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ABSTRACT

Collected here are six National Education Association (NEA) position papers in the form of booklets that address issues raised by the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The booklets are entitled: (1) "A Guide for Teachers to a Nation at Risk and Other Studies"; (2) "Teachers' Views About High School"; (3) "Teaching Views About Student Assessment"; (4) "The Teaching Profession"; (5) "Teachers' Views of Equity and Excellence"; and (6) "Local, State and Federal Roles." (RH)

[TEACHERS' VIEWS ON EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION. SIX NEA BOOKLETS.]

DECEMBER 1983

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

A Guide From Teachers to A Nation At Risk and Other Studies

National Education Association

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December 1983

Dear Colleague:

Teachers recommend the publication A Nation At Risk and the other major education reports of 1983. We welcome their calls for a new national commitment to educational excellence.

We join the reports in calling for higher standards for students, more and better materials, more educational opportunities, better content in curricula and materials; and more concern for nourishing students' individual aptitudes.

We remind everyone that educational equity and excellence are inseparable. One cannot be achieved without the other. We must continue to strive to educate all of our students to the best of their own potentials.

We applaud the nearly unanimous call in these reports for new opportunities for career growth for teachers. Teachers need more quality teaching time and more incentives, both professional and economic, to enter and remain in the classroom.

A Nation At Risk and the other reports can be taken as a guide for our profession and our nation. They recommend an agenda for excellence. And they warn that doing nothing invites national disaster.

The reports give us hope. The debate over them gives us confidence. But only if the concerns are translated into concrete programs will we have a real foundation on which to build quality education and a future for our nation even brighter than the past.

Sincerely,

Mary H. Futrell

Mary Hatwood Futrell

A GUIDE FROM TEACHERS TO A NATION AT RISK AND OTHER STUDIES

A Nation At Risk and nine other studies considered here more briefly have generated unprecedented public interest, political interest, and professional interest in education by teachers and others. This interest can be found in every school, in every school district, in every state legislature, and in numerous federal forums.

Already the attention focused on education has brought about positive results in state after state--action toward educational excellence; action to implement recommendations; action to stem the rising tide of mediocrity. Such action, of course, is all to the good. But it also requires support that can only be provided by federal leadership and federal funding.

All of the studies view the classroom teacher as central to any plan to improve education. Teacher recruitment, teacher education, teacher certification, teacher performance, teacher advancement, teacher pay, teacher autonomy--all are considered in the national reports.

The five major recommendations in A Nation At Risk are considered here from the perspective of the classroom teacher. Their comments and suggestions give new dimensions to the imperative for educational reform. Strategies for reform must be based on honest dialogue and thoughtful consensus. These comments then are an act of faith on the part of the teaching profession--faith in the future of our system of free public education.

RECOMMENDATION A: CONTENT

WE RECOMMEND *that state and local high school graduation requirements be strengthened and that, at a minimum, all students seeking a diploma be required to lay the foundations in the Five New Basics by taking the following curriculum during their 4 years of high school: (a) 4 years of English; (b) 3 years of mathematics; (c) 3 years of science; (d) 3 years of social studies; and (e) one-half year of computer science. For the college-bound, 2 years of foreign language in high school are strongly recommended in addition to those taken earlier.* (A Nation At Risk, p. 24.)

Among the five recommendations in this report, the most important is this one on the curriculum. Teachers enthusiastically support this recommendation. Curriculum planners, school administrators, teachers, and other educators have long been frustrated by the lack of time and opportunity to help students acquire essential knowledge.

Information now doubles every seven years; yet the school time spent on social sciences, physical sciences, and on basic communication skills has not increased. Clearly, all young people need to understand how to use computers.

This major recommendation is followed by nine "Implementing Recommendations." In the first five, the Commission specifies the knowledge and skills that students should attain as a result of studying English, mathematics, science, social studies, and computer science. Generally, teachers have found these five recommendations helpful and consistent with all that is known about these subjects. Many school boards and other policy makers, however, may believe the Commission has exceeded its mandate by overly specifying the kinds of detailed outcomes found here.

Experienced high school teachers are amused to hear these courses called the "new basics" since these are required courses (except for computer science) of most high schools.

Four other Implementing Recommendations follow. Number six urges four to six years of study in foreign language, beginning in the elementary grades. Many teachers would go even further. They would urge an even longer period of study beginning in the early years and extending through high school. But even the kind of program proposed by the Commission would cost quite a bit. Are the

American people ready to place that kind of priority on literacy in a second language?

The seventh recommendation, which deals with electives, calls for programs in the fine and performing arts and vocational education. A great many teachers believe the arts and a program of career awareness should be part of the basic curriculum.

Implementing Recommendation eight lists content that should be covered in the first eight grades and calls for more enthusiasm for learning and developing individual gifts and talents. It is interesting to note that A Nation At Risk and most other major studies give only passing reference to the elementary school, which implies that American elementary education is in reasonably good shape.

In the ninth Implementing Recommendation, the Commission urges greater cooperation among teachers, scholars, and representatives of business and industry in improving the quality of the school program. Teachers wholeheartedly agree and they stand ready to work with those who will help them and their students to be as good as they can be.

RECOMMENDATION B: STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS

WE RECOMMEND *that schools, colleges, and universities adopt more rigorous and measurable standards, and higher expectations, for academic performance and student conduct, and that 4-year colleges and universities raise their requirements for admission. This will help students do their best educationally with challenging materials in an environment that supports learning and authentic accomplishment.* (A Nation At Risk, p. 27.)

Where teachers, parents, and the community expect high student achievement, much is accomplished. Teachers, therefore, welcome the recommendation that more rigorous standards be adopted.

The Commission lists eight Implementing Recommendations. The first addresses the issue of grades. Teachers know that students feel more comfortable when they understand that grades are highly regarded and are carefully determined. They expect regular grading and place a high value on grades.

The second Implementing Recommendation, which deals with admission standards of universities and colleges, suggests that high

schools and colleges work together more closely. By coupling college entrance requirements to the high school curriculum rooted in the five basics, students' preparation will be more focused and, consequently, more thorough.

The third Implementing Recommendation concerns standardized tests. Experienced teachers know that these tests are useful only when they are used as part of a larger effort to assess student progress.

Implementing Recommendations four through eight focus on the need to improve the quality of textbooks and other instructional materials. These are recommendations which teachers, long accustomed to using outdated and irrelevant books, welcome enthusiastically.

RECOMMENDATION C: TIME

WE RECOMMEND *that significantly more time be devoted to learning the New Basics. This will require more effective use of the existing school day, a longer school day, or a lengthened school year.* (A Nation At Risk, p. 29.)

Teachers support the call for more effective use of time because they well know the many ways it is lost during the school day. Recent reports confirm teachers' perceptions that they are required to spend too much time on noninstructional activities.

From interruptions to paperwork to administration requirements, a teacher's day is too seldom without distraction from their primary responsibility. Researchers have found that up to 40 percent of classroom time is taken up by activities other than teaching. Teachers welcome a call for more effective use of time in the hope that this will alert administrators and others of the need to provide and protect instructional time.

Teachers applaud all of the eight Implementing Recommendations here except for the proposal for a 7-hour day and a longer school year. They believe that if students get more homework and the school puts parents on notice that education is the order of the day, vast improvements in the quality of education will result. Academic homework assignments must have a priority second to none. Parents must provide students with a good place to study. Because it may not

always be possible to find this at home, teachers urge schools to work with community groups in setting aside areas for students to use after school.

RECOMMENDATION D: TEACHING

THIS RECOMMENDATION CONSISTS OF SEVEN PARTS. *Each is intended to improve the preparation of teachers or to make teaching a more rewarding and respected profession. Each of the seven stands on its own and should not be considered solely as an implementing recommendation.* (A Nation At Risk, p. 30.)

1. *Persons preparing to teach should be competent....* Teachers agree. Ten years ago NEA members were instrumental in getting included in national accreditation standards the provision that evaluation of graduates be one of the criteria considered in granting national accreditation. NEA believes this standard should be rigorously applied. Teachers are also working diligently to create state Teacher Standards and Practices Boards with legal responsibility for raising standards.

2. *Salaries for the teaching profession should be increased, and a procedure developed to effectively evaluate teacher performance* ....Teachers agree, too, with the proposition that salaries should be professionally competitive. Teachers want an effective evaluation system, and insist on helping develop it. It should be noted that teacher evaluation is the norm in some 7,500 school districts covered by NEA contracts. The NEA supports peer review only as a part of a comprehensive system of teacher participation in decision-making about who is qualified to teach. In establishing peer review, the system must assure role clarity, mutual confidence among colleagues, high morale, proper training, and sufficient time and other resources.

3. *School boards should adopt an 11-month contract for teachers....* This is a negotiable item which appeals to many teachers. It holds the promise of better in-service programs for teachers.

4. *Career ladders for teachers should be developed*... Teachers believe career options can enlarge horizons for teachers and keep the best in the classroom. But they should not be used as a substitute for adequate salaries for all; nor should they be limited to a few.

5. *The use of "substantial nonschool personnel resources" should be begun to solve immediate problems of teacher shortage in certain areas*.... This is a stopgap measure that will not be necessary if all teacher salaries are increased.

6. *Incentives such as grants and loans should be made available*... The idea of using grants and loans to attract outstanding students to the teaching profession seems on the surface to be a good one, but it could well be shortsighted. A better way to attract prospective teachers to the profession is to treat those now teaching as professionals. Bright individuals who are given scholarships and forgiveness loans may teach for the required five or more years and then desert the profession if teaching conditions remain as they are today.

7. *Master teachers should be involved in designing teacher preparation programs*... As for the finding that master teachers should help design teacher preparation programs and supervise probationary teachers, teachers have been doing the latter -- for student teachers -- for years. And many teachers are already helping shape preservice programs.

The seven components of the recommendation on teaching are based on statistics relating only to elementary teachers. The implication is that they apply to all teachers. Another problem with the report is the statement that "...the teacher preparation curriculum is weighted heavily with courses in 'educational methods' at the expense of courses in subjects to be 'taught.'" The assertion is blatantly inaccurate. The claim is made from a "survey of 1,350 institutions that prepare teachers." The responses could well be out

of date, since institutions preparing teachers today number only 1,206. The figure of 1,350 is at least seveh years old. While elementary teachers do spend approximately 40 percent of their college coursework on pedagogy, secondary teachers spend only 20 percent and have one or more academic majors.

RECOMMENDATION E: LEADERSHIP AND FISCAL SUPPORT

WE RECOMMEND *that citizens across the Nation hold educators and elected officials responsible for providing the leadership necessary to achieve these reforms, and that citizens provide the fiscal support and stability required to bring about the reforms we propose.* (A Nation At Risk, p. 32.)

Teachers who heartily agree with this general recommendation, have been working through their professional organizations for years to win support for a quality education for all of our young people.

The first Implementing Recommendation of this section calls upon principals, superintendents, and school board members to lead their communities in garnering support for true reform. This leadership is crucial if teachers and parents are to get the backing they need to institute needed changes in education.

The second Implementing Recommendation reiterates the fact that stat and local officials, including school board members, governors, and legislators, have primary responsibility for financing and governing the schools. It calls upon them to include reform recommendations in their educational policies and fiscal plans.

This recommendation cannot be overemphasized because in the past many states and localities have not placed a high enough priority on the education of their young people. Some states did not have the resources to provide excellence in education for all. Other states simply did not fulfill their obligation.

The third Implementing Recommendation supports the federal government's role in helping meet the needs of diverse groups such as the poor, disadvantaged minorities, the handicapped, as well as the gifted and talented.

A Nation At Risk's fourth Implementing Recommendation reiterates the federal government's responsibility to aid quality of education, to promote equal access to education, and to aid local school districts that

lack basic tax support for quality education. Clearly there is a need to support programs that uphold constitutional and civil rights, to support educational research, to support teacher training, and to provide financial assistance to students.

The fifth Implementing Recommendation describes the federal government's responsibility to identify the national interest in education. Our nation's future lies, not in what happens in any one state or locality, but in what happens with our nation, as a nation. As such, it is fitting that the national level of government take a leadership role in helping protect and promote that interest. The very title of the Commission on Excellence in Education's report, A Nation At Risk, is important. Commission members did not describe a "state" or a "city" at risk, but a "nation" at risk.

Finally, the Commission calls on educators, parents, and public officials everywhere to heed its recommendations, and to provide the financial support necessary to achieve excellence in our schools.

Teachers have consistently called for this kind of large scale support. They know that they cannot fight the battle for quality education alone, and they look forward to working with Commission members and other Americans committed to a strong system of public education.

A Report on Nine Other Recent Reports

This section reviews nine of the major studies published during the past twelve months. Three of them are products of commissions and task forces brought together only for this purpose. Four are primarily the work of individual authors: a college professor, an encyclopedist, a foundation president, and a former headmaster of a private school.

Almost all of the reports have pointed to the broad selection of courses available to students as a root of the serious problems affecting our schools. Students are inundated with choices, yet they are receiving little systematic and professional help as they wind their way through four years of high school.

Another thread that runs through most of these reports deserves mention. Classroom teachers are finally being viewed as a part of the solution to school problems rather than a part of the problem. New York Times education writer Fred Hechinger comments favorably on that trend: "Experience shows that, without teachers in the lead, reforms are doomed."

What then, are these nine reports all about? And what are their recommendations for reform? Below is a very brief summary of each of these studies:

Educating Americans for the 21st Century: A Plan of Action for Improving Mathematics, Science and Technology Education for All American Elementary and Secondary Students So That Their Achievement Is the Best in the World by 1995. The National Science Board Commission on Precollege Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology, 1983. A report to the American People and the National Science Board, 124 pp. Source Materials, 251 pp.

Background: This 17-month study involved discussions with hundreds of educators, scientists, and others to improve and support mathematics, science, and technology education.

Major recommendations: Elementary students should spend 60 minutes a day on math, 30 minutes on science. Seventh and eighth graders should receive a full year of math and science. High school

graduation requirements should be increased to 3 years of math (with 1 year of algebra) and 3 years of science and technology, including one semester of computer science. Differential pay is proposed.

Comment: The final report supports the position held by most teachers of the need to restore the quality of science and math programs in the schools. NEA and other groups have closely studied the effects of many compensation systems and are concerned that the recommendations on merit pay are simplistic and ill-conceived.

Action for Excellence: A Comprehensive Plan to Improve Our Nation's Schools. Task Force on Education for Economic Growth. Education Commission of the States, June 1983, 50 pp. $5.00.

Background: North Carolina Governor James B. Hunt Jr. chaired this 41-member task force which included 13 state governors and 13 business executives.

Major recommendations: This report urges that "soft," nonessential courses be dropped in favor of a curriculum that is strengthened in all areas. Beyond the basics, the report says, other skills such as problem solving, analysis, interpretation, and persuasive writing should be mastered.

Comment: This report spells out the benefits of closer working relationships between schools and the business world. Many teachers are concerned that the recommendations could bring about a too narrowly defined purpose for education.

Making the Grade: Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy. 1983, 174 pp. $6.00.

Background: Along with the report this group produced a useful background paper supporting an increased federal role in education.

Major recommendations: The proposals range from the establishment of a national Master Teachers Program to programs that emphasize literacy -- both English and scientific.

Comment: Teachers welcome the call for clearer school goals and greater federal responsibility.

A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future by John I. Goodlad. McGraw-Hill, 1983, 396 pp. $18.95.

Background: This is the work of social scientist John Goodlad who gathered objective data over an eight-year period.

Major recommendations: Goodlad, adamant about the need for significant changes in teacher education, says this country cannot afford "the brief, casual, conforming preparation now experienced by those who staff its classrooms...." There are, of course, dozens of other recommendations in this important report.

Comment: The most significant topic of the book may well be Goodlad's observations about educational opportunity, which in his mind means equal access to quality learning opportunities.

The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto by Mortimer J. Adler Macmillan, 1982, 84 pp. $2.95. A more recent, supplementary volume by Adler is Paideia Problems and Possibilities, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1983, 113 pp. $3.95.

Background: The term paideia comes from the Greek pais paidos, which means the upbringing of a child.

Major recommendations: This proposal advocates a universal one-track system for K-12 public school students with the same objectives for all. Simply put, Adler advocates a liberal education in the classic sense.

Comment: Adler believes this plan must be universal. It is here where many teachers would part company with him. Adler's proposal may be just the thing -- for some schools. It would be simplistic, however, to assume in 1983 that any single plan can address the complex, diverse, pluralistic challenges facing public education in the United States.

The Current Status of Schools of Choice in Public Secondary Education by Mary Anne Raywid. Hofstra University, 1983, 36 pp.

Background: This is the most extensive survey of the nation's public secondary alternative schools ever undertaken. It marks the end of the first phase of an extended inquiry into alternative schools.

Comment: Although there are no recommendations, this survey lays to rest some myths about alternative programs and thus supports NEA's long-held commitment to increasing the number of alternative programs within pubiic school systems.

High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America by Ernest L. Boyer. Harper & Row, 1983, 363 pp. $15.00.

Background: This comprehensive plan to improve the American high school is the product of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Major Recommendations: The report proposes 12 key priorities that provide an agenda for school reform, including clear goals for every high school, a core of common learning with an increase of required courses, a smaller teaching load with more daily preparation time and higher pay for teachers, and better school-college and school-business relationships.

Comment: The report is well conceived in all respects. Teachers would have preferred a more sophisticated treatment of how to improve teacher education.

Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do. The College Board, 1983, 46 pp.

Background: This report is part of the College Board's 10-year project to strengthen the academic quality of secondary education.

Major recommendations: The report describes in some detail the knowledge and skills needed by all college entrants.

Comments: The teaching profession is involved with this important work, which will continue until 1990.

Horace's Compromise -- The Dilemma of the American High School. Theodore R. Sizer. Houghton Mifflin, 1984, 240 pp.

Background: This book will be the first of several reports in 1984 from a project known as A Study of American High Schools cosponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Independent Schools.

Major recommendations: Teachers should not have to make a compromise between what they know is needed for their students and what they have the time, the energy, and the resources to give.

Comment: All who admire good writing will be most impressed with this report. Teachers will recognize that the dilemma faced by the symbolic Horace Smith is theirs too. Recommended reading.

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December 1983

Dear Colleague:

Educational equity and educational excellence are inseparable

America's teachers teach all the children. Our nation is built on the strength of our democracy. And our democracy is built on the notion of a tuition-free, quality public education available to all.

Our attempts to move toward educational equity have brought us nearer our goals of educational excellence as well. Test scores are going up, especially among disadvantaged students. More and more young women are going into fields of study and school activities previously closed to them. More and more handicapped students are learning to be productive citizens. The gap is closing, and that progress is making America stronger in every way.

But there's still a great deal more to do. And we need the support that is necessary to get it done.

America's school employees are committed to educational excellence for all our nation's students. We will be satisfied with--and accept--nothing less.

Sincerely,

Mary H. Futrell

Mary Hatwood Futrell

TEACHERS' VIEWS ABOUT THE HIGH SCHOOL

Teachers concur with the findings of the National Commission on Excellence that education is the "common bond of a pluralistic society" and that it is "one of the chief engines of a society's material well being." And it is in this broad context that teachers see the shape of American high schools of the future.

The first step toward our vision of what the high school should be is to establish and agree on the mission of our high schools. Local communities should then design and implement the programs required to achieve this mission. The programs offered in America's high schools should reflect the complexities in teaching and learning as well as unique local differences and needs. The programs should attend to all students' needs, not just those who are college-bound. Thus, programs of secondary education in the United States must provide preparation for:

1. Citizenship in a democratic society.
2. Personal development as intellectually competent, mentally alert, and morally responsible human beings.
3. The world of work through mastery of those skills commonly required for all work in society.*

Each community should reaffirm its support for these goals then require educators to exercise their professional expertise and judgment to create rigorous, precise, yet flexible learning experiences for students. To accomplish the agreed-upon mission, many secondary schools will need to raise their standards, which means more than just increasing the number and "toughness" of current course offerings. Courses should be reviewed in light of their relevance to the contemporary world and student experience.

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*These represent a reordering and some modification of those identified by Mortimer Adler in The Paideia Proposal.

All secondary students should be well-grounded in communication (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), mathematics, and science. Teachers must have the time and flexibility to teach these "basics" in ways that help students learn to analyze, to develop critical thinking skills, and to make interpretations and draw conclusions. In addition, all students should learn about our heritage and develop positive attitudes of democratic citizenship by studying history and contemporary cultures, and by involving themselves in school and community civic activities and democratic processes. The arts are an essential part of the curriculum for all students to help develop the ability to achieve fulfillment through enjoyment of avocational and leisure pursuits.

All students need to be introduced to the world of work, to explore a wide range of vocations, and to experience satisfaction and accomplishment by "doing." Those who will seek full-time employment immediately upon high school graduation need help in making a smooth transition from school to work. That means the school, the home, and the community will have to work together. Those who wish to pursue post-high school education will need counseling and programs that will allow them to experience adult world pursuits through community service, volunteer activities, or private-sector enterprises.

Finally, all students must understand the role of technology in the society and how it will affect their lives as individuals. Some will need to learn how to use computers, some to program them, and some will need to know how to service them.

Along with a common core curriculum, schools should offer a range of electives. Unless students are exposed to a wide range of scientific, social, and artistic endeavors, many may never know about vocational and avocational pursuits most appropriate to their interests and abilities.

Teachers are anxious that their students accomplish the broad goals of schooling to the fullest. And what is most on their minds these days is that the conditions for teaching should maximize the chances of accomplishing those goals.

That means teachers must have more time to teach, smaller classes, more flexible instructional structures, better materials, and more appropriate teaching/learning conditions.

- More Time to teach

  Teachers must be freed from classroom interruptions and duties only marginally related to teaching. Classroom intercoms should be unplugged, non-instructional paperwork reduced, and aides provided to take hall, lunchroom, bus, and other monitoring duties. Teachers could spend that time tutoring, planning, and undertaking other actions that benefit student learning.

  Once the interruptions of academic learning time are drastically reduced, better use of work time itself must be made. Teachers could use preservice teacher education programs on classroom management techniques to help them make the best possible use of time.

  This important first step must precede consideration of lengthening the school day, week, or year since such moves will have significant consequences for school finance, for families, and for the business community.

- Smaller classes

  If the truly important purposes of education are to be achieved, teachers must have the opportunity to work with few enough students to individualize instruction. Class sizes of 35 and up must be reduced to provide optimum teaching and learning conditions. The NEA recommends an average class size of fifteen, recognizing that for particular purposes groups could be as small as two or three or as large as a hundred or more.

- More flexible instructional structures

  High schools must experiment with ways to break out of the traditional structure of the 50-minute period, the 7-period day, and the 5-day routine of the same classes each

day. This experimentation could lead to better teaching of related subjects that are now rigidly compartmentalized.

Teachers want to develop new, fulfilling, and rewarding career patterns within teaching. They want greater opportunities to apply their talents through differentiated responsibilities and more flexible time arrangements. They want to end the tradition that they must leave teaching and become administrators in order to advance.

- Better materials

  Student learning materials should be accurate, interesting, age-appropriate, unbiased, comprehensive, plentiful, and varied. Some of them should be in the form of commercial textbooks; most should be prepared or selected at the local level, targeted to specific student needs and directly related to their program of studies. Specialists in all manner of media should be important members of teaching teams in the high school of the future.

- More appropriate teaching/learning conditions

  The physical environment of many high schools needs to become more functional, comfortable, and cheerful for students, teachers, and the community.

The recent spate of studies of the American secondary school points to the importance of skilled teaching to achieve educational excellence.

The great majority of American secondary teachers do excellent work, often under adverse conditions. But they know as well as anyone else that their teaching skills can be improved. Many of our skilled teachers leave the profession while many of today's bright and promising college students shun teaching as a career. Attracting and retaining excellent teachers will require new ways to pay and promote teachers and improved classroom conditions.

Good teaching is based on the knowledge gained in teacher education courses. In addition, all prospective teachers should

complete a broad course of study, intensive instruction in one subject and a full-time, carefully supervised and evaluated student teaching experience.

Keeping today's teachers up to date requires professional development of a breadth and depth found in only a few of the nation's school districts. All such programs should be developed by teachers and conducted on school time with school district resources.

Teachers' Views About Student Assessment

National Education Association

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DON CAMERON, Executive Director

December 1983

Dear Colleague:

America's teachers believe testing is an important part of the teaching and learning process. But we oppose oversimplification of testing, reliance on a single instrument to draw conclusions about a very complex subject, namely a student's knowledge and ability.

We need the best information we can get about our students, and that requires rigorous assessment programs. Testing and teaching are inseparable. We must have solid information to help every student progress.

We insist on the highest standards for the tests themselves, as well as for the interpretation and communication of results.

Testing is like anything else--a little knowledge can be dangerous and it can be extremely misleading. A lot of knowledge is essential for good decision making by all concerned.

Sincerely,

Mary H. Futrell

Mary Hatwood Futrell

TEACHERS' VIEWS ABOUT STUDENT ASSESSMENT

> The National Education Association holds that testing and assessment should be conducted frequently, be comprehensive in nature, and serve educational purposes.
>
> Testing and assessment should be carried out to diagnose student weaknesses and strengths, to help students learn, and to assist students in choosing wisely among available options.
>
> Decisions about students should be based on both pencil-and-paper tests and a broad range of assessment methods available to teachers.

Testing and assessment must be part of the education process since good teaching is based in some degree on the results of tests. Through the teacher's daily assessment of performance, behavior, seatwork, boardwork, homework, and class discussion, students get needed feedback on how well they are learning. Teachers are skilled in matching what should be learned with a method of assessing that learning. For example:

Student Skills	Teachers' Methods of Assessment
Recalling factual information	Multiple-choice or true-false pencil-and-paper tests
Applying information and drawing conclusions	Judgment of the quality of original products, such as a chemistry experiment
Analyzing or culling pertinent information from readings and other sources	Discussions, essays, or oral presentations
Problem solving	Discussions, essays, oral presentations, or small group projects
Using knowledge in new situations	Simulation or role playing

Standardized tests are most useful to teachers and students when the results are used to improve the instructional program. Test scores should be made available to teachers before they move on to other subjects. Tests such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills are useful supplements to other student assessments. Observing students, evaluating their work, judging their speaking and writing--all help give a more complete picture of students' abilities. The various assessment methods, including standardized tests, can be quite helpful in identifying student strengths and weaknesses.

To realize educational excellence we must go beyond analyzing student problems--to developing solutions. We must offer help to those who need help, whether on an individual or a group basis.

The Kinds of Tests We Need

Those who set policy on assessment programs should recognize that all testing is connected with what happens in the community and in the school. No test by itself can supply valid information to all who need it.

Policymakers need to know about trends in student achievement. That information can best be gotten by testing a representative group of students, rather than all of them.

Sampling techniques used by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have resulted in reliable and valuable data. For example, sampling in the early 1970's revealed gaps in achievement between minority children and nonminority children. Compensatory programs were put into place, then NAEP measured again and found the gap had narrowed. The conclusion? Not only is test sampling an excellent way to gather information on student progress, but programs based on the results of sampling can produce gains in student achievement.

Parents need testing and assessment to know how their child is doing and what they can do to help. They need several kinds of information, such as a child's achievement in relation to his or her ability, interaction with other students, and attitudes toward school.

Test results should be presented to parents in terms they can readily understand. Testing terminology that is obscure to parents has little value. Such pseudo-scientific terms such as "stanines" and "percentiles" serve only to surround testing with an undeserved aura of mystery.

The press needs accurate and constructive information on student achievement. Reporters should get more than just math and reading scores. They should also get assessments of student progress in all subject areas.

Reporters also have the responsibility to report test results in valid terms. To dramatically declare, for example, that half the students score below the national average on some test is to state the obvious--but it comes across as an indictment. By definition it is impossible for everyone to score above average.

Teachers need the information that comes from all tests and their own observations to report to parents and students. They also need this data to help plan follow-up lessons and to inform the administration of their students' needs, weaknesses, and strengths. Effective district-wide instructional programs come from informed conclusions made by teachers.

Teachers believe that vigorous testing and assessment should be done in all subjects. They recommend the following standards for testing and assessment programs:

- Teachers should help select and develop evaluation procedures and instruments.
- No single instrument or procedure should be used to make a decision on placement; status, graduation, entry into or exit from a program or school. A variety of assessments should be used to reduce dependence on any one type.
- Many evaluation procedures should be used: teacher-made tests, anecdotal records, oral presentations, contracts, samples of work. Written evaluations should include a wide variety of formats, such as narratives, multiple-choice, open-ended items, critiques, analyses.
- Limited English skills, physical disabilities, and other exceptionalities should be taken into account in testing and

assessing students. Where students benefit, alternative assessment should be used.

- If school districts and states need data on student achievement for public information and for program adjustments, test sampling of the student population should be used.
- Testers should be free from cultural, ethnic, racial, or geographic bias.
- Testing should allow students to be placed in heterogeneous groups that reflect a wide range of achievement.
- Teachers should plan and implement staff development programs on preparation, selection, and administration of tests and on interpretation and use of results.
- Disclosing test results should be an educational process that informs the public of school needs and successes.
- School district policy should prohibit the use of student test results for teacher evaluation, retention, promotion, or transfer.

The quest for educational excellence raises fundamental questions on testing. As improvements are made in programs, standards, and requirements, should testing change? Do tests we use today offer the kind of information we need? Are policymakers, who have sought only "minimum levels" in competency testing, also concerned about improving students' performance?

Teachers are concerned about the quality of tests and the use of test results. It is time to improve the skills of all who test, report test results, and make use of results. It is time for policymakers and the public to insist on more effective approaches to the evaluation of students.

The Teaching Profession

National Education Association

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION • 1201 16th St. N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036 • (202) 833-4000
MARY HATWOOD FUTRELL, President
KEITH GEIGER, Vice President
ROXANNE E. BRAOSHAW, Secretary-Treasurer
DON CAMERON, Executive Director

December 1983

Dear Colleague:

You may be surprised at some of the facts about teachers contained in this report--about teachers and what we believe.

We believe there is a pressing need to improve teacher education. We must do everything possible to educate the best of today's students for a career as tomorrow's outstanding teachers.

We believe we must raise standards for entry into our profession, improve training, toughen licensing requirements, and improve evaluation procedures.

Education starts and ends with the needs of the students. Improving teaching conditions in the end benefits students as well as teachers.

Sincerely,

Mary H. Futrell

Mary Hatwood Futrell

THE TEACHING PROFESSION

The National Commission on Excellence in Education called us a nation at risk. Teaching is at risk, too.

Just one year ago, in the fall of 1982, only 4.7 percent of first-year college students indicated interest in elementary or secondary teaching as a career. In 1970 that percentage was 19.3 percent.

More than one-third of the nation's current teachers reveal that if they had to do it again, they probably would not choose to teach in the public schools. Some 13 percent declared in 1983 that they certainly would not become teachers again, and 30 percent responded that they probably would not do so.

Today's teachers are clear about the dissatisfactions they experience in teaching. Some 66 percent cite the enormous amount of time they must spend on noninstructional duties. That same percentage point out that salaries are inadequate, that they feel unfairly criticized by the news media, and that they need more help to get their jobs done. More than half of them are critical of the quality of their in-service education. On the list of pluses for a career in education teachers mentioned the flexibility they have in deciding how to teach, personal fulfillment they get from teaching, and the support they receive from other teachers.

The Teaching Profession, Statistically

- Public elementary and secondary teachers number more than 2 million. Higher education faculty, including 225,000 part-time faculty, total 732,000.
- Today's K-12 teachers are going to school longer than they did in the past. Almost half--49.3 percent--have earned a master's degree. In 1971, that was true of only 27.1 percent of the teaching force.
- Years of teaching experience have risen from a median of 8 years in 1971 to 12 years in 1981.

- One-third of all elementary and secondary teachers are male, two-thirds female. Some 7.8 percent are black, 0.7 percent from other ethnic groups.
- The median age for current teachers is 36 for women, 38 for men.
- Teachers average 46 hours of work a week. They get 33 minutes for lunch, but many teachers--45 percent--must supervise students during those precious 33 minutes.
- The average salary in 1981 for beginning teachers with a bachelor's degree was $12,769; for mathematicians it was $19,776; for chemists $19,464; for accountants $19,157; and for engineers $22,836.
- The average annual contract salary for K-12 teachers in 1981-82 was $17,209. For public higher education faculty it was $25,886.

Teachers' Recommendations To Improve Teaching

1. Improve learning conditions

Two changes, made immediately, could do more to improve the quality of teaching and learning than almost anything else: reduce class size and improve the quality of instructional materials.

Research shows students learn best when teachers work with them individually or in small groups. But most teachers have classes too large to do that. The problem is particularly acute in secondary schools where most teachers teach 120 to 150 students in six or more classes every school day. Under those difficult circumstances, teachers rarely have time to discuss a composition--or anything else substantive--with individuals. They must resort to written comments on papers in order to give feedback to students individually.

In addition to smaller classes, teachers need materials, and a variety of them: newspapers and current magazines, films and documentaries, tapes and records, paperback books, and computer software, to name a few. For too long the textbook--itself often outdated--has been the primary and

sometimes only resource. Textbook decisions are often made by state committees of lay persons or local school officials in a central office, far removed from the teacher attempting to tailor instructional programs for individuals. Since textbook publishers compete for a national market, they tend to avoid controversial and politically sensitive subjects.

School buildings also need attention. Some present actual health hazards to students and teachers due to the presence of asbestos. Many other school buildings cannot support instructional equipment due to poor electrical, plumbing and ventilation systems. We need space for learning and teaching, room for people and machines, the space for people to experiment, move freely, interact, study quietly.

2. Make plans to attract and retain good teachers

We want to keep the best teachers in the profession. As NEA President Mary Hatwood Futrell says, "We want, of course, to attract bright and talented people into the teaching profession in the years to come. Possibly one of the best ways to do this is to work to keep the bright and talented people we already have."

Setting adequate base salaries is imperative. But once that is done we must look at other motivators. Research suggests challenges such as developing curricula, designing computer software, and sharing skills with colleagues have more appeal to practicing teachers than any scheme to selectively raise the pay of a few teachers at the expense of many. Plans to help retain excellent teachers should:

... not be in lieu of competitive entry-level salaries in the professional market place

... reward instructional competence and keep teachers in teaching

... fix responsibility for implementation and provide adequate training for those who administer the plan(s)

... involve the teachers' association(s)

... not pit teacher against teacher or teacher against administrator

.... provide for a selection process free from arbitrary or capricious political whim and recognize academic freedom as the foundation for professional practice

... not be limited to a predetermined small percentage of teachers. All teachers should be able to volunteer evidence of advanced-level teaching skills that would enable them to move up in the teaching profession hierarchy.

3. Transform the traditional role of the teacher

Teachers currently spend as much time being wardens--taking attendance, keeping an orderly classroom, fulfilling lunchroom duty--as they do being instructors. There is little or no time during the day to share ideas and teaching methods.

Teachers have long felt the frustration of being kept from doing their "real" job. Paperwork, assemblies, and collecting money have often taken precedence over the qualitative aspects of teaching. Ensuring the successful performance of students requires having time to work with them in the subject areas, time not always available given other administrative demands. An alternative to such circumstances is the use of classroom aides.

Some 72 percent of the teachers surveyed in 1981 did not have an aide. The 28 percent who did found them of great help in doing secretarial work, grading papers, preparing materials, working with small groups, supervising lunch and playground time, and organizing the classroom.

More important than anything else, however, is that teachers be included in decision-making about teaching and learning. As professionals they have a stake in--and opinions on--broad educational issues, such as testing programs, instructional materials, new curricula. They want a hand in developing criteria by which they will be judged. They want a sayso in professional growth plans. Quite simply, teachers want to be more than expendable parts in a vast machine called school.

4. Set up good evaluation systems

Teachers welcome evaluation if its purpose is to improve their skills and professional growth, and if it is done by people trained in evaluation techniques. Professional evaluations, are especially important during probation (before tenure is granted), and should be done more frequently than with veteran teachers.

The following skills could well be the basis of a constructive evaluation system:

... planning (for accomplishing long-range objectives as well as specific short-range ones)

... classroom management

... organization and sequence of instruction

... presentation of subject matter (clarity and accuracy)

... verbal and nonverbal communication (standard English, a broad and interesting vocabulary)

... assessment of student progress and use of results in diagnosing needs

... continued professional growth

... relationship with colleagues and the community.

The NEA considers it a harbinger of good things to come that 7,500 school districts in the United States have already negotiated teacher evaluation plans with the local teachers' association.

5. Create more opportunity for professional growth

The fact that nearly half of today's K-12 teachers have obtained master's degrees on their own time and money indicates the value they place on additional learning. But they want and need support from other sources, including their school districts, to help them keep up with the latest developments in their teaching specialities. They need local staff development programs; opportunities to participate in conferences,

conventions, workshops, and teacher exchanges; and paid leaves devoted to study.

Professional growth opportunities could help relieve another problem--that of teacher shortages in math and science. Local districts could offer scholarships to retrain teachers in other fields. The National Science Board recommends an excellent combination of programs to upgrade the skills and knowledge of great numbers of teachers. The Board's report states;

> Traditional summer workshops or institutes cannot accommodate this large a number of both elementary and secondary teachers and retrain them at a reasonable cost.... In the near future, upgrading efforts should be supplemented by new communications technologies such as closed-circuit TV and interactive telecommunications.

One federal agency setting up professional growth opportunities is the National Endowment for the Humanities. Next summer NEH will underwrite 51 workshops at major universities across the United States. More than 700 secondary teachers will study advanced literature and humanities. Last summer 15 workshops were offered and thousands of teachers had to be refused. The demand for professional development is great; the opportunities are sadly limited.

Career-long professional development in teaching should be designed by professional educators and supported by school districts. Students are the direct beneficiaries of teachers' improved knowledge and skills. Teachers benefit from the fulfillment of continued learning and professional growth.

6. Improve teacher education programs

The National Education Association is working to improve teacher education programs for those who want to teach by insisting on standards that teachers themselves believe are basic to success in the classroom. Those basics include rigorous admission and graduation criteria, properly designed and academically challenging teacher preparation programs, and substantial opportunities for laboratory and field experience. Ten

states are now using NEA's pilot program on teacher education. They are taking the lead to strengthen standards for teacher preparation, to apply these standards to all teacher education programs, and to strengthen the way in which teachers are certified.

Because teachers care about high standards in their profession, the NEA is calling for states to establish Teacher Standards and Practices Boards with a majority of teacher members. Such boards would be legally responsible for approving the teacher preparation programs of the colleges and universities in the state. The Standards and Practices Boards would certify teachers as well as revoke certificates of persons not competent to teach.

Since the need for quality teacher education transcends state lines, NEA has long supported national standards in addition to state standards. At present, 527 of the 1,206 institutions in the United States preparing education personnel have voluntarily met national standards. Those 527 institutions graduate between 80 and 90 percent of today's teachers. A list of accredited institutions is available from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE).

Teachers who are in the nation's classrooms day after day and year after year are in a unique position to add to the knowledge and perceptions of national commissions and committees that study, observe, theorize, and pronounce what this nation should do to improve education. They can point out dramatically and graphically how much better schooling could be if certain conditions were different. They welcome the current national talk about education and intend to be aggressive in joining the quest for excellence in education.

Teachers' Views of Equity and Excellence

National Education Association

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DON CAMERON, Executive Director

December 1983

Dear Colleague:

The school program must be designed to achieve educational excellence for our students. A clear purpose for the program is essential, as is a broad curriculum, high standards and expectations, and emphasis on communications skills.

Teachers' working conditions are also students' learning conditions. That means we must set up school environments that allow teachers to teach; materials must be of high quality, accurate and current. Class size must be appropriate for the age and subject taught. The school building must be safely designed to accommodate today's instructional equipment.

Our high schools must serve the needs of today's students for tomorrow's world.

Sincerely,

Mary H. Futrell

Mary Hatwood Futrell

"And in the debate about public schools, equity must be seen not as a chapter of the past but as the unfinished agenda of the future. To expand access without upgrading schools is simply to perpetuate discrimination in a more subtle form. But to push for excellence in ways that ignore the needs of less privileged students is to undermine the future of the nation. Clearly, equity and excellence cannot be divided."

-- Ernest L. Boyer, High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching)

"We do not believe that a public commitment to excellence and educational reform must be made at the expense of a strong public commitment to the equitable treatment of our diverse population. The twin goals of equity and high-quality schooling have profound and practical meaning for our economy and society, and we cannot permit one to yield to the other either in principle or in practice. To do so would deny young people their chance to learn and live according to their aspirations and abilities."

-- A Nation At Risk, The National Commission on Excellence in Education

America's school employees are committed to these words. We are committed to seeing our nation's schools live up to them.

We are committed to quality education for all children in America, be they rich or poor, able-bodied or handicapped, gifted or slow to learn, English-speaking or unable to speak English, male or female, white or of color.

We are committed to seeing that our nation's schools have the means to achieve this ambitious end, be they textbooks or computers; remedial education or college courses, tutors or interpreters, secure grounds or access ramps, smaller classes or more quality teachers.

We are committed to the inseparable goals of equity and excellence for all.

There are some who claim that in the last 20 years efforts to achieve equity have taken precedence over concern for quality education, and that quality has suffered. They claim that equity and excellence are mutually exclusive goals. And they are hoping that the recent enthusiasm for excellence generated by national commissions, study groups and politicians will focus reform efforts on quality and ignore the goal of equity.

If that happens, it will be because we as a nation have forgotten why achieving equity became a national policy goal 20 years ago. We will have overlooked the important gains made in those 20 years and lost our vision of the future for all our children.

Not so very long ago, many poor, minority, and handicapped children were excluded from receiving a free public education in this country. And many educational opportunities were denied to girls as well. We must not forget that:

- In 1950, only one-half of all white students and one-quarter of all black students graduated from secondary school.
- In 1960, the median educational level for black children was only eighth grade.
- Before 1965, there were no compensatory education programs for the disadvantaged, a disproportionate percentage of whom were minority.
- Before 1965, millions of children unable to speak English were educated in segregated, non-English-speaking schools, put in English-speaking schools with little or no language training, or denied a public education altogether.
- Before 1966, millions of poor children were going to school hungry, unable to concentrate and learn.
- Before 1966, there was no federal educational program for the children of migrant workers, many of whom -- without an education -- became the next generation of migrants.
- In 1972, only 8 percent of all female students were enrolled in federally funded agricultural, technical trade, and industrial programs. Before 1972, many professional schools restricted women's enrollment -- if they admitted them at all.

In 1972, women were only 2 percent of all dental school students, 11 percent of all medical students, 12 percent of all veterinary students, and 10 percent of all law students.

- In 1975, 25 percent of all disabled children received no public education at all; another 25 percent were underserved. Prior to 1975, 48 of the 49 states with compulsory attendance laws, and the District of Columbia, had statutes that exempted disabled children.

Despite historic, attitudinal and financial barriers we have made significant progress toward achieving equal educational opportunity. The equity programs that have been instituted have dramatically improved both equity and excellence for all students.

We have seen the number of high school graduates rise dramatically. In 1979, 85 percent of white students received diplomas, and 75 percent of black students -- three times the percentage 30 years earlier -- do so as well.

We have seen the median educational level of blacks increase from eighth grade in 1960 to twelfth grade in 1980.

We have seen black students improve their reading, writing, and arithmetic skills and the gap between blacks and whites on standardized test scores has narrowed.

We have seen disadvantaged children in federal programs like Head Start make startling gains. A 1982 Department of Health and Human Services report, Lasting Effects After Preschool, shows early education programs do work. The number of low-income children assigned to special education classes and retained in grades has dropped while their math, reading and intelligence scores have risen. Perhaps most important, those remedial programs have had a lasting, positive effect on students' academic self-esteem.

We have seen disadvantaged students in Chapter 1 programs improve their reading skills by as much as 17 percent and their math abilities by as much as 74 percent.

We have seen hungry school children fed -- nearly 4 million of them in federal breakfast programs in 1980-81.

We have seen the Bilingual Education Act and the Indian Education Act give millions of youngsters an equal chance to learn and participate in American society.

We have seen more children of migrant workers being educated. The numbers have risen from 80,000 in 1967 to over 700,000 in 1980.

We have seen the difference that Title IX has made in increasing opportunities open to girls and women. (Title IX is a federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in education.) The percentage of female students in federally funded agricultural, technical trade, and industrial programs rose from 8 percent in 1972 to 28 percent in 1980. Women's enrollment in dental school has risen from 2 percent in 1972 to 17 percent now; in medical school from 11 to 26 percent; in veterinary school from 12 to 39 percent; in law school from 10 to 34 percent.

We have seen the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act allow many disabled children to be educated in regular classes.

These gains are only the beginning, a sampling of what can be achieved when a nation is committed to quality and equality. Unfortunately, we are now witnessing a serious erosion of that commitment. In the last two years, the seedlings of equity have been pulled up by the roots, and excellence for all our children has suffered. Since 1981:

- The Department of Education staff has been cut by 25 percent.
- Overall funding for the Department has been cut by 16 percent and all 14 members of the Advisory Panel on Financing Elementary and Secondary Education have been replaced. The panel has recommended further cuts in educational funding, eliminating the Department of Education, and scrapping Chapter 1.
- Efforts are being made to relax requirements that schools receiving federal funds must comply with anti-discrimination statutes.
- 750,000 children have been dropped from Chapter 1 programs. Monitoring how federal dollars are spent by state and local authorities for programs such as Chapter 1 has become a low priority.
- New funding arrangements have funneled more federal aid to rural and private schools at the expense of urban and inner-city public schools.

- 475,000 children no longer receive free or reduced-price breakfasts. At least 900,000 poor children were rendered ineligible for free or reduced-price school lunches.
- Bilingual education, already cut by 15 percent, has faced cuts of up to 42 percent in Administration proposals.
- Migrant children's and American Indian education programs have been threatened with 50 to 100 percent cuts.
- Attempts have been made to eliminate the Women's Educational Equity Act Program. After these attempts failed, the director was fired and the staff cut in half.
- Programs for the handicapped have been targeted each year for elimination or substantial cuts. Special education programs in 890 school districts have been cut back.

This current move to "deregulate" public education, to "cut costs," to "reduce paperwork," and to introduce "realism" into our definition of educational equity has severely damaged both equity and excellence. Our mission is to teach all the children, to help each child become a contributing member of society. This cannot be achieved with the narrowly focused programs and curricula of the past.

It can't be done because our student population -- our nation's population -- is radically different today. We have 40 million children in our public schools. Approximately half are female, nearly 11 million -- or 26 percent -- are members of minority groups, and 3 million are handicapped. In all but two of the nation's 25 largest school districts, more than half of the students are minority. By 1985, the United States will have the fifth largest population of Spanish-speaking people in the Western hemisphere. By the year 2000, California will have a majority of minority residents and so will 53 major American cities.

We are living in a global, interdependent society, and our nation is becoming more diverse each day. We can no longer afford to ignore the educational needs of children who once seemed "different," for they are now a large and growing percentage of our youth. We can no longer educate children in classrooms that bear no resemblance to the society they will live and work in. As sociologist Kenneth Clark recently wrote:

> "We must develop a strategy for communicating to the majority of American whites something they are reluctant to understand and accept: that segregated, racially organized schools damage their children, make their children ineffective, make their children incapable of coping with a real world in which two-thirds of the people are not white; that America has a precious commodity in its racially diverse population which can be used as a very positive asset in education."

Many white parents have already come to this conclusion. A recent University of Chicago study found that 75 percent of all white parents surveyed said they would feel comfortable with their children in schools that were 50 percent minority. More and more people agree: Today's quality education must include the lessons of pluralism.

We can't return to McGuffey's Reader or to the curricula we used 20 years ago because they don't provide the knowledge necessary for a basic education today. The information explosion has revolutionized our definition of the "basics." For today's students to succeed in today's world, they must know how to think, analyze, compute, cope, understand, choose, negotiate, mediate, influence, convince, lead, follow, teach and learn. They must cope with social pressures their parents never faced. They must take from their public school education a much greater sophistication than we took from ours. And no one knows better than teachers that the task of providing that sophistication becomes more difficult and more necessary each day.

We cannot walk away from that challenge and pretend it doesn't exist, as some people would have us do. That would be a great disservice to our children and to our nation's future.

We must reaffirm our commitment to quality public education for all. Our future as a democracy depends on it. Our citizens must be educated about our freedoms in order to enjoy them and perpetuate them. Today's students are tomorrow's voters, tomorrow's leaders. They are the ones who will be raising our children's children.

We must continue to strive for equity and excellence.

"We cannot have quality education if we continue to condone inequality for any," the NAACP concluded recently. And we must not, as Washington columnist Richard Cohen wrote, let the current

spotlight on quality "provide a bogus justification for a return to a time when ... that vaunted goal, excellence, was like a Jim Crow drinking fountain -- reserved only for certain kinds of people."

Whatever it takes, America's teachers and school workers will work for excellence. At the same time, we will do everything in our power to ensure that equity is seen, not merely as a concern of the past, but as the unfinished agenda of the future.

Local, State and Federal Roles

National Education Association

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DON CAMERON, Executive Director

December 1983

Dear Colleague:

If every person in this nation were provided a quality education, America would experience a growth in human capital and an upsurge in economic productivity. Our citizens would be better prepared to function in a fast-paced society undergoing radical technological and scientific change, and the nation could compete more effectively in the world market.

Education is clearly a local, state, and national issue that requires a national commitment to make it great. Teachers and school employees believe the federal government's role is to ensure that a free, quality public education continues to be the right of every American. In our view, the federal government must ensure that state and local governments have the financial ability--and the will--to erase educational inequity.

Sincerely,

Mary H. Futrell

Mary Hatwood Futrell

LOCAL, STATE AND FEDERAL ROLES

"Excellence costs. But in the long run mediocrity costs far more."

From A Nation At Risk

As an organization whose members--the nation's school employees --are profoundly affected by calls for educational reform, NEA welcomes the debate currently taking place nationwide. And we welcome the opportunity to reflect on the roles of various levels of government--local, state, and federal--in helping education meet our national, state, and local needs.

NEA is no newcomer to educational reform movements. Organized teachers have been involved in every reform effort in education in this century--in 1911, 1924, 1934, 1954, and 1974. Back in 1924, for example, NEA leaders made it clear that certain principles were crucial to building true and lasting reform. During this 1924 debate, they developed a three-point program to strengthen American schools. One of their key points was the need to pay teachers professional wages. Our leaders said then: "We must squarely face the fact that if America is to have a better teaching profession, it must pay for it,...today young people have too many opportunities to perform services of value to the community, at a fair return, to expect them to be willing to enter teaching at a pittance." These words ring true even more so today, as every single one of the educational reform reports has underscored. And the challenge to upgrade teachers' salaries across the board must be dealt with in deliberations at the local, state, and national levels.

Teacher leaders in the 1920's also emphasized equal educational opportunity, with adequate financial support to ensure a quality education for every child. To quote them: "The wealth of the nation is more than adequate for the provision of a good educational opportunity for all children...the proper education of thousands of children--equality of educational opportunity--will be impossible until the principle is put into practice that every dollar of wealth, no matter where

it exists, should bear its just share of educating the nation's children, no matter where they live."

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education made that same point. "Excellence costs," said the Commission report. And the nation can, and must, pay the bill. We are "A Nation at Risk," the Commission said, not a city or a state at risk.

Education is a vital national concern and a national issue which means we have a national responsibility to address the problems and build toward lasting excellence. Serious attention must be paid to the need for reform at the local, state, and national levels. In the past, NEA recommendations, while heralded at the time, often were laid aside to collect dust. But this time around, NEA members are committed to working for substantive change and turning talk of educational reform into reality.

Educators and elected officials must provide the leadership necessary to achieve reform, says the National Commission, and citizens must provide the fiscal support for that reform.

In the section on "Leadership and Fiscal Support," the report points to the responsibilities of principals and superintendents, local school boards, state and local officials, governors, and legislators in helping move the reform agenda outlined.

The report also outlines the federal government's many responsibilities in the reform movement. Prime among them is the need to identify the national interest in education, as well as help fund and support efforts to protect and promote that interest.

A Nation at Risk calls on the federal government to help states and localities provide quality education for all groups, including the socioeconomically disadvantaged, minority and language minority students, the handicapped, and gifted and talented students.

In addition, the Commission reiterates the federal government's responsibilities to protect constitutional and civil rights for students and school personnel, to collect data, to support teacher training, and to provide student financial support and research and graduate training.

The three-tiered partnership of local, state, and federal governments is part of the American heritage. Local and state governments provide the vital foundation for quality education, and the federal

government supports programs national in scope or with national objectives.

The Local School: At the Heart of the Matter

Since the days of the little red schoolhouse, education in this country has been a local affair. What goes on in the schools of a community largely reflects the objectives, make-up, and needs of that community. Schools in many places are funded in large part by local property taxes, and it is at the local level that students, parents, teachers, and administrators must work together to achieve a quality educational program.

State Involvement: Setting Objectives and Aiding Parity

States also play an important role in education, financially and in terms of educational standards and quality. During the 1982-83 school year, state funding for education averaged 50 percent. That amount ranged from a high of nearly 90 [illegible]t in Hawaii to a low of less than 7 percent in New Hampshire. Much state aid is aimed at achieving financial parity between wealthier school districts and poorer ones, and NEA believes this important function must continue.

Current trends in tax limitation initiatives, such as Proposition 13 in California or Proposition 2½ in Massachusetts, however, threaten states' abilities to continue providing the amount of money needed to keep the gulf between richer and poorer school districts from widening. These trends could eventually have a devastating impact on public education throughout the land, especially if the country experiences a severe recession.

State boards of education must articulate educational objectives for students. These objectives should be clear, precise, and manageable in number so that local school districts can implement them efficiently and imaginatively.

In the same way, NEA believes that states must take the lead in promoting excellence through educational reform while preserving local control. Setting high but realistic standards, states can do a great deal to set the machinery of effective educational reform in motion.

NEA members in every state are already working with state education officials on tough questions such as how to recruit and retain the best teachers, improve standards and performance in the classroom, and evaluate teachers and students.

Funding for Excellence: A Greater Federal Role

The federal government also has a role to play in the drive for excellence in all of America's schools. In fact, the federal government's objectives--to broaden access to education, to enhance the quality of education, and to provide financial assistance to local school districts--directly affect the quality of education everywhere and for every student.

Besides supporting programs such as Chapter 1, handicapped education, vocational education, or higher education aid, federal money aids essential educational research and the collection and dissemination of educational statistics. It stimulates innovation throughout the field as well.

NEA's Research Division has calculated it would cost an additional 2.2 cents out of every federal dollar to meet the standards proposed by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. To update textbooks and teaching materials, for example, would cost roughly $5 billion, a seven-fold increase over the current $700 million now being spent nationwide. Implementing tougher course requirements in math, science, and social science and adding an hour to the high school day would cost $4 billion. To meet Commission-backed recommendations for "professionally competitive" salaries for teachers and a longer school year would cost $8.6 billion.

The federal government currently spends only $8.6 billion--less than 1.4 percent of its total revenues--on elementary and secondary education. And that comes to less than 8 percent of total education expenditures. To take the National Commission on Excellence in Education's call for improved education seriously means taking a hard look at federal spending priorities.

Any discussion on achieving educational excellence must focus on one point: changes to promote excellence must come from and be implemented at the local level. This is where education takes place,

where innovation and hard work must come from to strengthen our education foundation.

The American Defense Education Act, an NEA-backed bill that addresses the pressing problems detailed by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, takes this fact into account. The ADEA recognizes a national problem, proposes a national financial commitment to address it, yet relies on local commitment to local programs to resolve it. Through the ADEA, local school districts, in conjunction with community and business leaders, school boards, teachers, and others interested in education, would develop programs for their own communities. Programs could be on curriculum design, specific courses, or teacher training in a certain subject area. Communities would be free to set up whatever programs they desired, whether they dealt with higher standards, better prepared teachers, more modern equipment, or other points raised by the National Commission.

ADEA funds would also help prevent the spawning of a new generation of "have and have-not" schools based on students' access to microcomputers. This "have and have-not" dichotomy could particularly affect urban school districts where fewer funds are available for purchasing such items.

The ADEA would help give our nation's students--all of them--access to an improved educational system that will better prepare them for the future. They deserve a system that promotes excellence at the same time.

Finally, all of American society has a responsibility to reform our public education system. Our schools will improve only to the degree that a significant proportion of our people care about them and are willing to work for educational change.