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**I am pleased and proud to be here with the Michigan Federation of Teachers and School Related Personnel for your first QuEST Conference.**

**This is a big accomplishment, and I applaud you for it.**

**Not many state federations even have QuEST Conferences, so you should be congratulated not only for holding your first one, but for setting such an ambitious agenda, and for carrying it off so well.**

**I know it took a lot of debate within the MFT&SRP to change from holding your convention every year to holding it every two years - with QuEST conferences in the alternate years.**

**Your decision reflects your great commitment to improving the quality of education in your state, and to making this union an even more effective mechanism for addressing professional issues and providing professional development.**

**You're the only state federation whose name includes "SRP" - and that reflects your commitment to organize every member of the education team, as well as other public service employees. Because you're organizing so successfully – and involving your members – you're strong and growing stronger.**

**Here in Michigan and all across this country, we need all the strength and sophistication we can muster. Because, when it comes to the future of public education, we are in the fight of our lives.**

**You just heard what you're facing – a voucher referendum this November – and MFT/SRP is doing a great job building the broadest possible coalition to defeat the referendum and defend the public schools.**

**The alliance you're in is appropriately named "ALL Kids First."**

**And let me tell you --**

**This fight is important for every teacher and school employee in every community in this country, and of course for the kids in this state, I want to tell you that the AFT will continue to assist the coalition in every way we can.**

**In this fight, our strongest weapons are the facts, so let's talk about them:**

**The fact is: Ninety percent of America's children attend our public schools.**

**The fact is: Private school vouchers do nothing for them. Vouchers do not improve schools. All they do is take away money that could be and should be spent on improving education - especially for kids in communities with the greatest needs and the fewest resources.**

**And the fact is: For all the talk about "choice," it is the schools that will do the choosing. Private schools will still choose which kids to accept and how much to charge their families. And when the limited seats in existing legitimate private schools are gone, and they surely will be in very short order, the voucher initiatives will create a new industry of "voucher mills" - without the standards, the scrutiny, and the accountability that are required of public schools.**

**In short, vouchers are just one more way for those public officials who haven't done what needs to be done about the education of poor kids to begin with -- to wash their hands of the responsibility altogether. And we must not let that happen.**

**Here in Michigan, with charter schools, you're getting a preview of what happens when public schools are turned over to private operators without standards, scrutiny, and accountability.**

**When charter schools are good, they can be very good. But, when they're bad, they're terrible. And, here in Michigan, unfortunately, you're seeing many more bad ones than good ones.**

**MFT members are teaching in two outstanding charter schools, which formerly were operated as alternative programs. These are the good kind of charter schools -- with certified teachers, proven programs, and an eagerness for innovation. They represent the best of the charter schools movement - throwing bureaucracy out the window and giving well qualified teachers the opportunity to do things differently.**

**But they are only two of 170 charter schools in this state - and about seventy percent of the rest are operated by for-profit organizations. Many have pre-admission interviews that let them weed out students they consider undesirable -- including special education students. Many won't let the public know the names of their teachers, the test scores of their students, or other information that any public school would have to make available.**

**In short they consider themselves private schools -- in every sense of the word "private." And they represent what's worst in the charter school movement -- throwing accountability out the window.**

**It's time that Michigan made charter schools operating with taxpayer dollars accountable to the public.**

**Accountability means that all charter schools should be required to tell the public how they are spending their money.**

**Accountability means that all charter schools should be required to tell the public who their teachers are and what their qualifications are.**

**Accountability means that all charter schools should be required to tell the public who their administrators are and what their qualifications are.**

**Accountability means that all charter schools should be required to tell the public how many students they're serving and how they are performing academically.**

**And charter schools should be required to adhere to the fundamental principle of public education: they should be required to serve all comers - not just a selected few.**

**In short, charter schools should have the same kind of transparency that any other public school would have - so that we can see how they are doing and evaluate their performance. That way, we can tell which charter schools are really laboratories for excellence - and which ones offer no innovations except making money for their investors.**



**Until we have restored the original mission of charter schools, the people of Michigan are fortunate that the MFT&SRP successfully worked in the Legislature to call a halt to the chartering of any new schools in time for the next school year.**

**When it comes to the fight for public education, conferences like this are the best weapon in our arsenal.**

**Because make no mistake about it: The best way to defend our public schools is to improve our public schools - by taking reforms that work, and putting them to work everywhere we can.**

**The movement for higher standards is running into problems - but schools are making progress, and we've got to keep that progress going.**

**Most states have already set standards for what students should learn.**

**Many states are putting an end to social promotion; and more are providing intervention programs to help the students who are struggling to meet high standards to do so.**

**And these reforms are getting results: School dropout rates are lower.**

**High school students are taking more challenging courses.**

**Girls are closing the gender gap by taking more rigorous math and science classes.**

**SAT scores are up.**

**More and more kids are going to college.**

**And more and more schools and districts that have been failing or floundering are turning themselves around - even in communities where hope has been a scarce commodity.**

**But there is a backlash developing, and some of it is for good reasons.**

**Too many states are using single high-stakes tests to determine whether a student will pass or fail, whether a school will pass or fail, or even whether a teacher will pass or fail. Standards-based reform should not mean simplistic test-based reform.**

**Not nearly enough is being done to make standards work for every student in every school in every district in this country.**

**There are still big challenges that need to be met:**

**Helping all our kids - especially the children of the poor - to reach high standards.**

**Preparing, placing, and retaining good teachers in every classroom.**

**And helping all teachers with access to the latest research on how to teach the most important skill of all - the ability to read.**

**You know, when I hear people call for "experiments" with vouchers, I've been asking -- why we don't try a different**

**kind of so-called experiment - something we've never tried before: equal educational opportunity for poor children – that is, paying for the educational conditions wealthier districts take for granted.**

**The nation's wealthiest school districts spend 56% more per student than the poorest school districts in America, according to the Children's Defense Fund. 42% of low income three to five year olds are in pre-school, compared to 65% of wealthier children.**

**Our economy is booming.**

**We're the richest nation in the world - yet we aren't providing our poor children with what they need – in many ways. But certainly not what they need when it comes to paying for their education.**

**Now – I'm not talking about "throwing money" at badly managed schools or districts.**

**And I'm glad this conference includes a track on how to redesign low performing schools with proven programs and new leadership.**

**What I am talking about is specifically funding what specifically works in education, insuring that poor kids will get the same basics most middle class kids get, and all our kids deserve. And when I talk about kids from low-income families, I don't only mean kids in the inner cities - I mean kids in the suburbs and rural areas, too.**

**Robert F. Kennedy used to say - and I quote - "I dream things that never were and ask, 'Why not?'"**

**In that spirit, I ask, why not offer kids in every community the things that make schools work?**

**Why not offer quality, early childhood education? Poor kids enter kindergarten much less prepared for school than more advantaged kids. High-quality pre-school makes an enormous difference - so why not make it available?**

**Why not offer small classes, especially in the early grades? The research evidence is crystal clear that the benefits of small class sizes from kindergarten through grade 3 last all the way to high school graduation - and far exceed any gains made by voucher children. So why not small class sizes?**

**Why not offer poor kids an extended school day so they can get the kinds of things advantaged parents can pay to**

**provide for their kids - such as tutoring or enrichment or extra supports in meeting high standards?**

**Why not repair deteriorating school buildings, so poor kids don't constantly get the message that they are second-class citizens. Why not wire their schools for the information age and rewire the buildings that are so old they can't even be "connected?"**

**And, most important of all, why not provide every class in every subject with a qualified teacher?**

**We know we already have a severe teacher shortage - and it manifests itself, among other ways, in requiring teachers to fill in for classes in subjects such as math and science which they are not prepared to teach.**



**And that's before today's teachers retire, and the nation faces the challenge of recruiting, training, hiring, and retaining more than two million new teachers over the next ten years.**

**That is the number one challenge confronting our schools. Last month, our union released a report calling for more rigorous standards and preparation for new teachers. And that is important.**

**But you know – there is one thing we can do to raise and keep teacher quality – and there is one way we can put market forces to work in our schools, and that is by raising salaries to attract and keep committed and qualified teachers.**

**Teachers should be paid what they're worth.**

**The law of supply and demand does not apply to every occupation except teaching. There is no other way that we can recruit and retain good people in a booming economy. That's just common sense.**

**When we've raised the floor for teachers' salaries, then we can - and should --- talk about offering additional incentives for new knowledge, new skills, new responsibilities, outstanding performance, and taking on the toughest assignments.**

**And let's also set new standards for quality and accountability, including ideas the AFT has championed.**

**At the very time we are trying to raise academic standards for students – and now that we'll need to find at least 200,000 new teachers a year – we cannot allow standards for teachers to slip.**

**We should have high quality national tests for prospective teachers. Not only would that help teachers with portability and mobility – will be good for kids. Teaching 3<sup>rd</sup> grade arithmetic shouldn't require a different level of preparation in California or Connecticut or Michigan.**

**We should have real internships, strong mentoring and support for new teachers, and rigorous peer review before they receive tenure.**

**Unlike the voucher advocates and the charter school entrepreneurs, we believe in accountability – real and reasonable accountability, not punitive schemes that serve political purposes. And we know we need the confidence of the parents and taxpayers.**

**As we strive to strengthen public support for public education, conferences like this are invaluable.**

**Teachers and school employees are on the front lines with the kids. And it is absolutely essential that unions like ours offer professional development, so that educators can do their best work and keep current with the newest teaching techniques.**

**That is why it's really terrific that you are offering a track on new and more effective approaches to teaching reading - the skill on which all education depends.**

**Children who don't know how to read simply can't make it later in life. And now we know better than ever before how to help them learn to read.**

**The reading wars are over. We now know that children need to learn how to recognize the letters that stand for the sounds that make up the words they read. We now know that children also need to place these words in the context of the sentences they speak. We now know, better than ever before, how to help kids learn both of these essential skills.**

**And of course – need to have high standards for the profession as well – that’s why it is so important that you’ll be helping MFT&SRP members learn how to put new knowledge to work in their classrooms.**

**Now: Just a word about this political season and the coming elections.**

**For everyone who cares about our schools and our children, everything is on the line in the elections this year.**

**Thanks to the Clinton/Gore economic record, our federal and state governments have the resources to put into practice the things our schools need. And the things you're talking about at this conference; the workable "reforms" that our students deserve. And it's beginning to happen.**

**We're seeing real progress.**

**We cannot go back to the pre-Clinton years... the wretched record of the last Bush Administration - recession, unemployment, stagnant living standards for most Americans, and dwindling resources for our schools.**

**When it comes to the Bush who's running for president this year, let's look at the contradictions:**

**There's the George W. Bush who talks up education and promises an ambitious new program to help kids learn to**

**read – a program that’s similar to actual efforts going on by the Clinton/Gore Administration – and then there’s the Bush who proposes huge tax cuts that would make it impossible for the nation to afford his program**

**There’s the Bush who calls himself a compassionate conservative – and yet speaks at Bob Jones University; refuses to condemn keep the Confederate flag flying in South Carolina, and wants to take away payroll deductions for union dues to weaken unions.**

**There’s the George W. Bush who loves to get photographed with kids at public schools – yet would defund those very schools by supporting private school vouchers.**

**Well, there's one thing we all ought to know about George W. Bush: he should not be the next President of the United States.**

**In contrast, the candidate who should be the next President – Al Gore – offers ideas that will work for our schools and our students: rebuilding and rewiring our schools; attracting good teachers with higher pay; universal pre-school and smaller classes, particularly for disadvantaged kids; and being able to afford it because he won't throw the economy into reverse gear with tax cuts for the rich. As President Clinton recently said, "It's wrong to spend about \$100 million of the surplus on tax cuts for every \$1 you spend on education."**

**You know, we aren't wedded to a political party. We look at where candidates stand on the issues, but if we ever had any doubts about what is at stake in the election, the**



**Republican majority in the U.S. Senate should end them. The majority on the Senate Committee that deals with education voted to turn Title I into block grants that state governments could spend any way they choose – from shortchanging poor communities to creating a slush fund for fly-by-night voucher schools.**

**We all know how important Title I is to many schools districts here in Michigan that are striving to improve student achievement. We all know that a revamped Title I is contributing to educational improvements across this country. And we all know that the gains that have been achieved, the gains that still can be achieved and the goal of a high quality education for every child are too important to risk on a radical scheme that would hand the states blank checks that they can spend on any faddish experiment or failed initiative that they wish.**

**In this year's elections, it is all on the line: the Presidency; the Supreme Court; control of both houses of Congress.**

**The best way to win these fights is to keeping on doing what you're doing: motivating and mobilizing our members for the elections; building coalitions, and improving the quality of education in every school.**

**Together, we can win these fights, improve our schools, and leave a legacy that will make us all proud - the opportunity for quality education for every child, not just as a slogan but as a living reality.**

**Thank you for everything you're doing, and for inviting me to be part of this great conference.**