

face of '88
1

**Albert Shanker, President, American Federation of Teachers
Remarks at SUPA 20th Anniversary Symposium
"The Next 20 Years"**

Thank you very much. It's a pleasure to be here to help celebrate your anniversary and a special pleasure to be on this platform with Jim Hunt. I of course knew him as governor and as the head of the Education Commission of the state and am pleased to participate, not only as a member of this commission, but as a participant in the fine report that came out a week or so after A Nation at Risk. Jim Hunt did not stop with those things or with the things he did as governor. He has been with the Carnegie Group from the very beginning, which developed its own report on the professionalization of teaching, and he now serves as head of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Even though Jim is in the private sector, he is still devoting a major part of his life to the improvement of education.

Since Dr. Preston and Dr. Thurow presented the rationale for a more educated workforce, I would like to talk about what needs to be done to improve education.

The first thing we need to address is the question of just how good or how bad our schools are. The kind of strategy that we should pursue follows from an answer to that question. If we have schools that are doing well, that is, if we are now educating 75 to 85 percent of our youngsters, then the strategy would be to say, "We've got a pretty good operation here. The thing to do is reach out for the small number of youngsters who aren't making it,

tighten things up a little bit, and we'll move up to an 85 or 90 percent success rate." We'll never be perfect--no institution ever is--but we would be able to say, "We've got a good system that only needs some upgrading."

On the other hand, if we find that we are educating only 10 to 25 percent of the youngsters in this country, that raises a totally different question. With that low a success rate, we should ask why those who are learning are learning. They may be learning for totally different reasons. If they are, we should think about an entirely new production process.

It's precisely the same kind of thinking that one would engage in if one were in business. If you are doing a relatively good job, you need only to improve your quality control and make a few other adjustments. But if you are producing 80 percent lemons you must rethink the entire process. I'm going to use the same assessment as Jim Hunt used: the national assessment of education progress for youngsters ages 9, 13 and 17.

If we look at 17- and 18-year-olds this gives us a good picture of what a high school graduate can do. These are kids who are still in school so we have the benefits of positive selection. About 25 percent of the kids have dropped out by this time, but most of them would not do as well as those who remained in. The toughest examination in writing given to them is a variation of this: "Write a letter to the manager of a local supermarket and convince him to hire you. Remember that there will be many more applicants than there are jobs. You don't have to have perfect

spelling in order to have an acceptable letter, and you don't have to have perfect grammar. It does have to be readable. What they are looking for is persuasion, critical thinking, communication. They want to see one or two arguments, things like: 'Hire me because I used to work for my uncle in his candy store and I'll come every day and be on time because I know how important it is for you to be able to count on me because you can't get help at the last minute.' Or, 'I used to be the treasurer in my boy scout troop and I know what a disaster it can be if you give incorrect change. And my records were always...'"

The percentage of youngsters who are able to write an acceptable letter at the time they are graduating from high school is only 20 percent. And, if you saw the letter that's considered acceptable by the national assessment, many of you would say it's unacceptable. If these graduating seniors are given six common fractions, such as $1/2$, $1/3$, $5/6$, et cetera, and asked to arrange them from smallest to largest, only 12 percent will be able to do this. If these students are given a railroad or bus timetable and asked which train or bus must be taken from Philadelphia in order to get to Washington by 6:00 p.m. on a weekday, the number who are able to figure that out is only 4.9 percent. And this is not just a minority problem because only 5.9 percent of whites are able to do it. We still have a job to do in undoing the damage of the past and the present with respect to minorities, but when all minorities come up to where the white population is in education, we will still have an educational disaster on our hands. The only good

news in education is that minorities are the singular group in our society that is making progress in reading, writing, mathematics, and science.

Now you've read recently the percentage of our kids who are not able to find the Atlantic Ocean, Germany, England or the United States on a map, and the percentage who do not know in which half-century World War II was fought or various historical figures lived. The latest figures show that only about 6 percent of our youngsters who are graduating from high school could go to college to pursue a scientific career because they have the background to do it. When you look at all these results, depending on how tough you are, you are going to come to a conclusion. What percentage of the kids in American is being educated to a minimum standard of basic skills? We are considering only skills that are required on many jobs today and the kinds of skills that are necessary for good citizenship. How can a debate on international issues mean anything to people who have no concept of what happened, or when, where or why it happened? If you looked at those results, many of you--if you're tough--might say we're educating about 5 percent of our kids. If you're a little softer, you might say 10 percent; if you're quite soft you might say 20 percent or 25 percent. There might even be a few who say 30 or 35, but I guarantee there's not a person here who would look me in the eye and say, "Al, we're educating 40 percent."

Now to me that means something. It means that various proposals to make the school day longer, raise teachers' salaries,

reduce class size, have better teacher training and merit pay, are only going to make some marginal differences. But marginal changes in the current system would not take us from the point of educating 10 or 20 percent of the kinds to educating 70 or 80 percent of them. You don't get huge jumps in the nature of quality by making minor changes in the current system.

More bad news that has come out recently from researchers like Lorin Resnick and Robert Glaser at the University of Pittsburgh and Sue Berriman at Columbia is that the 25 percent who are being educated at some decent level cannot apply what they have learned unless they become teachers or college professors. This is because what we learn in school is basically abstract manipulation of symbols. In the real world, it is necessary to put them into context, but in our schools we don't teach people to apply things to contexts. A second finding is that knowledge is always mediated by some kind of technology, although the schools insist that it be unmediated. And, third, that work in the outside world is always team or group work but, in school, asking your neighbor for help is something called cheating. In the outside world, it's called common sense, actually cooperation.

Before I get into the issues that we ought to look at, I want to point out that I disagree with Bill Bennett's idea of education's "Golden Age" when everybody learned, then along came John Dewey or unions or television or liberalism or whatever and all of a sudden people stopped learning. Now, all we have to do is go back to that and build James Madison High School and everybody

will get the education we used to give and everything will be fine. Well, I had an education just like Bill Bennett describes. I grew up in New York City in a working class neighborhood in the late '30s and early '40s. Never heard of drugs or anybody using them in all the years I went to school. There was no television throughout my elementary and secondary education. Most kids did not have radios during that period, at least not until the end of it. Most of us did not have telephones during that period. We had an intact family. We had a lot of support. We had a traditional curriculum. We had no automatic promotion, no automatic graduation and we had to take mathematics and foreign languages and everything else. Was it a good education? Sure it was. Here I am, right? It was terrific.

But when I look back to 1940 to see how many other kids graduated that year, about 20 percent of the high school kids graduated and 80 percent dropped out. The first year in which the majority of high school students graduated from high school was 1953. There were no headlines in 1940 about the huge dropout rate because there was a world for these kids to drop into. There were a lot of jobs around here: steels mills, auto factories, clothing factories and all sorts of places. And 20 percent was the highest graduation rate that we'd had in our history up to that point, so that it wasn't viewed as a problem.

Although we're probably not doing as well with our top kids as we used to, my guess is that we're probably doing a better job than we've ever done before in our history. However, that's not

good enough. That's like saying the 1988 automobiles are a helluva lot better than the ones we used to build in 1955. That is absolutely true, but there was no Japanese car to buy in 1955. So we're in trouble today with a car that's a helluva lot better, and we weren't in trouble with a car that was a helluva lot worse because nobody gives you credit for being better than you were in the past. They just want to know what are the alternatives now. If there's a better car to buy, they're going to buy it. Nobody is going to give us credit for schools that are doing a better job now. They're going to ask, "Are the schools up to meeting the needs of our society and solving the problems our economy faces today?" The answer is clearly "No!" It's not a "Golden Age" question.

Why do we have these problems? Well, we all have them. The British have them: only about 18 percent of the kids in England go on to higher education, and education is a rough political issue over there. In France, the minister of education two months ago made a speech decrying a school system that educates only 15 percent of its students. The Germans have a system where about 23 percent of the kids go on to college, with apprenticeships and vocational education for the others. The Japanese do an excellent job in terms of literacy--with a much more difficult language--and mathematical knowledge, but they are rethinking their school system because their high school graduates cannot engage in a discussion where they have to exercise judgement. They've had national commissions designed to figure out how they can get their school

systems away from memorization and rote and to create a kind of workforce that will have qualities that they don't have now without losing what they do have. This issue has not been solved anywhere, not just in America.

We need to look at the school as an institution that produces a good part of this. Of course there are outside problems and influences. Without question it's going to be more difficult to reach youngsters who are growing up the way kids grow up today. A kid who has to look at violence and experience all sorts of things that most adults don't experience is not going to find it very easy to sit in a first-grade class reading "Run, Jane, run." But I think the overwhelming majority of youngsters who come into our schools fortunately don't suffer from these problems.

We've got to ask ourselves the question of whether the schools are something like what medicine was for a couple thousand years. If you were sick, you went to a doctor. You hoped to get help, but often you died as a result of seeing the doctor. Why? Well, doctors for thousands of years didn't know they were supposed to wash their hands or sterilize their instruments--not because they were evil people, but the state of knowledge was such that this was found out rather recently in medical history. Is there an educational equivalent of not washing our hands or sterilizing our instruments? That is, are schools doing certain things in a systematic way which gets kids not to learn? I ask that question because I think I have an answer to it, and I think the answer is yes. Just calling on your experiences as a student and your

experiences as teachers or parents, it quite easy to see what the schools are doing that brings about these results. Only students who have certain things going for them will make it through the system.

Now what are some of these things? Our thinking and talking about schools is based on an improper analogy and that is that schools are places where teachers do the work. If the teachers do the right work, then the kids will turn out all right. The teachers are the workers and the kids are the raw materials, the product, the inanimate projects that we are working on. Totally wrong analogy. I hear a phrase all the time when I talk to teachers. They say, "I taught them, but they didn't learn it." Now can you tell me what that means? It's as though the act of teaching and the act of learning are totally separate. Now, how are schools organized? First of all we've got to say that the kids are workers in the schools. There is no person who gets an education by having someone give it to him. Education is a result of effort and work that the student does with the help of teachers. Teachers can make it more difficult, they can make it confusing, they can do all sorts of things that help or hurt but essentially no matter what the teacher does if the student doesn't do all kinds of work--listening, speaking, writing, thinking, concentrating--no learning is going to take place. And therefore, we've got to look at the question, "Does the school turn off a lot of kids?" Does it get a lot of kids to say, "I'm not going to be in this game. I'm not going to work. I'm not going to try. I can't do it. I'm

too stupid. I'm going to be humiliated if I try."? Does the school get the kids not to work? That's essentially the kind of questions that managers would ask about their workers: "How do I get them to come on time?" "How do I get them to work hard?" "How do I get them to be interested in the quality of what they're doing?" That kind of question is what educators have to deal with.

What are some of the things we do in school that might turn the kids off? Well, one thing that we do is get kids to unfairly compete with each other. We take a whole bunch of kids in September and say, "You're all six years old, and you're now in first grade and here's the work you've got to do." But are all these kids six years old? No. How did they get in that class? The school district chooses a date and announces: "If you were born on this day or before, come on in. If not, you wait until next year." That means the oldest kid in the class is at least a year older than the youngest kid. Does a year make any difference at age six? A tremendous difference. It's one-third or one-fourth of the physical, intellectual and emotional growth of a human being. It's not like the difference between being 50 and 51, it's like the difference between being 30 and 50. When you put a whole bunch of kids into the same class, you are telling these kids to compare themselves with each other. You are instilling competition. What we find later on is that the overwhelming number of kids who drop out happen to have the wrong birthday--they're the youngest kids in the class. It's not surprising, though, because this is like putting a heavyweight and a lightweight boxer in the

ring at the same time and saying, "Go ahead, fight; you're both fighters." You know what the results will be. Now occasionally, you get the youngest kid in the class who is able to overcome that handicap. When he can, he's like anybody who overcomes a handicap: he's better for it. But the majority don't overcome that handicap.

Why do we have all the kids come in on the same day? Well, that's when the teacher starts talking. Otherwise you could have them all come in on their birthdays. When all the kids start on the same day, the teacher doesn't know their names but they know each other's. It can create discipline problems for the teacher because the kids are organized and the teacher doesn't know them. If the kids came in one at a time, it would be the kids who didn't know anybody else. The teacher and other kids would know each other, so it would make quite a difference in terms of classroom management.

The second thing is that we require most kids to commit an unnatural act, something most adults can't do. That is to sit still and listen to somebody for five or six hours. That's very difficult. You show me a second grader who can listen for five or six hours and I'll show you a college graduate later in life. We have made the rear end one of the major organs of educational determination in this country. Not original, Peter Drucker said that many years ago. Those kids who move around or whose eyes wander are referred to the Special Education class or are considered disruptive--and they are--because the teacher is graded partly on the ability to keep them seated. If I took my kid at

home and had him sit still for five or six hours a day, someone from the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children would come after me, not after my child. But in school they come after the kid if he can't sit still.

The third thing that happens is that the kid has to be able to learn by listening to words from the teacher. Is that the only way to learn? Of course not, but in school we essentially say you're going to learn it this way or you're not going to learn it. This is very much like taking medicine your doctor gave you, and it didn't work. You came back a few days later and said, "Doctor, not only did your pill not cure me but I broke out all over." If the doctor were an educator he would shake you and say, "You've got a helluva lot of nerve not responding to my medicine. Here, take twice as much." Now of course, doctors don't do that. Doctors say, "I'm sorry, it's not your fault. What I gave you what works on most people, but it doesn't work on everybody. Here try this and if that doesn't work, come back and we'll try something else." What is missing in education is that you have a structure in which that can't happen. Anyone who doesn't learn by listening isn't going to learn.

Another thing is that we all know that every individual learns at his or her own rate. However, we systematically violate that in schools. We may all learn at our own rate, but you had better learn at the same rate I am talking because I can't talk at 25 different rates to 25 different kids. We know we have a system where the teacher talks to the middle of the class, bores the 1/3

at the top, and loses the third at the bottom.

Then we do something else. After I teach the lesson, I call on different kids. Some kids have their hands raised all the time; they know all the answers. Those kids would like to come to school on Thanksgiving Day. Then there are those who know the answers some of the time. But there are some kids who never raise their hands and they are constantly engaged in an unconstitutional act: they are praying that I don't call on them. Of course, I have to call on them because that's pupil participation. I've got to know if I'm reaching them, trying to motivate them by calling on them. What am I doing with the kid who's called on day after day and never gets it right? He starts guessing and he turns red and the other kids start calling him stupid or pointy-head or dumbo. What am I really doing to him? I'm publicly humiliating him in front of his peers. Is humiliation a good motivator? Every management book says to never humiliate anybody because there's a price for it. These kids are workers. What happens when you humiliate somebody? He says, "This is not my game. Don't blame me. I'm not dumb, I'm just not trying. I'm in a different game. I'm going to throw things or I'm going to play hookey or I'm going to do something else, but I'm not in this game." How many of us take driving lessons from our husbands or wives? We don't want people that we care about to see the bumbling mistakes that we make when we're learning.

Is it possible to create a school in which the learning efforts of youngsters might be done in greater privacy than they

are in a classroom? Is it possible to create a classroom in which kids can learn more than one way than just listening to a teacher? Is it possible to create a school in which kids do not unfairly compete with other kids? Is it possible to have a classroom in which we do not put a premium on sitting still? Think about this: if you view the class as a workplace--and it is a workplace, and the kid is a worker--if he doesn't do the work, he's not going to learn. What workplace in the outside world is most like a classroom? A classroom is not like a steel mill, and it's not like a coal mine, and it's not like an auto factory or a garment factory. It's not like working on a merchant marine. A classroom is more like an office. You read reports, you write reports, you verbally give reports, you listen to reports. It's an exchange of symbols and numbers. That's what goes on in offices around the world.

So let us now assume that you are the manager of an office and you just hired me and you say, "Al, sit at your desk right here. You see that there are 25 other people with desks just like yours around you. They are doing exactly the same work that you're doing, but we don't want you to talk to them. Everyone is to do his own work and not talk to each other. There is your boss. She or he will come over and tell you exactly what to do, and then you do it. Now, Albert, there's one more thing. In 45 minutes a bell will ring. I want you to stop doing this work and go up to room 409. You'll have 25 other workers doing a different kind of work there. Don't talk to them either. The boss there will give you

a totally different kind of work to do. Do that and every 45 minutes we're going to change your room, we're going to change your desk, we're going to change the things that you do, we're going to change the people around you--and don't talk to them. We're also going to change your supervisor."

Now if you were the manager and organized that office in that way, how long would you last? People would say, "You are crazy. It takes people time to get adjusted to work. You can't change the job that they're doing every 45 minutes without confusing them. You can't give them a different boss with a different personality and different expectations every 45 minutes. People have one boss. They form a union." That's my only commercial. Well, that's exactly the way our secondary schools are organized: on to a different manager, on to a different group of kids every 45 minutes. This system of moving the student from one period to another and one teacher to another would make perfect sense if the kid were an automobile on an assembly line, and one teacher put English into him and another one put math into him and another one put physics into him. It's as if the teacher were the worker, but that's the wrong analogy.

There are many more things wrong. For instance, the fact that most schools are organized on an annual basis, which means the kid starts in September and asks when the final day will be. You say next June 15. Well, if I were that kid, I'd say, "Gee whiz, I got 10 months to do this work, I'm not doing my homework tonight, I'm not that compulsive." If you gave the adults in the school their

full 10 months' salary 10 months in advance, how many would have any money left next year? It's very important to develop the characteristic of understanding that everything you do every day accumulates in terms of college, in terms of money, in terms of obesity, in terms of debt, in terms of all sorts of things. That characteristic is extremely important to develop in people, but not many develop it. When you require all of the youngsters in our schools to have that notion what happens? A lot of the kids don't do the work in September, and by the middle of October they know they're hopelessly lost. They're finished. They're humiliated. Now they have two choices: they can stay and be humiliated and not understand anything for the rest of the year, or they can drop out. If they drop out, when can they drop back in again? A year later. But after a year of freedom and then with kids who are one year younger, and they are made to feel their mental age has just shrunk one year.

Do we have to organize our educational system on a full-time annual basis? No. We could have semesters that are three weeks long or four weeks long. We could have people going through schools with a sort of merit badge system, that as each kid accomplishes certain things, he gets credit and moves on. These are just some of the things that could be done.

What I'm saying is this: The 10 or 20 percent of the kids who end up getting an education are those who happen by accident or birth to be in the top half of the age group, by and large. They're the ones who, because of training at home or natural

ability, are able to sit still for that long period of time. They are kids, who without the aid of audiotapes, videotapes, computers, discussions or anything else, can translate words into pictures and concepts and everything else--something not very many people can do even later on in life. They are kids who ended up being grouped in such a way that they weren't in the bottom third of the class so they weren't being humiliated, and a lot of whether you're being humiliated depends on who's sitting next to you. If you go out and try to learn how to play tennis with other people who can't play either, you're much more likely to stick with it than if you go out there for the first time with a bunch of people who are pros. It's who is next to you and what are they like that influences what you look like.

Essentially the school says that if you have abilities and support, then you make it. But the school does not bother to change its structure in order to make it possible for more kids to make it. If in a workplace you had all kinds of things that were discouraging different workers, the problems of managers would be: "How can we get more of these workers to do a good job?" "Can we get the lighting to be better?" "Can we create incentives?" "Can we create better conditions?" You would be constantly thinking about how to get the non-working workers to work. But very little thought in terms of school organization goes into that question, which is a basic management question.

Let me move from that to two other points about school. Emily Feistritzer, who is a nationally prominent journalist in education,

has an annual report in which she says that there is no teacher shortage, and there will not be a teacher shortage. She's absolutely right. There can be no shortage in a field that has no standards. There has never been a classroom in the United States where the kids were sent home with a letter saying, "Dear parent, we're sorry we could not find a teacher and would you keep your kids home until we find one." In England, they do that. Here, we always find some adult to stand in front of the kids so, in the large sense, there's no teacher shortage.

However, there is no surprise when you get results in mathematics and science like the ones we're getting. Why is there no surprise? First of all, the majority of secondary school math and science teachers in this country are social studies and English and phys ed teachers because anybody who did well in high school mathematics gets nice offers from IBM and Hewlett Packard and banks. But how about elementary schools? Why is it that most school districts in this country say that we will pay different subject matters in accordance with market supply and demand? Not, "We have certain standards and we're going to maintain those standards no matter what it costs to get teachers in that field." There are 15,500 school districts in this country, and I don't know of one that has proposed that salaries on the basis of shortage be market-centered.

But even if you fill all those positions in the high school, the problems really start in the elementary school. There are now a number of states with examinations for prospective elementary

school teachers. In those states the usual mathematics examination consists of a number of questions that are the same arithmetic questions given to sixth-grade kids. And the passing score for prospective teachers is the same as that for the kids: 65 percent on a sixth-grade arithmetic test. In those same states, between 30 and 40 percent of the prospective teachers flunk, which means that a lot of those who pass are just above the 65 percent mark. Furthermore, a lot who flunk are hired anyway because they are the only ones available to teach. Is it surprising then for their students to get perhaps one out of every three arithmetic questions wrong? If you have a teacher who is that poor at math, do you think that teacher is going to spend a lot of time on it? Do you think that teacher is going to convey the importance of math? On the contrary. That teacher can say, "Look, I made it and I don't know any math. I'm living proof that you don't need it." We don't have a million teachers out there to replace the ones who are there right now, so there's no point in saying let's get tough. But if half the teachers in elementary school are really good at math, why can't the school be reorganized so the people could teach to their strengths? Not a total departmentalization which would be very confusing to youngsters. What I'm saying is that we are not doing the kind of organizational and management thinking in our schools that would take place in the workplace.

Now there's one other thing that drives our schools in a bad direction, and that is the whole measurement process. Let's take the publication of the SAT scores last week. The scores went down

two points. Since the scores of blacks and Hispanics went up considerably, that means the scores of most whites went down. A lot of people like Bill Bennett and others made speeches expressing disappointment that the SAT scores have not gone up despite the reforms that had been incorporated. Now I could understand some very unsophisticated person making a remark like that. But when did these reforms occur? Five years ago, A Nation at Risk was printed. People talked about it for a year. Almost no state did anything about it even in the following year. Some states haven't done anything yet, legislatively. But many states did something within the last two years. Passing a law and implementing it in the many hundreds of districts within a state takes time.

In other words, reform has not been in place for five years, it's been in place for only one, two or three years at the most. And some places, it's not in place at all. That means that the 17-year-olds who took the SATs were 16 or 15 years old when these reforms took place. They already had most of their education by that time. Why isn't anybody saying that?

How can we intelligently discuss public policy if knowledgeable people are going around making speeches saying how disappointed they are, rather than educating the rest of the people as to the kind of time frame one has to expect when you put educational programs into place?

Now the other thing we have are these idiotic standardized test scores. I said they're idiotic because they limit what the school can teach. Teachers spend an awful lot of time teaching

kids how to answer multiple choice questions. They don't spend very much time getting kids to learn how to write because there is only one state in the United States that asks for a writing sample before kids graduate from high school--that's Maryland. So if your school is going to be measured on the basis of a bunch of multiple choice tests in reading and mathematics, that's what you're going to teach your kids. Writing is difficult. There are a lot of papers to mark. Expression is a critical thing, and it's tough to teach writing. Of course, it's much more worthwhile than teaching kids how to pass multiple choice examinations, but essentially whatever it is that's tested is what is taught. Tests do drive schools, and therefore it is very important to have good test results.

One of the major reforms we could make in this country is to get away from SATs and go back to the old college entrance examinations where, to enter college, you have to write essays as well as answer some fill-in and multiple choice questions. I assure you we'd have many more kids learning how to write and teachers teaching them how to write. But it's a lot more expensive to do, and it's a lot more difficult to do. We used to do that in the days when not many kids went on to college, so it was easy to do. But the Germans still do it, and the British still do it.

If your school district says 80 percent of our kids are above the national average, what does that mean? What can a kid do? What can't he do? Does the kid know? Does the parent know? Does the business community know? Does the governor know? Does anybody

know? What is the point of a system of measurement which communicates absolutely no information except something relative to everybody else? And does it mean what we think it means because, as Dr. Kinnel found out, every district in every state in America is above average because the average is an artificial norm set by a sampling of kids 8-12 years ago. Therefore above average does not mean above all the kids who are taking it now. It means above the sample it took eight years ago, and that sample is always a sample that makes everybody look good. In other words, the testing companies are selling cosmetics, not rulers. So that is a key issue.

I want to touch on another issue and that is the issue of governance. No other system in the world has local school boards. Mark Twain had some things to say about local school boards, and so did Douglas MacArthur when he created the Japanese school system without local school boards after World War II.

But I'm not dumping on local school boards; I think that most of them are very good people who run for office. Most of them are not compensated, and there's a lot of heartache in the job. They're there mostly for the same reasons that I'm there and all of you who are interested in education are there. I'm not talking about bad school board members. I'm talking about the structure of the institution. School board members basically run in non-partisan elections. The only way that they can re-elected or that anybody can know about them is that they've got to get up at school board meetings and they've got to discover some scandal that's been

going on in the school. Then their names get out there and they get re-elected. That's the politics of school board elections. There are no big companies financing people or no PACs; there is no separate financial or political structure for that institution. That's how they make it, by and large.

Think of yourself as superintendent of schools. You are the chief executive officer of a school district. And you will meet in a public meeting once every week or every two weeks where seven or nine people will do everything they can to figure out what has gone wrong with your institution for the last week or two and bring it up at a public meeting.

What is your major priority as a chief executive officer? Your major priority is to make sure that nothing wrong happens. No mistakes is the top priority. Well, any institution that's premised on not making mistakes can't do anything good. Nobody's ever going to try anything. Nobody's going to take risks. So what do you do? You get out a big book of regulations saying don't do this, don't do this, don't do this. Why do you do that? So that if anything goes wrong, you can say it wasn't your fault, you told them not to do that. And the principal communicates the same thing to the teachers, and the teachers do it to the kids. It is a marvelous custodial institution where everyone is telling everybody else what not to do. It is not an institution that rewards any sort of entrepreneurial spirit. There aren't many incentives for kids or for teachers or for superintendents or for principals or for school boards.

What can be done about this? We could eliminate school boards, but we're not going to because it is a democracy. It is local control. I'm not ready to go for a national school system; I know Hyman Rickover was interested in that sort of thing. How within the current system can we change it so that it doesn't have these adverse effects? I'll just throw out two ways in which it might happen. Perhaps some of you will think of others and you'll send them to me because I am looking, I think America is looking, for a way to do something about this problem.

One way might be to say that school boards could only meet once a year for one whole week and their job is to review what the school system and the chief executive officer have accomplished over the last year. That means that there's not much profit in saying, "Why was Johnny found on this staircase and beaten up last February 3rd?" It means that you've at least got a year to do things, that the chief executive officer and his staff must have a certain amount of risk time and breathing space. A lot of school boards like this. A lot of these people did not seek school boards seats so they could get into the plumbing of each thing that happens every day. It's just that those are the pressures that are on them from constituents.

That's one way of doing it. Another way might be to empower school districts to subcontract auxiliary programs for specific problem areas. In other words, entering into an agreement with some group provides a buffer for school boards. Now suppose that school boards were willing to enter into an agreement with members

of their own staff. Suppose, for instance, that a staff were to come up with an idea about how to govern itself and how to make some substantive changes and did it in accordance with certain principles, such as organizing a school so that there is more privacy and less humiliation. Suppose that the school board agreed, but would not compel any parents to send their child to that school because it was doing something different and not under the school board's governance. The agreement would state a specific time period, for instance, seven years. In other words, maybe one of the ways out of the situation is to provide for a system of internal subcontracting. This would encourage an entrepreneurial spirit and provide a way to get out from under necessary regulations.

There may be other ways, and I would hope that you would give them to me. There are quite a few interesting things happening. Things are not hopeless. However, anybody who is optimistic about changing a system that has been the way it is for 100 years or more isn't being reasonable. On the other hand, there are certain signs that are very healthy: your own Pittsburgh School System and Al Fondy here. Both the union and the superintendent have pioneered not just collective bargaining in a non-adversarial way, but there are a hundred things going on here that are educationally different from what other school districts are doing. There is a search, there is a feeling of not just accepting what happened before. They're doing the best they can to shape up the system as it exists, and they're trying some new things.

Dade County said, "Those schools that want to manage themselves come to us with a governance proposal, a substantive proposal." Every school in that district is now on a self-management basis. I'd just like to spend a minute or two sharing with you a school that I saw, not in the United States, but elsewhere, which I hope will provide an idea of how different that institution can be with just a few minor changes. There's a school in Cologne, Germany. It is an urban school, and it's not just a school with a lot of middle-class German kids who are learning. These are Turkish kids, they're Greek kids, they're Moroccan kids, they're Portuguese kids--different cultures, different languages. In Germany, every kid in the fourth grade takes an examination, and from that examination it is determined which type of high school he goes to. If you're in the top track you go to the Gymnasium, if you're in the next track you go to the Realschule, if you're in the bottom track you go to the Hauptschule, which has a combination of vocational-apprenticeship programs. This is a comprehensive school, which means that kids from all these tracks can go to it. However, if you passed the exam with flying colors, the chances are your parents will send you to the Gymnasium because that's the academic track that prepares you for the university.

So this is essentially a school of 2300 kids who've been told, "You're too dumb to go to the university, you're going to be in the bottom two tracks, so come here." Now here are the few differences in how this school's organized. If I'm a teacher and I come in to work today, just before school opens a few days from now, I'm told

to go to a certain room to meet six other teachers who are on my team. The first thing we are told is, "Here are the 120 kids that your team has. You can decide how to divide them and group them any way you want. That's your job. And you can re-group them during the course of the year, so that if you see that one kid is very discouraged because he is at the bottom of everything, move him to another group where he's going to look a lot better and feel a lot better about himself. Secondly, there are no bell schedules here. So if, as a group, you want to spend a whole day teaching history, you can do that. But if you find that for the whole day the kids get bored, you can decide on a morning for mathematics or an afternoon for history and the next morning for German. And as a team you can meet whenever you want to change these things, you don't have to make a decision once and for all. Now you really should have only had six teachers on this team, but we've given you seven because we want you to organize yourself in such a way that we will never have to hire a substitute when someone is absent. When a teacher from the outside comes in for one day, they really don't know the kids, the kids don't know them, the kids disrespect them and run rings around them, so we've given you an extra teacher, full-time, so when somebody's absent you can carry on."

Now the next thing this team of teachers is told is, "These kids are coming to school in a couple of days. They're starting here in the fifth grade. This school runs from the fifth grade and these kids graduate when they're age 19. Your team is going to be with the same kids from fifth grade all the way to age 19.

You'll get to know their mothers, their fathers, their sisters, their brothers. You'll not be able to say I inherited these kids from some teacher who ruined them, and I can't wait to pass them on to the next teacher next June. It will not take you till Thanksgiving to learn their names each year, and you will not be packing up three weeks early because you're passing them on to someone else. You are going to gain probably eight or nine weeks in the school year without working an additional day."

Finally what you see is what they do in the classrooms. No teacher lectures. The kids are at tables with five kids per table--no more--and for 17 years they've been doing what we call cooperative learning, that is, the kids do things together. The Japanese also do this. Why do we have kids just learning from and listening to the teacher? Why don't we treat kids like baseball teams, football teams, basketball teams? What happens when kids work on a team? If some kid can't hit, can't run, can't catch, the other members of the team practice with him because that helps to bring the team up. You form an organization within your school that gets kids' teams to compete with each other and to compel cooperation inside the team. This is exactly what auto factories are doing when they take work that is inherently boring and put workers into teams to compete with other teams in meeting work orders.

The kinds of questions that are thrown at these kids at the table are not just what is $2 + 2$. They are efforts to stimulate the imagination, to get all kids to be able to contribute.

Questions like: "According to this map, when it's 2:00 in Cologne, what time is it in New York? All right, so you know what the time zones are. Now I don't want you to look this up, but I want the best idea. When do you think time zones started? And why? Were there time zones in the time of Jesus? Of George Washington? Who might have opposed time zones when they came into effect? What would happen tomorrow if someone proposed that there be an abolition of time zones? What effect would it have on your life? Who might be for it? Who might be against it?"

This particular school turns out about the same percentage of kids who go on to the universities and who pass the national ombiture (?sp.) examination as do the academic schools. We need to say to faculty members, "Start thinking of your kids as workers and come to us with proposals, something like what the Saturn project is developing in the evolvment of both teachers, managers and I would say high school kids as well."

How can we structure a school in which we take care of all of the problems which turn kids off? It might be a school where some kids are learning by reading and others are learning by videotape and some are learning with teams of kids.

The best way to get away from the teacher problem is to get away from the self-contained classroom. You're never going to get 2.2 million teachers of the caliber we need given the demographics of this country. Two point two million: we need 23 percent of all the college graduates each and every year for at least the next 11 years. Now it's easy to get .23 percent of the bottom--they are the

ones who can't do the arithmetic. You're not going to get 23 percent of the top. You need good lawyers. You need good business people. You need good doctors and dentists and people in other fields. At most, if you've got a good institution you'll get your fair share of people at the top. But you don't just take your share and pay them the same and treat them the same and isolate them in a room so that they have no effect on anybody else.

A school has to become much more like a hospital, like a law firm, like an engineering firm, like an accounting firm. You need teams of adults with a lead teacher who might make \$70,000-\$100,000 a year and might have thought of a career in law or medicine as well as teaching because that is a leadership position that pays well. In that team are interns and residents who function in the school much the same as interns and residents in a hospital, and paraprofessionals and even some volunteers from the community. A different structure for adults and a different structure for kids.

I'd like to conclude by saying that not only do we need this for our economy, but we also need it because the value of public education in America will threaten our democracy politically. There are already signs. Half of the American people are so fed up with public schools that they say let's provide public money for private schools and let kids escape public school systems. Iowa has passed a tuition tax credit plan. Minnesota has passed a tuition tax deduction plan. New Jersey has a proposal where the state can take over so-called bankrupt school districts. Chicago

was talking about dividing the city up into 35 or so separate districts with almost instant rights of hiring and firing by parents of both teachers and supervisors. The Chelsea School District in Massachusetts is about to subcontract itself and have John Silber and Boston University take it over for a period of 10 years without any public accountability. And right now, a new reform has gone into effect in England and that is if a majority of parents voting in any school say that they want to opt out from the public school system, they have a right to take an entire school with its teachers, administrators, chalk and books, and can elect their own parent board and run the whole school. In other words, something that takes it out of the public circuit and makes it a publicly funded private school.

What's at stake here is if we don't shake schools up the American people will say, "We gave you more money. We gave you reform ideas. We tried to do it. You guys didn't do it despite all that." And now we will move to a system where kids go to Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, black, Hispanic, Vietnamese schools, and that isn't just a union question or primarily a labor/management/union question. This is a question of whether we will preserve in our country the institution which probably more than any other has been responsible for the fact that people of all races, religions, and creeds end up being Americans and end up being able to work with each other--a phenomenon which exists in almost no other place in the world. In other places you have different groups and they are all killing each other. Here we've

miraculously found a way to have them work with each other.

The stakes are very big. We can't stand still. We will either wait for someone to make the changes for us or those of us in the educational community will provide the leadership and bring about the changes ourselves.