if
you take, if you go back to that system; we don't have the
parental support and family support today that we did in
1940 and '41, '42 and during that period. If you go back to
a tight system that requires what these reforms would require
in a very stiff fashion, the chances are that we will see a
fairly substantial increase in the dropout rate.

Now what happened after World War II? We
started telling kids "Hey, hang around in school. You really
need to graduate. You can't get anywhere in this country
without a high school diploma. As a matter of fact, we want
you to stay so badly that if you hang around long enough and
keep breathing, at age 18, we'll give you a diploma, even if
you haven't learned very much.

So what has happened? If you look at the scores of the national assessment of educational progress, we are now not dropping out 80 percent of the kids -- by the way, when 80 percent dropped out in 1940 there were no headlines, because graduating 20 percent from high school was the highest point we had ever reached in students graduating high school, it was a high achievement point.

Whereas today we say that 20 percent dropping out or 25 percent dropping out is a national disaster, and indeed it is.

But what we see in the national assessment of educational progress results is that while we're keeping 80 percent of the kids in school, only about 20 or 25 percent of them can write a decent letter, only about 20 or 25 percent of them can read anything of any difficulty. Only about 26-27 percent can do a mathematical problem that involves two steps. In other words, essentially, the kids who used to drop out are learning more.

When I was a kid and asked my parents, "What do you mean by illiterate?" They said he can't sign his name.

Well, that's no longer our definition of literacy. Our standards of illiteracy have gone up. You have to know more to be illiterate than you used to. So we've done well with
a lot of people but basically, we are still educating only about 20-25 percent of the kids.

Now, I took a look at what happens in England, what happens in Germany, what happens in France and Italy and Holland; and as I talked to teachers and educators and other people over there, it's hard to get precise measurements; they don't have the same curriculum, they don't have the same examinations, you can't exactly correlate what happens there, but essentially the number of kids who make it over there in education is about the same; 20 to 25 percent make it and the others go into various other tracks where they are not deemed capable of going on to higher education.

Well, isn't that interesting? 20 to 25 percent of the kids make it in the United States and in England and in Germany and in France and Holland, all those places -- that should give us a clue that that's the way God makes people -- only 20 to 25 percent of us are smart. And the rest of them, there's not much we can do about it.

I'm not ready to buy that. As a matter of fact, this argument is something like the argument that American automobile manufacturers used to make. You would go to them, you'd say: How come you sell all those automobiles and then two years later you recall 150,000; you've got to do them over again? And the American automobile manufacturers would
say, "Well, that's the nature of manufacturing. Why, anytime you make a product, something always goes wrong and then you've got to bring it back and redo it. Anytime you mass produce anything, that's going to happen."

Then along came the Japanese, and they decided they would think about it long enough and hard enough, and they would develop a process, and by and large the Japanese now put out automobiles and other products where there's very close to a zero point in the number of defects. It essentially showed that the arguments that we were using about quality control were wrong; that it is possible to develop systems which will make major improvements.

Or perhaps another way of thinking about it or looking at it is to ask ourselves, "Are we in the schools doing something like what medicine did for a couple of thousand years?" People went to doctors and they went to hospitals and they hoped to get cured; but in many cases, they were actually injured or in some cases they were killed because for thousands of years doctors and nurses and people in hospitals or places like that didn't realize that you had to wash your hands and sterilize your instruments, and so people who went there were very frequently, instead of being helped, they were actually harmed.

Are there things that schools, that all of us do
to kids because of the way we handle them in school that means that millions of them fail? Is it that only 20 or 25 percent of them are smart, or is it that only 20 or 25 percent of them can survive the system that now exists, and if we had a different system we might get 35 or 40 or 50 or 60 or 70 to do much, much better than they're doing now; indeed, perhaps to do as well as the 20 to 25 percent who are doing well do today?

That is a key question, because that figure of 20 to 25 percent is so constant that we need to ask ourselves, What is it that we do to kids in all of these countries that's identical?

Well, let's think about it for a minute. All these kids bring the kids in at 5 or 6 or 7 years of age, and the major method of teaching is to get the kids to sit there five to six or seven hours a day, and the major instructional method is chalk and talk. We ask kids to do what I consider to be an unnatural act; and that is to sit and listen for five or six hours at a time. And then we say that those who can't sit or listen for that period of time are disruptive or they're stupid. Why should teachers all across the country go home on Friday to figure out how to give a lesson on how Eskimos live or how Indians live or how the Grand Canyon was formed or what the Founding Fathers to each other before they signed on when there are audio tapes, video tapes, all sorts
of other materials that are much more interesting than a
lecture, or at least they're different, so that kids who
don't respond to a lecture could learn them that way.

We bring these kids all into the first grade
and we put them all in seats, and the teacher talks to all of
them and expects them all to understand, and we give them the
same questions and the same materials to work on -- what are
we saying to all those six year olds? We are saying to them
all, "You're six years old, you're in the first grade, you're
all expected to do the same thing because you're really all
equal; you're the same."

Now, are they really equal and are they really
all the same? Well, we only take them in once a year, and
their birthdays are all over the place, so when you've got
a class of kids in that first grade, you know that the oldest
kid in that class is one year older than the youngest kid in
class. Does one year make any difference at the age of six?
It makes a tremendous difference.

What does research tell us? What has it told
us for a long time? It has told us that the oldest kids in
the class are most likely to succeed, and that sticks with
them all through their lives. Then if you look at dropouts,
if you look at kids who are failing later -- even, if you
take a kid with a much lower IQ who is the oldest kid in the
class, and the kid with a higher IQ is the youngest kid in
the class, the chances are that the kid who's the youngest
kid will find out that he's weak and he's slow and he's dumb,
because he is engaged in unfair competition. But a six year
old doesn't understand.

After all, we are the adults, we put them all
in the same room. We're asking them all the same questions.
We are compelling them to engage in unfair competition, and
we are permanently injuring the younger kid who decides that
he's stupid and he can't make it.

What do we do? I start asking the kids ques-
tions, and some of the kids, oh, their hands are always up
and they know the answer to almost every question. Those
kids get such great joy out of school. They would come
Saturdays, Sundays, holidays -- boy, is it a terrific place
for them. "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest
of us all?" They are.

But then I call on the other kids. I can't
just call on the ones who are always raising their hands,
I've got to get participation from everybody. And there are
four or five or six kids in the class. Every time I call on
them, boy, it really proves that there's always been prayer
in the schools -- they are praying that they're not called on.

(Laughter.)
But from time to time, their prayers are not answered, and I do call on them, and that kid stands and gets very red in the face, and is either absolutely quiet or says, "I'm sorry, I don't know and I don't understand it," or sometimes blurt out some sort of a wild guess, which usually turns out to be a ridiculous response.

And I call on him today, and tomorrow I'll call on him again, and maybe some day I'll call on that kid twice, and it's not just one kid; it's four or five or six in the class. What are we doing to a kid when we call on him every day to be seen by 20 or 25 or 30 of his friends and peers and every day he strikes out? How would you feel? Have you ever been in a place where that happened to you? Sure, we all have.

Years ago some friends took me out and they said, "Al, today you're going to learn how to play tennis." And I took the ball and I missed the first and I missed the second and a third off into a lake and a fourth into a swamp, and after I went through I don't know how many of them, I decided something. I decided this is not my game. And I have never, ever again played tennis or taken any interest in it. It represents a very bad memory, and I assume that in front of me sit many people who have some memory like that; not of tennis but of something.
Each one of us has been in a situation where we tried -- and especially if others are watching. Probably if I were out there alone trying to do it, I would have tried longer and harder. It's a lot more difficult when your friends are watching you.

So I've got to ask questions. Is there a way of organizing a school so the kids don't have to sit all day long and listen? Is there a way of organizing a school so that there's a choice of different ways of learning, not just lecture, but videotape, audio tape, peer instruction, textbooks, games, all sorts of ways; not just one way so that we're not just saying the only kids who are capable of learning are kids who are capable of listening or learning from a blackboard. A lot of different ways of learning and we're not going to say that you're stupid or that you can't learn, if that's not the way you learn, if there's another way.

Is there a way of organizing the school so you don't all have to come in at the same time and do the same thing? Why do they all have to come in on that same day in September and August? Well, that's when the teacher starts talking. You know, if somebody comes in a few months later, it's like coming in at the end of the movie. You may not know what's going on.

Is there a way of organizing it so those kids
can come in at a different time and not come in in the middle of the movie? Is there a way of getting kids to learn in relative privacy so that if they don't have the answer or if they're a little slower, if they're not quite up to the other kids so they're not embarrassed, so that they're not humiliated?

That's what we're doing. We don't intend to humiliate kids. If someone were to ask us as school board members or as teachers, as educators, if one were to state the general proposition that one of the best ways of getting kids to learn is to humiliate them in front of their peers, I don't think I would have a single person saying that's right.

But nevertheless, the way we're organized, that's the way we do it. And then you take some older kids; kid comes in to high school, it's the beginning of the semester, beginning of the year, and he asks the teacher, "When's the final mark in? When are the final exams?" Teacher says next June. Well, this is September. If I were that student and this is September and the final day of reckoning is next June, I'm no compulsive, I'm not going to do my homework that night. How many of us would sit down and do something tonight if we know we have nine months to do it? Very, very few.

It takes a tremendous amount of character, to be developed over a long period of time, to realize that what
you do each and every day accumulates at some distant point. Some people never get it. So what happens, a lot of these kids don't work the first day, they don't work the second; maybe they're even absent the third day, and the middle of October comes, and now they're hopelessly behind.

What's the rational thing to do if you're hopelessly behind and you know that there's no way of catching up? Well, you either stay and you're humiliated each and every day for the rest of the year, or you drop out. And if you drop out, when can you drop back in again? In most of our school systems, you can't drop back in again until next September. What are the chances that you will come back after having almost a year of freedom? And come back to a school where you're going to be put with a bunch of kids who are a year younger than you are after you've been told all your life that they are the babies and you've got to be with your group.

Well, we know what the answer to that is. Are there other ways of organizing schools? Well, there sure are.

I had an experience with my youngest son, who graduated high school but he didn't like school and decided not to go on to college, but he went to work in a restaurant. Started as a dishwasher, then made salads, then made soups,
and then finally, after working for about a year and a half, he came to me and he said, "Dad, I've decided on what I want to do." I looked at him. He said, "I want to go into the CIA."

So that was kind of shocking, and I looked at him, I was speechless. He says, "No, it's not what you think. I want to go to the Culinary Institute of America. I want to become a chef." Well, he went there, and I wanted to visit him two weeks after he got there because I felt that he might be shocked. He thought it was a place where you made souffles, and actually it's a place where you learned about nutrition and profit and loss statements and how to sign contracts with vendors and a lot of academic work in it, and I thought maybe he'd get turned off.

So I called him up and said, "Can I come up and have dinner with you tonight?" He said no. I said, "Why not?" He said, "Well, I've got to study tonight." I said, "You've only been there for two weeks." He said, "You don't understand. Semesters here are three weeks long."

Well, that concentrates the mind. Anybody who is 10 minutes late from class has missed a major part of the semester.

(Laughter.)

But it's got other advantages. You get some
of these kids like kids in other places, they decide they've met the person they love, and they're running off to Fort Lauderdale, forever. And four weeks later, forever turned out to be pretty short. A school that has three week semesters you can drop out at any time, but you can drop back in every three weeks.

Not only that, if you flunk a course, looks what happens to all of us? That problem of what happens to a kid who hasn't made it? We've got two choices, don't we? We can promote them automatically; that's ridiculous, or we can leave them back for a whole year, after -- what that does. But if the semesters are three weeks long, flunking a course means you only have to take three weeks over. Lot easier. Doesn't present us with the same problem.

Well, what is it that we are talking about here? We need to think of a school that is radically different. If the automobile industry, which was so great all these years and now is about to go out of business. Why? For years we had great automobiles starting with the old Model Ts and before that with Henry Ford, up until recently. But if we keep doing the same thing in the automobile industry today we won't have one. There won't be an automobile made in the United States of America four years from now unless we make major changes; not minor changes, not a difference in tail
fins or a new stereo set or the paint colors or something
like that.

The Japanese are putting out a much better car
and they are manufacturing it in a totally different way. And
if we aren't able to totally revolutionize the auto industry,
we're finished in that. I submit to you that we have to
engage in the same type of thinking about schools. We've got
to ask, is it possible to organize a school in such a way that
some teachers, not all, could make $75,000 or $100,000. Is it
possible to organize schools in such a way so that teachers
do have the time to individually work with students and coach
them on writing and expression and critical thinking? Is it
possible to organize a school in such a way so that teachers
have the time to think about what they're doing, and to
develop new materials, to evaluate materials, to work with
their colleagues in terms of a collegial relationship.

Is it possible to organize such a school that
each and every teacher feels a part of a team and a piece of
the action in the same way that workers in a Japanese auto
plant feel that they are the inspectors and the creators of
the automobile and not in the way in which typical American
workers are in an American automobile plant? And is it pos-
sible to create a school which for students doesn't mean they
have to engage in unfair competition, provides them with
privacy and provides them with a choice of different ways of learning and different adults to relate to?

That's another thing we do; we put a kid in a class with a teacher for a whole year. Sometimes people just don't like each other. There may be no rational basis. But when a kid and a teacher are locked together for a whole year and they don't like each other, there's a lot that happens in terms of the ability to teach or the ability to learn.

Such a school can be put together. We can have schools where students work with computers, videotapes, audio tapes, peer tutoring, individual counseling with individual tutoring with teachers, simulation games, books and other materials; and yes, there might even be a few lectures in the school for kids who can learn that way and for teachers who are good at lecturing.

And the adults would be working in a team; no self-contained classroom, but a teacher who is the head of a team. How do you select that teacher? On the basis of leadership ability and on the basis of national certification by a national board of professional teaching standards that says that this person really knows something.

Here I want to spend a minute or two saying that there is no answer to the problems of education unless we end the anti-intellectualism which is so pervasive in our
field. You ask teachers, "Well, can you ever have some people who are going to be called by one title and others by another and some differentiation in pay and staff level?" "Oh, no, it's too subjective. You can never tell."

You go to a principal and say, well, why does this teacher do so and so? "Oh, it's all a matter of opinion and all a matter of individual style." A parent comes and complains to school board members, the same thing. We really don't know very much about these things, and so different people do it different ways.

I have never before seen any institution in which so much money is spent where people think that they're really defending the institution by telling the public that they don't know a damn thing. Ignorance doesn't protect us.

Any institution, if it wants the public to have confidence and faith and investment must say that "We're doing certain things because we know what we're doing." Take a recent question on the national teacher's examination -- this is the so-called professional part of the examination. What's the question: An angry parent walks into your classroom and objects to a textbook that's being used. Which of the following ways is the proper way to handle this? A) Blame the school board. B) Say the principal bought the books. C) Stand on your constitutional rights and refuse to talk to
the parent. Or D) ask the parent if she has a better textbook to suggest.

Now, notice that not one single answer assumes that some intelligent person has analyzed and evaluated the textbooks and picked one for a good reason, which could be shared with the parent. They all assume political answers. Do you want to get in trouble by blaming the school board? Do you want to get in trouble by blaming the principal? Do you want to get in trouble by being arrogant and not answering the parent? No.

The important thing is, "get her off your back by saying, 'What do you have to suggest?'" That's the right answer.

Imagine going back to a doctor after some medicine you've gotten has had a bad reaction and you tell the doctor that instead of curing you, you got a rash and the doctor says to you, "And what medicine would you like me to give you?"

(Laughter.)

The height of anti-intellectualism and non-professionalism. So the purpose of this National Board, the purpose of the assessments that are being worked on now is to have the profession certify people who know what they're doing, who know the research, who know how to evaluate books and
materials and how to think about students; and you will have a team of adults with a few people like that, and then you will have some teachers who are licensed but who are not yet nationally certified. You will have a paraprofessional or two on it. You can even have some volunteers who have got knowledge in certain areas but not in others, because the way schools are now constructed as a self-contained classroom, any outsider is an intruder in a self-contained classroom.

I'm giving my lecture to the kids and I don't need any other adult there, but if you're not lecturing and if you've got students individually working, learning in different ways and learning at their own rates and learning with some privacy, then all the members of this team can do something.

Now since they are not spending all their time lecturing they've now got time to evaluate materials; they've got time to advise students as to what is a better road to get a certain type of knowledge. They have time to individually mark papers and to coach and to deal with expression and to deal with critical thinking.

Now this is the kind of institution that we need to develop. Will it be easy? No. But if General Motors can try to develop a Saturn project where teams of blue collar workers are doing this, then we can. There are steel plants
where this is happening.

We talk about empowerment of groups. I'm not saying that we should empower people to do -- the only empowerment that exists is on the basis of knowledge, as I've just indicated. Power should be given to those people who know how to do it.

Now if we had teams like that, teams with an outstanding one or two people at the head of each team, you wouldn't need the tremendous number of people that you have watching all the teachers who are there now. You know the system we've got right now is very simple: You hire a lot of people at very low salaries and very poor conditions. You know what happens when you hire people for low salaries? I know what happens if I hire people for a low salary. I then hire somebody else to watch them, because I don't trust anybody who would work for that kind of money and under those conditions.

So instead of hiring somebody that we trust in the first place, we hire somebody that we don't trust and then we add the money onto the inspectorial system.

Now in this new system, of course you are going to have a lot of people who are now assistant principals and administrators, supervisors, but they won't be watching teachers down there; they will in the future be the heads of teams,
working with students and with other adults. They'll be working up front with the entire group.

Now let me say to you that this is starting to happen. I will share with you the fact that somebody called me just two weeks ago and said, "I want to tell you about something that's going to happen." He said, "I represent a bunch of America's major corporations. We are about to start a school in one of America's biggest cities, and the companies are going to pay for it, so in a sense, it's going to be a private school, but in all other respects it is going to be a public school."

"We are going to put that school smack in the middle of a typical neighborhood in this city, which means that all the kids are going to be black and Hispanic. We are going to spend exactly the same amount per pupil that that city spends on its pupils; but we are going to organize that school in a totally different way. We are going to organize it the way you have been talking and writing, Mr. Shanker, and a few other people that we have been talking to; the teachers are going to be able to earn much higher salaries because we're not going to have this whole administrative overhead and we're not going to have all these bureaucratic regulations that come from everywhere, because it's a private school, and we're going to have a principal or headmaster and
we're going to have a faculty, and collectively they are going
to design everything that they do in that school. We're not
going to hand it to them; we're going to give them a lot of
ideas. 'And we're coming to you because we'd like you to
help out.'

That is an exciting prospect. You know in the
1930s we had a government agency, the TVA, as the yardstick
for private utilities. Now I think in city after city,
private companies are going to set up schools; they are going
to take the same kids who are in that neighborhood, tuition
is going to be free; they are going to pick the kids at
random so that there's no favorable selection or creaming
process; and we are going to cooperate.

I hope that across America that those of us in
public education don't wait for the private sector to do this.
In every state and districts across the country, why don't
we as school board members, as teachers, as administrators,
why don't we say that if General Motors can do a Saturn pro-
ject, if companies in our country can radically alter and
restructure their institution in order to meet the competition
that exists in the world today, that we in education have the
intelligence and we've got the vision, and we have the guts
to sit down and somewhere in our system create a project
which will rethink from the very beginning every single thing
that we do in our schools and do it over again, and do it much better.

Why can't we do that? I believe that we can.

(Applause.)

I would like to conclude by suggesting that what's at stake is very important. The business community, governors and legislators, have invested a lot. They've invested their political reputation as well as money in the last few years.

If a few years from now, instead of a better school system we end up with one that's worse because in spite of the money and the rules and regulations and reforms we end up with teachers who are less qualified than the ones we have now and who will be leaving, and if we get a higher dropout rate and more problems, those very same political forces are going to turn on us and they are going to say "The public schools are hopeless. The school boards are too political. Administration is inept. The teacher's unions are too powerful and too rigid." They'll have enough blame for all of us, and the next thing they will do, the backlash that will come from this: after all they've done for us, after all the commitment, after the additional money, after trying to help, after putting us on front page all of this time, if things get worse instead of getting better, they are
going to say "The only answer is to break up this huge public
school monopoly, and let's have tuition tax credits and let's
have vouchers and let's have private schools."

Now I need not say before this audience that
what's at stake is not just public education. What's at
stake in public education in this country is the future of
the country. Private schools will mean Jewish schools,
Protestant schools, Catholic schools, black, Hispanic, white,
Klu Klux Klan, Mr. Farrakhan, schools in different languages,
and the schools which really hold our country together by
giving youngsters a rich experience of being with others of
different races and religions and cultures, could become a
separate set of school systems for different groups; and not
only will public education be at its end, but our country
will face the kinds of problems that other countries face
when different peoples live with each other but do not have
the common experience of learning how to live with each other
before they do.

I hope that this vision is one which you can
share. If you don't like the answer but if you accept the
problems I have put before you; that basically in all these
countries that kids don't learn in the system; and that there
is no way of having 2.2 million people of the level that we
want. There's no way of doing it the way we've been doing it.
If you don't like my answer, think about it and come up with some answers of your own, and let me know about them. I would be very interested.

I hope in the year or two to come that all across the country you and we will be able to establish partnerships to build a new and better public school system in America. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)