

THE DANGERS OF NOT HAVING ANY NEW IDEAS.

Remarks of Albert Shanker
To The AFT QUEST Conference
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Some years ago when we started these QUEST conferences, for many, including many in the leadership of the organization, they were an add-on, an appendage. It was something that we did because, although for the most part we're involved in collective bargaining, servicing our members, taking care of grievances, political action, we knew that among teachers there were those who weren't necessarily attracted by these activities and who had some professional interests and concerns. We said there ought to be a place where once a year those strange people who are not that involved in collective bargaining ought to be able to come, and we can show that we're interested in the things that they're interested in, too. But implied in the whole discussion and implementation of the QUEST program originally was that it was, in a sense, a frill, a nice thing, a gesture to go a bit beyond the basic purposes of the organization.

How things have changed! I think it's accurate today to say that far from being something the organization does to reach out to those not usually involved or active, the issues we will be discussing at this conference are central to the continuation of public education in America and to the success of our own organization.

Indeed, just as a few years ago a person would be deemed incompetent as a union leader if he or she didn't know how to organize a strike, how to communicate with members, how to bargain at the negotiating table, how to process a grievance, I think we're clearly at a point in time where a union leader is incompetent if, in addition to having those skills, the leader is not well versed in all the issues of educational policy and research that will shape the changes in our schools in the next few years. Questions of the length of the school day, the length of the school year, systems of reward and compensation, changes in the organization and structure of schools, in certification, in licensing, in methods of instruction -- none of these is going to be decided at the bargaining table, and none of them will be intelligently decided in the state legislature. But within each school district there will be a number of people who have read, who have discussed, who know what the current state of research is, who know what the pitfalls are, and who can with great confidence assert that such and such things have been tried and haven't worked too well, or there are certain pitfalls, or if we do try this it ought to be done in a slightly different way to avoid the previous problems, that these things are known, and, therefore, things ought to be done this way, that some things are failures and ought to be rejected.

Anyone who knows what he or she is talking about when saying these things will have tremendous power to direct and redirect and will also be in a position to serve our members.

Now, this is a very special conference in another respect, in that it may very well be the conference of the decade because of the number of outstanding people in education who have cancelled vacations, decided not to go to Europe this week, decided to stop writing the book that they just had to get finished to be here. And many of them said they would not do it for any other organization, but that we had really stuck our necks out and were doing exciting things, and, therefore, they were making the sacrifice to be with us.

A Call to Entertain New Ideas

I would like to begin by elaborating a little bit on something that I touched on last night (in welcoming remarks). These talks are difficult for me to give for a number of reasons. For example, I would like to repeat the speech that I gave at Niagara Falls. I'm not going to do that because many of you were there, and I will assume that those who were not will take the time to read the text of it that is in your folders. I know it's long. But it's difficult to speak about many of these topics without going into some detail. So for the most part this morning I will stay away from the issues that I discussed at that meeting and move on to some other issues that were omitted at that time.

There's a second problem that I alluded to last night, and it's not just a problem with today's talk or any particular talk, but of helping to generate new ideas and discussion, on the one hand, and at the same time maintaining one's position as a leader of an organization that does have certain positions adopted by convention and by the Executive Council. If any leader of an organization says, well, the only thing I'm ever going to say or talk about is something that's been adopted in a resolution because I'm the head of the organization and I have to speak only in these policy terms, it would be pretty boring. On the other hand, if the president of an organization feels that he or she can just go off and say anything regardless of what the members have voted, that's not particularly responsible, and the members, after awhile, are going to refuse to elect this person to office to go around and say anything that just comes into his mind. But the fact is that unless someone stands up and does say something different from what is already policy, without others feeling that that person is being disloyal or is breaking ranks or is doing something to endanger the group, it's not possible to have any new ideas. Somebody has to get up and throw something out for discussion that's different. So I ask you this morning to once again join with me in exploring some ideas -- ideas that are not policy now, that may never be policy, but ideas that are worth thinking about because they're out there anyway. And we ought to think

about them so we know how to handle them, and some of them perhaps we ought to embrace.

Public Education Is Still in Danger

Having said that, I would like to start where I started at Niagara Falls and where I started at a number of other conferences, because it's always important to remember the context, and the context of this meeting and of these discussions and of the ideas that we'll be talking about is that education in this country is still in danger. Public opinion polls show that the public thinks that we're a little better this year because of all the stimulation of education reform. But the grades that they give the schools are still pretty low. There are still huge numbers of people in the polls who would support vouchers and tuition tax credits. We had more legislatures this year where such pieces of legislation were introduced than ever before. That legislation came closer to passing this year in many places than ever before. That's the context. We continue to have a national administration pushing these ideas, both the President of the United States on every occasion and the Secretary of Education. We can only hold off these dangers on the basis of sheer political power, lobbying, for a short time if the public continues to be dissatisfied with education, because over a period of time the political process will reflect the wishes of large numbers of people, and if large numbers of people are unhappy and dissatisfied with public education, they will seek alternatives.

They seek them now. They give up their homes and apartments. They move from one town to another, one district to another, one state to another, one part of the country to another. And they will move out of public schools and into private schools in exactly the same way unless we offer an attractive institution. This is no longer a society made up of very poor people, immigrants who automatically respect teachers and schools and who are too poor to seek an alternative. With all the problems we have, it's a fairly affluent, middle class society. People can afford to buy an alternative education if they want it.

And so we've got to be in a position very soon where we're able to go out to the public and talk against tuition tax credits not just because of what terrible things would happen if tuition tax credits came. That's a good argument, but you never sell anybody on buying your product by telling them how lousy the other guy's is. We've got to be in a position to go out and say how good ours is.

It is good. It's got a lot of strength. All these reports underrate and underestimate what we have. But it's got to be better. All the reform reports are very interesting documents because most of those people really did not know what they were talking about. But they were friendly people. They kind of said, hey, raise standards, teach kids more, get good teachers and keep them, get kids to read good books. When you read these reports,

there's nothing very profound in them. They're just telling us to do what we've been trying to do for a very long time and what everybody in education has been trying to do. Ted Sizer and John Goodlad and Ernest Boyer actually came up with ideas. But you might look at the other reports as saying, help, please, come forth with some ideas. Here's what we want to accomplish, but we can't tell you how to accomplish it. There's a great opportunity because, believe it or not, those governors and those businessmen are hungry for ideas -- and they have a naive idea that teachers probably have ideas about what ought to go on in schools. They really do. I have met with so many governors; in several cases I was invited to address joint sessions of a state legislature or joint sessions of education committees. And in almost all these cases, what they were saying is, you people have been taking and thinking about education. We know where we want to go. We want to know the product. We know what the people out there want us to do. But we don't know how to do it.

Either We Have Answers -- Or Others Will

We've got to put on our agenda answers to these questions. What do we tell them? Because if we don't tell them, you're either going to get stupid solutions imposed on us by people who know that they don't know what to do but have to do something -- that's what you're getting in all the state legislation -- or you'll get an abandonment of public education. They're going to say, here, we tried to help them but it's really hopeless.

I've been thinking about an experience this year. You've all seen it. Education reform has come to California. It's come to Texas. It's come to Florida, Tennessee, Arkansas, a bunch of places. And what does education reform mean? Well, generally it means some more money, and it means a big, fat piece of legislation, about 150 pages long, telling me and telling you and telling your principal and telling your school board how many minutes to do this and how many seconds to do that and which book to use and which course is taught -- everything. There it is, foolproof. We won't let those fools make any decisions. We'll tell them what to do.

Now, if you were in private business and you saw that the legislature was coming after you to start telling you what to do because you weren't doing things right up to then, and they figured they had to come and tell you because that was the only way that you were going to shape up, and you saw them about to impose all sorts of regulations on you that you didn't want, what would you do? I would make the changes myself before they passed the regulations, and I'd go up there and say, I don't need a 150-page document to tell me what to do -- I've done it myself. And you would expect in places that don't have school reform yet that teachers and supervisors and school boards would be sitting down to shape themselves up so that it's not done to them by a bunch

of people who don't know what they're doing. But I go from state to state where they haven't had reform yet and I ask, well, what are you doing to prepare yourself. The answer is, Oh, no, we're not doing anything. We're waiting for the legislature to reform us. Bad process.

Our Needs Can't Be Met in Traditional Ways

Now, one other point before I get into the specific notions that I'd like to explore today. There's another reason for us to explore many of these new ideas and to entertain ideas that would have been considered heresy a few months ago and may still be considered heresy by some, but heresy or not, worth entertaining. Any fair minded analysis of the current situation leads to an inevitable conclusion. If you take the simplest objectives that we have for the improvement of education -- not only the objectives that we have, but the objectives of any fair minded analyst -- and you look at, let's say, the three or four or five most important things that ought to be done, you find that they are really impossible to do in traditional ways.

What are some of those items? Well, one would be a modest 50 percent increase in teachers' salaries. It is modest. After all, teachers are now earning \$22,000 a year, \$23,000 a year. That's the average salary for teachers, many of them with years of experience, not the starting salary. That's the average for all teachers, no matter how much experience or how many credits, and so forth. Is it really such a radical notion to say that they should get \$33,000 on the average? And \$33,000 is not a lot of money. It doesn't make you a well paid professional in our society. But the cost of that, with pension and everything else, just the cost of that one item, is \$30 billion. Now, think of that: Title I at its height, I think, was about \$3.5 billion. \$30 billion is something like twice the cost of operating all the federal education programs, including college grants, loans, and everything else.

Let's take another little thing that we ought to do. Ted Sizer said it yesterday. You can't do it with 170 kids or 150 kids, because unless each kid thinks and puts those thoughts down on paper and you've got five minutes with him once in awhile to coach and to ask a few questions and get him to read, you're just not going to get large numbers of students to be able to think, to be able to write, to be able to express themselves. Yes, they may be able to answer multiple choice questions. All the test scores are going up. Why are they going up? Because teachers get the message: you're going to be considered a better teacher and your school is going to be a better school if the kids do better on the tests. So we spend more time teaching kids the strategies of taking multiple choice tests. Are they learning any more? I doubt it. We're forced to do it, and the public is being fooled, at least temporarily. So we've got to reduce teacher load. But if you're going to go from 175 down to 80 in a tradi-

tional way, you've got to more than double the number of teachers in this country. We've got to find 2 million more teachers. Where are they? They don't exist. And I'm not even going to put a price tag on that. But let's be modest about that one, too. Let's just say we'll reduce that load by just 20 percent.

And then let's add a third thing that's very important, that teachers have to have not only time to mark the papers and to plan, but time to meet with their colleagues -- the whole business of collegiality and peer involvement, with or without peer review. There is understanding that the isolation of teachers is a bad thing, and that teachers would learn much more if they had time and the ability to exchange ideas with each other than they'll learn from having someone come in in the back of the room with a check sheet and evaluate them once or twice a year. And let's just say we give them one out of five periods a day, 20 percent of the time. Well, that package, those three items that I just outlined, the 50 percent increase in salary, a 20 percent reduction in the number of students, and a 20 percent reduction in the time, is \$100 billion.

And we're told the country is about to go down because of the \$200 billion deficit. And up until Ronald Reagan \$100 billion used to be considered real money, too. So, where does this lead us? How many people really believe that if we got all of our arguments together and if we got some good campaign literature and if we went out and got all the parents together and if the NEA and AFT merged and we had one single organization and we had all the businessmen on a national committee, that somehow \$100 billion would be produced? Anybody really believe that? I don't.

Well, if we don't believe that we're going to get these simple things -- and I have not described heaven, but very modest changes -- then that implies something. One thing we might do is turn to our members and say, folks, we just figured it out. Al Shanker told us at his meeting that it costs all this money, and so we're sorry; we're not going to go for higher salaries or pupil reductions or more time because it's just unrealistic. We really have wonderful jobs as it is, and we ought to be satisfied with our lot, and every year we'll go to the bargaining table and we'll get 3 percent or 5 percent or 6 percent. Some years we'll get a point better, and some years a point less. But what I can promise you is that 20 years from now you will not have lost anything because we will be fighting for you. You won't gain anything, either. You'll be standing still. Standing still is much better than falling behind. If you don't have a strong organization you will fall behind, so you still need us. But abandon all hope. You can't get there from here or this way.

Well, I'm a coward. I don't like to generate that new idea. I don't want to go out and peddle that. So then what do I do? Well, I could go out and give the same speeches about higher

salaries, lower class size, time for teachers, knowing all the time in my own head that it can't happen, but, after all, those folks out there haven't figured it out yet. I can't do that, and I don't think that you can either. So if we're not going to give up on our goals and if we're not merely going to go through a ritual of making believe that we're getting there when we're really standing still, there's only one alternative. We've got to reconsider everything about the way money is spent, about the way people are certified, about who gets paid what, everything. We've got to ask: Is there a different way of organizing things that will enable us to accomplish the things that we want to accomplish?

That will mean opening ourselves up to all sorts of new ideas. Now, maybe we won't find a way. I've suggested in that Niagara Falls speech some ideas which would help bring us along that way. They may or may not be acceptable. I'd like to hear about some other ideas. Read those, and come up with some different ones, better ones. Let's generate a lot of them. But we've got an obligation to our membership. We've got a program. We've told them that we're there to make a better professional life. We no longer believe that it can be done in a traditional way. It's not going to happen. And, therefore, we have to look at radical, new solutions, new ways of structuring in order to get us there.

Has the NEA Really Changed Its Position?

I would now like to deal with four issues. The first will be some comments on the recent changes in the position of the NEA here in Washington, D.C. two weeks ago on the question of testing and on one other issue. I read in the newspapers that the NEA came up with a radical new policy at this convention. For the first time they have recognized that at the end of a due process procedure a teacher may be dismissed.

I'd like to caution all of you about going out there and telling everybody that the NEA has changed its position. We don't really know if they have or haven't. I don't know whether they know, because they have couched their resolution on testing in a way that says that testing is one element in an overall program of certifying teachers. We agree with that. You can pass a test but be no good in the way you work with students. But they've been saying this for two years now, and what it's meant to them in the past is that there would be no specific cutoff point on any examination below which you would fail, no matter how strong your motivation or how wonderful your personality.

In other words, in the NEA's position up to now, if everything else was right and if you got a zero on your math test and you're supposed to be a math teacher, you could still be a math teacher. There is nothing in the new NEA resolution that would

prevent them from taking that same position. Whether or not they've really changed on that one we're going to have to see.

Then they've got another thing which says a test has to be valid and has to be free of cultural bias. There's a lot of room for interpretation of what that means. Because of past discrimination and present discrimination and poverty, the effects of slavery in our history, at the present time there is not going to be a test that does not have a different impact on minorities. If minorities, given the same test of two plus two equals four, fail that test in a larger percentage than whites do and if the NEA decides that, therefore, the question two plus two with the answer four is culturally biased, then the NEA has really perpetrated a hoax on everyone, because that's one definition of cultural bias that will mean that no examination will be accepted by them.

They have insisted in their resolution that the standards must be state by state. I wonder why that is. Most states that have adopted examinations have shamefully low cutoff points. Most states that have adopted examinations are giving prospective teachers sixth-grade examinations.

So, I hope that they really have changed their position, but please don't go around telling everybody that they have and saying that, see that, they had to come over to our position. I know that there's a temptation to do that. I am very worried that they haven't changed their position at all, that they may have perpetrated a kind of public relations hoax. And we intend to monitor state by state to see whether there are any states where, as a result of this change in resolution, they actually support examinations and a reasonable standard. That's where the proof will be.

On the second point, it clearly was a hoax to say that at the end of a process a teacher may be dismissed. I mean, for years they've been assigning lawyers to people, just as we do, and going through a long set of hearings. I cannot believe that they've spent millions of dollars defending people without knowing that at the end occasionally we lose a case and somebody gets dismissed. I don't understand how anybody could run that as a reform or as an improvement, to take something that's been standard practice since 1776 and bring it out as a revolutionary idea which has just been accepted. Certainly it is a neat trick, but it really isn't such a good trick. It's this type of activity that creates an atmosphere that makes it easy to bait teachers. It makes it easy to pass laws punishing us and singling us out in special ways.

Retesting Teachers -- Some Tough Choices

Talking about punishing us and singling us out, I'd like to talk about Arkansas for a few minutes. You know what happened in Arkansas as part of the reform movement. We don't like retesting teachers who have been around for years and years. There is a question of fairness. The teachers didn't hire them-

selves. They were hired under the then current state laws. They did what they were told. And now 15 or 20 years later somebody changes the rules in the middle of the game. It is kind of unfair. It's also not very nice if you're trying to attract really good, bright people in colleges and to come on into teaching. There's all this reform. It's going to be good. It's not very good now. It doesn't pay very well. You can't get satisfaction. You can't really reach the kids. But come on in. Come on in. And then they notice that even if they decide to be dedicated and self-sacrificing, one of the things that might just happen to them is that 15 years from now the rules may change and someone may come along and decide that the one thing they thought they were going to get, a little bit of security, isn't there either, and they might find themselves out looking for a job at the age of 52 or 53 in some new field, at a time when the best years of their lives have been given. They were told that they were fine, and all of a sudden the rules change.

You know, there's been a big change in the practice of medicine in this country in 100 years, and law and most other fields. I don't know of any of these fields where when new systems were put in, all the old practitioners were subjected to them. There were always grandfather clauses. There were always ways of easing it, and in a short period of time it takes care of itself.

The other thing I don't like about it is related to this last point. I don't like singling teachers out. I think retesting professionals happens to be a pretty good idea. I worry when I go to a doctor who graduated from medical school 50 years ago. He's a good doctor, but he's very busy. He's got lots of patients, people lined up. This fellow still makes house calls. I don't know how many books he's had a chance to read in the last 50 years. I don't know how much of what is considered good medicine today was part of his curriculum 50 years ago. So there's a pretty good reason for retesting -- there are a few states that are starting to do it, but most of them still don't. But I don't think that teachers ought to be the only ones who are retested. If there's retesting, let them retest lawyers and accountants and doctors and dentists and architects and engineers and everybody else. But if you say the only group of people in our society who are going to be retested are teachers, that's an interesting message. It's an attitude. It tells you something.

Having said all that -- that it's going to drive people away, that it's unfair, that it's singling teachers out -- I would strongly differ from the position taken by the other organization. I am very concerned, and we as an organization must be very concerned, that there are teachers teaching in this country who are illiterate and who shouldn't be in the classroom.

I don't like the fact that some idiotic school board hired an illiterate person 20 years ago, but I'm not so sure that if a bunch of idiots did that 20 years ago, we've got to compound the error by subjecting kids to the same illiterate teacher for another 10 or 15 years. One can be strongly opposed to retesting without taking the position that there's no merit on the other side. This is one of those tragic situations where there is no good answer. I don't like to remove people who have given years of their lives. They didn't evaluate themselves. They didn't hire themselves. I don't like to do this to them. On the other hand, I don't like to do something to children, to impose a person who shouldn't have been there in the first place for another five, 10 or 15 years. The least that a teacher organization can do is to express the sense that this is a tragic situation that everyone finds themselves in, rather than making believe that there's only one side to the issue.

A few comments about the Arkansas test. I looked at parts of it. First of all, the cutoff point was 70 percent. You had to get 70 percent to pass. And what was the level of the examination? I'm not a psychometrician, but a good part of the examination was sixth-grade material. So what has Arkansas done? Well, first of all, I think you'd find it pretty tough to look at the examination paper and say that somebody who got less than 70 percent is really able to impart knowledge in those areas to children. But I think it raises a different question: Do you really want someone teaching kids who got 71 percent on a sixth-grade exam? That means that such a teacher gets about one out of every three answers wrong. What will that do to students?

I was on the same platform with Governor Clinton in Chicago, and I three times asked him a question and three times did not get an answer. It has not been answered yet. Here they are, scaring the wits out of the teachers, shaming them before the general public, creating the impression that they're all a bunch of dummies, going after people who have given years of their lives, and I asked, look, next September, Governor, or August when schools reopen, if you've got a shortage of teachers and you can't find enough people who passed the entry test, what will you do? Will you guarantee that you will not go out and find an emergency, substitute temporary teacher who cannot pass the test? He would not answer that question. And I submit to you that not answering it is an answer. The answer is that after all this public relations about improving standards by giving an examination, the state is going to permit the hiring of people to teach children many of whom will not do as well as those who have just failed the re-examination. I think we ought to take the position that when there are these examinations, there ought to be a law which puts into prison any public official who allows a person to practice without a proper certificate.

There's one other thing I'd like to see in Arkansas and

everywhere else, and that is if a teacher fails a test -- as I said, I could not stand and look at that test and say that I want that teacher teaching -- when that teacher is removed from teaching, I want something else to happen. I want the supervisor who watched that teacher for 20 years to go out with the teacher. See, they got a cute thing out there. You know what they say, they say they're going to give the supervisors the test, too. Well, I don't care if the supervisor knows arithmetic. The supervisor is supposed to know illiterate teachers. And the test for the supervisor is not the written test of whether he knows how to read at the sixth-grade level; it's whether he can identify people who shouldn't be there in the first place. And if you find one or two or three or four teachers like that in a school, the principal and the superintendent and the school board have flunked. I mean, that's a very practical examination. So I think if we had that as a requirement, they might have a different attitude about how humane they should be or how tough they should be.

We Should Push for End to Out-of-License Teaching

That brings me to a related problem, and it's one of the major issues that I'd like to talk about today. And I must express thanks to Virginia Robinson, who's done a series of pieces for Education Times, and I understand that the Council on Basic Education is working on this problem. By giving teachers tests and an internship and certifying, and so forth, we're convincing ourselves and the public that we're raising standards. But there is a huge problem all across the country that people are pretty quiet about. It's mentioned once in awhile, but it appears in almost none of the reports, and that's the fact that hundreds of thousands of teachers in this country are not teaching in the area in which they are certified to teach.

So what's the point in Arkansas or anywhere else of giving an English teacher an English test and then assigning him to teach physics and mathematics, which happens all across the country? Now, I know that it creates certain problems for us. There are some places -- not many -- where the idea is that seniority prevails, and, therefore, a senior teacher, even if not in that subject, stays. That's not true in most places. In most places certification counts more than seniority.

We also have another interest and that is we don't like to have people employed for one period a day or two periods a day. And so if you've got a few classes left over, you say, all right, that teacher will teach math, but for the next three periods he'll teach another subject.

You've got the problem of what happens when a subject disappears. Foreign languages went out of favor for a long time. What do you do with the Latin and Greek and German and Spanish

and French teachers? Well, you don't want to see them go just because those subjects become less popular. So it creates quite a few problems.

But there is no question that if we as a profession are to stand before the public and say we believe in quality and standards and examinations and internships and competence in subject matter, and we've been supportive of the idea that perhaps professional education ought to be graduate education and everybody ought to have a bachelor's degree in the subject that they're going to be teaching and specializing in, then we ought to start pressing for an abolition of out-of-license teaching. One of the suggestions that's been made is that every teacher ought to have a certificate, his or her own certificate, of the area that they're licensed to teach in. After all, if you went in to have a medical problem taken care of and you noticed that the fellow had his bar association certificate on the wall, you might turn around and leave.

We're also getting close to the point where teacher unions are going to be blamed for the problem of out-of-license teaching. There are a few places where that may be true, but by and large our members don't like to teach out of their own area of competence. There's the whole question of whether it is fair to rate and evaluate a teacher if it's really an English teacher with whom you've pleaded to teach math or physics. Can you really go in and evaluate what that teacher is doing when they're, in a sense, doing you a favor?

So this whole emphasis on quality and testing and on standards is destroyed unless the practice of out-of-license teaching is prohibited. And I mean prohibited. This business of saying, well, only one period a day or only two periods a day or only in an emergency or only in something else, all of these ifs, ands, and buts throw out the whole integrity of what we're talking about, the integrity of subject matter, the integrity of license. If state education departments and if the reformers are serious about what they're talking about, they will join with us in pressing for rules and regulations that will prohibit this very bad practice.

Board Certified Specialists: An Answer to Merit Pay

The last issue I want to get to is how to deal with merit pay. We've got good arguments against merit pay. I'm not going to repeat them here. If you want them, we'll get the literature out. I think I've done about 25 columns on the subject in the last four years. We've got booklets. The trouble is that we've had these good arguments for at least 50 years. They convince some people and they don't convince others. But the interesting thing is that the issue does not go away.

Fair people will say you've got a lot of good arguments against merit pay, but also that the other side has a lot of good arguments, too. There are many other industries and businesses that do have some type of compensation for superior service, and while they're not perfect, and all these schemes have some flaws, many of those businesses haven't gone down. Many of them prosper. So sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't work. There's something that's very deeply ingrained in the American people and I think in most people, and that is the idea that somehow either harder work or better work should be rewarded. And, by the way, most teachers in general accept the idea. If asked philosophically whether they like the idea, they do. Of course, once you put a merit plan into effect and they see how it works, the number goes down tremendously. That's true in industry as well. Before a plan goes into effect, a lot of people think that they obviously will be recognized. And the minute they're not recognized, they know it's a bad plan. Those who have been recognized know that it's a wonderful plan. That's human.

So we have a problem. We have good arguments against merit pay, but there's a constant issue out there, and as long as we keep with our arguments and the other side keeps with its arguments, we may win. By the way, some of our arguments are that this is a tough problem even in the private sector. A lot of articles in business management magazines today say that the system of rewarding managers in industry is what's responsible for low productivity and the fact that we can't compete with other countries. How is the meritorious manager rewarded in private industry? Well, if he shows a good bottom line one quarter, three quarters, four quarters. How do you show a good bottom line? Not by making a better product. It might take you 10 years to design and manufacture a better product. But if you can buy and sell different pieces of equipment and effect various mergers, it can look like your company is really doing very well, and in two years you can get yourself a great promotion and a vice presidency somewhere else. Of course, all the time your company is really going down because you're not thinking five and 10 years ahead. And so merit in many ways, if improperly applied, could be very, very destructive, and business recognizes that.

Also, it's generally recognized by most administrators that many of them don't really want the job of doing this because, while there might be a payoff in the long run -- in the long run the school might be better if we rewarded merit, -- most administrators don't want to go through the decline in morale, the conflict, the bitterness, the argument about favoritism. They're people; they're sensitive; they don't like to rock the boat on these things. The union certainly doesn't like it for a lot of reasons, but we also don't like it because if someone isn't picked and that person says he should have gotten it, then the union might be in a position of handling Mr. A against Mr. B, who's also a member, saying that one should have gotten it instead of the other.

We don't like it and we have good arguments against it, but it won't go away. It's been around for 50, 60 years. It's not going to go away next year no matter how many speeches I give, no matter how many speeches you give. And our opposition to merit pay makes us look as though we're not interested in quality, that we don't care if somebody is better, that we don't want to have any incentives for anybody. It makes us sound very bad, even if we've got a lot of good reasons to be opposed. So we ought to think about ways of handling the issue while at the same time avoiding all of the pitfalls which are in merit pay.

I recently came across something that I think deserves consideration. It was in an article published in Phi Delta Kappan in 1959, by Myron Lieberman. Kappan is about to print an updated version of it sometime early this fall, and they've asked me and some others to comment on the idea. I'd like to present it to you.

Lieberman says think of medicine for a few minutes. You could think of other fields like accounting, et cetera. But in medicine, if you're a doctor and someone comes to you, you can say, Joe, you're got an allergy and I'm going to give you the following antihistamine. The next patient walks in and the doctor says, well, you've got this terrible rash. I'm going to treat your skin ailment in the following way. Someone else comes in and he says, well, you just have a broken toe, and I'm going to treat it in the following way. So, actually the general practitioner can treat anybody.

But doctors have devised a series of specialty boards. These boards certify people who are already doctors as being board certified specialists. And they make public the lists of those people who have gone through the extra training and have demonstrated that they are super-duper doctors in those particular areas, that they are certified by a group of outstanding specialists in that field. And if you have a really good hospital, that hospital will try to get mostly board certified specialists on board. If you have a good health maintenance organization, it will also try to employ board certified specialists. But other doctors are not deemed to be poor or not meritorious because they didn't bother to become board certified in a given area. They still practice, although generally board certified doctors do make more money.

How would this work in teaching? Well, suppose the mathematics teachers organization and the American Mathematics Association -- the groups that are interested in mathematics and mathematics teaching -- got together and created a national mathematics teacher specialty board. The board would not have to administer just a written examination. It could ask for a combination of written things, of course work, of demonstrations, of site visits, a portfolio of articles written, of lectures and demonstrations, of models created that would get students to understand certain concepts. That group of people in mathematics and mathematics teaching who are crackerjacks -- you'd have to start out by finding a group of outstanding people -- who want to become

board certified, would go through the process.

There might be two categories, according to Leiberman. You might have a board certified person who has been through it all. You might have somebody who has been through more than half-way, and that person could be called board eligible.

Favoritism, Competition Avoided

Notice what we have here. First of all, no local school board member or superintendent or principal or group of peers -- nobody in that locality -- makes the decision as to who's a board certified teacher. It's done by a national board through a process that is not subject to any tampering -- it's untouched by human hands, as the old cartoon said. So there's no favoritism. There's also no unhealthy competition. The teacher next door comes to me and says, Al, I'd like you to help me. If we're going to get traditional merit pay in this school, I might give her the wrong answer, so that I will come out looking meritorious and the other teacher would not. But, under this proposal, these people are way off in Washington or somewhere else. The teacher next door is not competing with me. Anyone who meets these standards -- very high standards -- can become board certified. Leiberman doesn't expect that more than 20 percent of the teachers in the country would ever become qualified, because it would be really tough. But if everybody really worked hard, and if we got a flood of very talented people in, and if they all met the standards, they would all become board certified.

There is no problem for the union. There is no problem in negotiating a contract which says that board certified teachers will receive X thousands dollars more, just as we now say a master's degree gets you more. It's an objective standard.

By the way, once this happens I think that colleges and university education departments would ultimately be compelled to hire as those people who train and evaluate and supervise teachers only board certified specialists, not people who haven't been in a classroom since they themselves were students. You would have a group of nationally certified professionals doing this. There is another nice thing about it. Right now if you get merit pay in Dade County and you decide to move to Broward County, you lose your merit pay because that's a different system. But, this would be nationally portable. You would qualify anyplace you go.

Good school districts would say to their public, 95 percent of the teachers in this district are board certified teachers, and the other 5 percent are on their way to board certification. The outstanding districts of the country would advertise to the people who are looking for homes that they've got people who are

nationally recognized, crackerjack teachers who have been through a nationally recognized process.

That article will be available soon. If this moves ahead, it will show that teachers and their organizations are interested in merit, that we want people to work hard for excellence, that there is a way to move up in both salary and recognition, that it can be done in an objective and an apolitical way.

By the way, the National Science Teachers Association made the front page in a lot of places a few months ago when Bill Aldridge said the standards for certifying new science teachers are so low that the National Science Teachers Association is considering setting up its own certification process. So they're going to tell the public, hey, if your state says somebody is a science teacher, don't believe them. They're not really knowledgeable unless they've gotten the real certificate.

If you like the idea and after discussion or reading the article, we could bring together the science teachers, the math teachers and the college level groups, we could bring together all of these specialty groups in a national meeting to discuss whether they like the idea and how we would move ahead to set up national educational specialty boards in a number of areas that would provide that sort of recognition and that sort of super certification. I think it's a creative idea. Whether we end up endorsing it or not is something else, but it's a good one.

Well, I'd like to conclude my remarks by thanking all of you, because you're very special. And you're very special because there are not many organizations that would put themselves through the pain and trouble of putting all their ideas and beliefs at stake. It is a dangerous process. You start discussing these things and even if in the end you don't like them, somebody else gets to like them and you think that you're the one that started the trouble, let the cat out of the bag.

We understand that it's dangerous to let a lot of ideas out of the bag, some of which may be bad. But there's something that's more dangerous, and that's not to have any new ideas at all at the time when the world is closing in on you.

So if we're going to suffer, we're going to do it the right way and we're going to come out fine.

Thank you very much.

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