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ABSTRACT

This Summary Guide to the third Annual Report of the National Education Goals Panel continues the commitment of the Panel to let the American people know the results being achieved in education. Facts about performance are presented, with tangible guidance about what each citizen can do to make the Goals a reality. The National Education Goals developing from the Education Summit of 1989 represent the educational centerpiece of both the Bush and Clinton administrations and serve as a nationwide compact for education. The most recent national assessments indicate that students are showing some improvement in mathematics, but that few understand complex mathematics theory and problems. Similar findings appear in measurements of reading ability. Because only about one-fourth of the nation's households include school-age children, depending on parents alone to improve education is not enough. All concerned citizens must work for better education. Specific suggestions are offered to help make the U.S. education system the best in the world. Five bar graphs illustrate aspects of progress toward the national goals. (SLD)

THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL GOALS REPORT

Building the Best

19 19

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Foreword

The National Education Goals remain at the forefront of the movement to *build a nation of learners*. In the past year, the Presidency changed hands, as have over half the Governorships in the four years since the Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia. These changes serve to underscore the continuity, bipartisanship, and long-term nature of the National Goals process.

Where vision and commitment count the most, however, is at the community and neighborhood levels. Only through an enduring partnership of families, educators, employers, and other dedicated citizens can America's learning enterprise—our local schools—be transformed to help all our children reach their full potential. Only then will we become a nation of lifelong learners. And only then can we be confident of meeting the competition in this global economy, assuring a high quality of life, and preserving our democratic system and ideals.

This Summary Guide to the third annual National Education Goals Report continues our commitment to let the American people know the results we are getting in education. In it, we not only present the facts about our performance plainly, but also offer tangible guidance as to what each and every citizen can do to make the achievement of the National Education Goals a reality.

Over the past year, the National Education Goals Panel has worked hard to bring the Goals and the vision of high-performance learning for *all* to this nation's communities. The title of this Summary Guide, "Building the Best," highlights that outreach and partnership effort. Along with the full National Goals Report, state and local goals, vision documents and progress reports, we hope this document will become a tool for continuous improvement.

Sincerely,

E. Benjamin Nelson, Chair
(August 1992 - August 1993)
National Education Goals Panel, and
Governor of Nebraska

The National Education Goals: How Are We Doing?

High school graduation day has always been something special in America. It is an end, a beginning, a time to celebrate. Like stamps of approval, the diplomas carried home proudly tell our new graduates: "You have met our expectations, and you are ready for what comes ahead. Your education builds the foundation for a successful life. You now have gained the tools needed to tackle future challenges."

Most students leave this system without ever being seriously challenged, without ever fully knowing what they are capable of learning and doing, and without having gained the tools and skills they need to survive and prosper.

Sadly, this message does not depict the whole truth. Instead of a high school diploma being a symbol of academic achievement and preparedness for life's challenges, we have allowed it to become, in all too many cases, nothing more than a certificate of attendance — a simple piece of paper that says a student showed up in school for twelve years.

"We" means all of us. Educators, learners, parents, policymakers, employers, and other community leaders allowed what was once an exemplary education system to stagnate and decay. Most students leave this system without ever being seriously challenged, without ever fully knowing what they are capable of learning and doing, and without having gained the tools and skills they need to survive and prosper.

Only in the last few years have Americans come to understand the disservice done to individuals and to society by our low expectations. For many years, employers and college officials criticized the low skills and knowledge levels of high school graduates. But when international academic assessments showed that American students were not measuring up to students in other industrialized countries, it rocked the foundations of businesses and the education system.

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS

By the year 2000:

- *All children in America will start school ready to learn.*
- *The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.*
- *American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.*
- *American students will be the first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.*
- *Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.*
- *Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.*

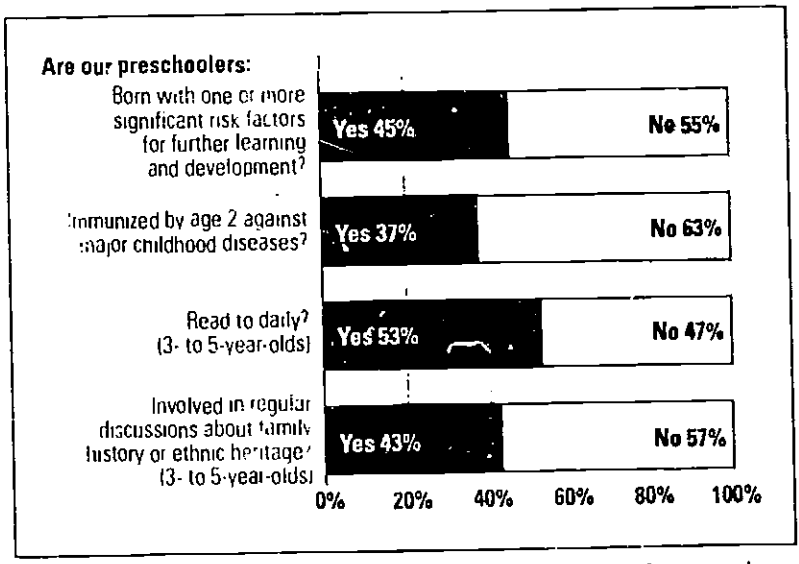
In September 1989, an historic turnaround began. The President and the nation's Governors met in Charlottesville, Virginia, for an unprecedented, bipartisan "Education Summit." At that summit, they laid the groundwork for the National Education Goals, a vision of the education results toward which we should strive. Equally important, they developed a timetable for attaining the Goals.

These Goals are a rallying cry that focus attention on where we stand, how far we have come, and how far we have to go to guarantee world-class education for all. The National Goals are neither a political ploy nor a hollow promise. Indeed, they represent the educational centerpiece of both the Bush and Clinton Administrations, and serve as a nationwide compact by which we can marshall our best efforts and measure our shortcomings and accomplishments.

A WAKE-UP CALL

The sobering facts about our status in meeting the National Goals are a wake-up call to all Americans. At no stage in a learner's life — before formal schooling, during the school years, or as adults — are we doing as well as we should be or as well as we can. The nation has fallen behind its own expectations and behind the progress of our global competitors. For three years, we have gathered the most comprehensive and reliable data measuring our performance on the six National Goals. This is the picture we have:

1. Almost half of American babies start life behind and never have the support to catch up (Goal 1).



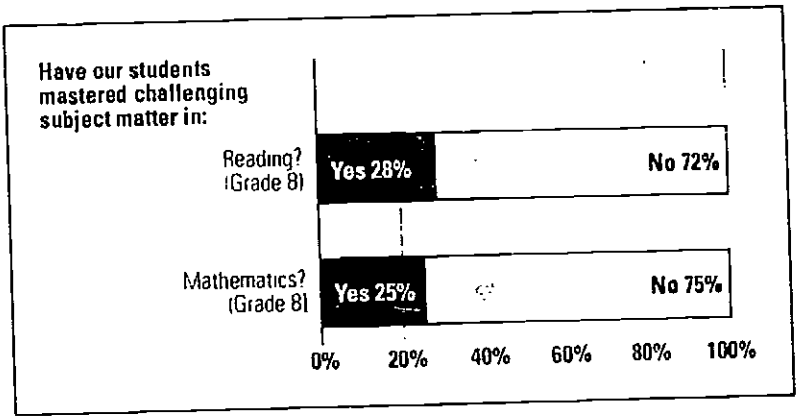
An alarming percentage of our infants (45%) are born with an appreciably higher risk of school failure because of one or more health factors, such as having mothers who smoked or drank alcohol during pregnancy. Only 37% of two-year-olds receive necessary immunizations against major childhood diseases. Only 53% of preschoolers are read to every day by their parents. Only half participate at least once a month in community- or religious-sponsored events, and fewer than that (43%) are regularly involved in discussions about their family history or ethnic heritage. More than half of all children from poor families never attend

Only 53% of preschoolers are read to every day by their parents.

preschool, and these children are much less likely than others to have a regular source of health care when sick.

Missing from the lives of so many infants and young children are the relationships and activities that stimulate what teachers believe are the qualities a child most needs to be ready for school—curiosity and an ability to communicate and get along with others. When we consider that infants born during the next year will enter the first grade in the year 2000, we have a unique opportunity to give these babies the chance to meet the first National Goal—that all children start school ready to learn. This is a daunting *but double* task.

2. During the years American children are in grades K-12, most cannot understand and perform at levels that are necessary for success in today's world (Goals 3 and 4).



The most recent national assessments tell us that while students have improved their mathematics performance somewhat in the last two years, fewer than one in five 4th and 12th graders and one in four 8th graders understand complex mathematics theory and problems. Similar findings appear in measurements of reading ability.

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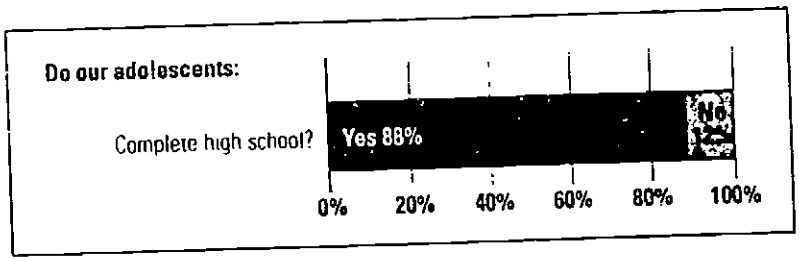
Why? As long as children bring home reasonably acceptable grades and don't get in trouble, most parents are satisfied with the education system. But grades tell very little about whether a child is getting an acceptable education. Is the subject matter challenging and important? Can children apply what they have learned? Is it relevant to today's world?

International comparisons tell us that many of our children aren't learning as much as they should—not because they lack ability, but because they have not been challenged or given opportunities to learn at high levels. For example, while most American 13-year-olds are reviewing basic arithmetic concepts, nearly all Japanese pre-high school students are taking advanced math classes. Only 35% of American students graduate from high school having completed courses in basic and intermediate algebra and geometry. Only 7% complete calculus.

Similarly, nearly a third of high school mathematics teachers have no degree in either mathematics or math education. And despite the fact that three years ago the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics recommended that all students should use computers and calculators in class, only 20% of 8th graders have computers in their classrooms and only 56% use calculators regularly.

3. More than one in ten students fail to complete high school (Goal 2).



Even with a diploma, many young people face a difficult future. Without it, their prospects are dismal. Yet 12% of our adolescents fail to complete high school.

In the past, the American economy could absorb most high school dropouts. Today, most high school dropouts "need not apply." Except for the most menial labor, employers demand workers with high skills or the ability to quickly learn them. Today's dropout will earn less than half the amount of someone who dropped out of school in 1973.

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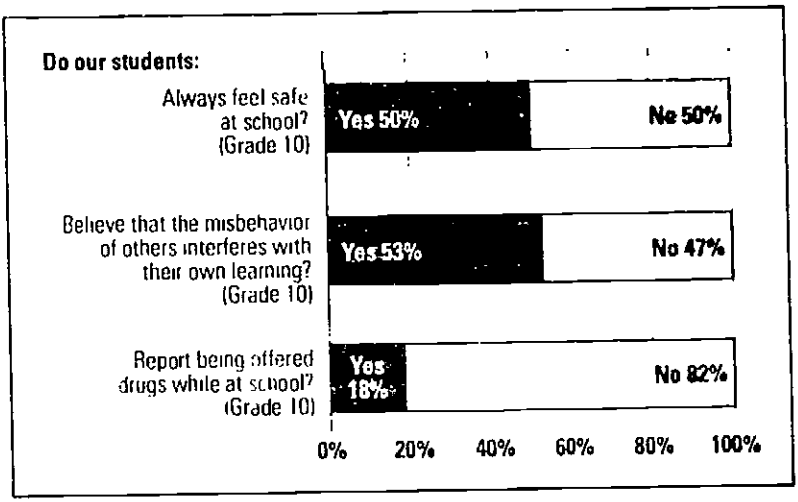
Among reasons for leaving school, past academic failure is still a primary reason given by all young people for dropping out. Older adolescents also often cite the difficulties of juggling employment and schoolwork. The truly tragic statistic, though, is the number of girls who leave school because they are pregnant (about one out of every three female

dropouts). It is extremely difficult for young mothers to return to and complete high school—a factor that more often than not results in lifelong dependency and/or low-paying jobs. This perpetuates the drop-out cycle by negatively affecting the attitudes of these mothers' young children —the next generation—toward school.

4. Today's schools are full of barriers for those who want to work hard (Goal 6).



Too many schools are not safe and conducive to learning. Some have become war zones, where gunplay and violence are common. Ten percent of 10th graders reported in 1992 that they had brought a weapon to school at least once during the previous month. Fifty percent report that they feel unsafe at school, at least occasionally. Over half say that the misbehavior of others in class interferes with their own learning.

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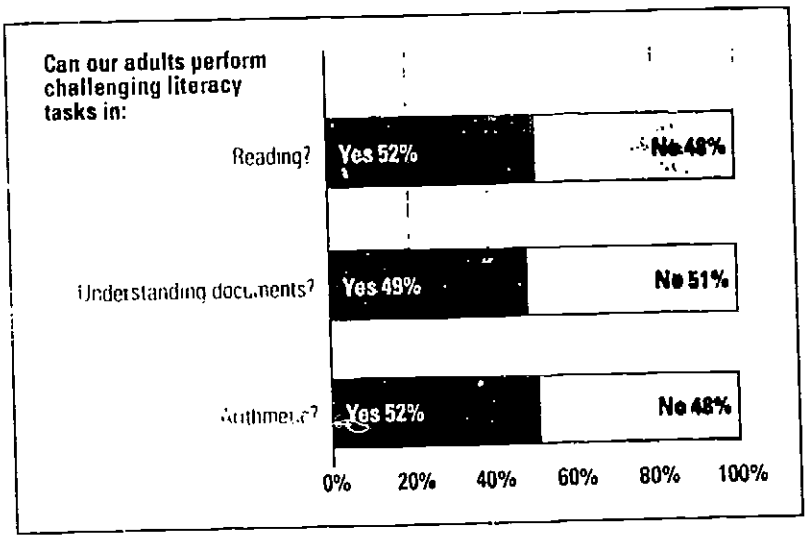
A national effort to make schools and their immediate neighborhoods drug-free began several years ago. But drugs are still widespread in many of our schools. In 1992, nearly one in five 10th graders said that they had been approached in school during the past year by someone trying to sell or give them illegal drugs.

We cannot expect students to learn under these conditions. Schools can be orderly and safe places for learning only if parents and

communities join them in making sure that students feel secure on their way to and from school and while they are on school grounds. Students are required to attend school. Their safety and well-being ought to be top priorities of educators and parents, and top priorities of their communities as well.

5. **In a country in which a highly skilled workforce is critical to the economy, many Americans have only mediocre basic literacy. And even these average skills are declining among young adults (Goal 5).**



The United States is a literate society—on the basis of how literacy was defined a century ago! All but a small percentage of our population can write and read simple tasks. For a long time, however, much more has been required to be considered literate, and in recent years, the definition of literacy has been raised quite a bit. A decade ago a mechanic could get by with basic skills, a toolbox and a simply written manual. Today, a mechanic needs to know statistical quality control, understand how to work with computers, and read manuals written for someone with at least a 12th grade education.

According to information in this year's Goals Report, most Americans still believe that they can read and write well. But most of these same people can only complete minor literacy tasks, and even college

graduates have only mediocre literacy skills. More disturbing is the fact that the literacy levels of young adults have declined in the past seven years.

At the same time, businesses need employees with higher skills. The American workplace, like the education system, is undergoing a radical transformation—but businesses are changing more quickly than schools. Businesses are selecting workers who have the education or have demonstrated skill levels adequate for high-technology workplaces and for solving problems. They are investing their training dollars in workers who are better prepared to continue their education. Consequently, workers who know and understand more are much more likely to have stable employment and earn more than workers with lower levels of literacy.

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The changes in the workplace have been so profound and so rapid that many Americans are not yet aware of them. For example, American workers are much less likely than workers in Germany or Japan to believe that they should be expected to suggest improvements in how to perform their jobs. And a 57% majority of American workers believe that their skills will be adequate in the immediate years ahead—compared to only 13% of Japanse workers.

Building the Best Education System: The Need for Nationwide Standards

The United States is justifiably proud that it was the first modern nation to guarantee all its citizens access to education. The responsibility for education was assumed by the states, not the federal government. States often declared in their constitutions that all of their future citizens should have a "free and appropriate education."

Over time the states developed ways of defining "appropriate education." At first, they relied heavily on "input" measures such as the hours spent studying subjects and course credits. Later, some rough measures of "output" or performance were frequently added: minimum competency examinations, national standardized tests, and other indicators, such as scores on SATs and other college admissions tests. However, none of these measures really tell the public what children and young people have learned. In fact, we have no way of telling whether our current "standards" for learning are as high as they should be, because we have not clearly defined the results we seek from our system. The situation is like a runner beginning a race without knowing where the finish line is.

Without high standards, we will not be able to rebuild America's education system—they are absolutely pivotal if we are to thrive and prosper.

Without high standards, we will not be able to rebuild America's education system—they are absolutely pivotal if we are to thrive and prosper. Textbooks and test scores have been used as substitutes for standards, but these actually require little of learners. Under our present system, few students face intellectual challenges, are asked to exercise reasoning skills, or are empowered to be problem solvers.

It is even more shameful that we do not provide a level playing field for all students—expectations differ from state to state, between the poor and the more affluent, those who are minorities, those headed for college, and those entering the workforce immediately. Missing from our education system is the expectation that all young people should learn challenging material and demonstrate that they have the tools for responsible citizenship and a productive future. Our system was simply not designed for that.

In response to this fundamental problem, the National Education Goals Panel is working to develop voluntary nationwide standards that challenge all learners and indicate levels of accomplishment in major academic subject areas. The standards are intended to provide reliable, practical benchmarks for your communities and schools. The Goals Panel and a soon-to-be-created National Education Standards and Improvement Council will provide a "seal of approval" and a form of checks and balances to assure all Americans that the standards are, indeed, top-notch. But the Panel needs your help.

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Everyone interested in providing students with the best education has a stake in implementing the Goals and standards in their communities. To succeed as a nation, all of us—parents, educators, and other citizens—must use the standards as guides for improving their local schools.

The United States can and must have standards as good as, or better than, those of any other nation. But we will use these standards in a uniquely American way—as a blueprint, not a national curriculum—that inspires "education architects" in each community to design better systems of teaching and learning.

What Can Parents and Citizens Do To Help Meet the National Education Goals?

The National Goals process rightly calls us to "wake up" and embark on a renewed education agenda from the earliest childhood years through lifelong learning. Information gathered during the past few years should convince all of us that we need to get busy to rebuild our education system to make it world-class.

The quality of schooling affects every American, directly or indirectly. Parents, of course, have a clear stake in seeing that the National Goals are met. However, only about one-fourth of today's households include school-age children. Therefore, to depend largely upon parents to achieve the Goals is not enough. We all have jobs to do, and we must unite as a nation to carry them out—our future depends on it.

In order to "welcome every child" and nurture high achievement in every young learner, all of us must pull together. Consider what you can do.

As a Parent

- ☐ Have I sought out proper prenatal care and taken care of myself and my unborn child so that I will have a healthy baby?
- ☐ Have I taken my child for regular medical checkups and made sure that he or she has had all immunizations?

- Am I reading to my child every day and making sure that there are always books around the home?

- Do I use all opportunities to encourage my child's language development, like telling family stories, taking time to answer his/her questions fully, or asking my child to help me at the store by naming items we buy?

- Am I selecting day care facilities or pre-schools carefully, thoroughly checking out the programs to make sure that they are able to give my child the right start?

- Do I have a habit of frequent contacts with those taking care of my child, such as volunteering for activities and attending parent-teacher conferences? Do I think of myself as a full partner in caring for my child? Do I express my concerns (as well as praise) with day care providers and other important adults who share in caring for my child?

As a Concerned Citizen

- Do I help agencies, care givers, and groups work together to provide adequate health and other early childhood services for children in my community?

- Do I offer my spare time to help in well-baby clinics, children's library programs, or other places that serve young children?

- Do I encourage my place of business to offer day care on-site or to support expanded day care services in the community?

When children enter the formal education system, usually by kindergarten, an African adage becomes very real—"It takes a whole village to raise a child."

As a Parent

- ☐ Am I in frequent contact with the school, so that I know what is being asked of my child and of me?
- ☐ Do I make home a place to learn by a variety of activities such as cooking with my child, making sure he or she understands homework assignments, involving my child in separating recyclable items, and creating art projects with home and outdoor supplies? Do I limit my child's television viewing?
- ☐ Do I look for and take advantage of opportunities in my community for my child to learn—museums, art galleries, concerts for children, special events (most often free) to explore science or other subjects—on a regular basis?
- ☐ Can I recognize challenging teaching methods—those that use lots of materials beyond textbooks, such as experiments and projects, hands-on experiences, and opportunities to work in groups—and do I encourage my child's school and teachers to use them?
- ☐ Have I checked to be sure that my school has the resources it needs for excellent instruction and expert training for teachers? Do I volunteer my time to give teachers time to learn new skills?
- ☐ Have I asked school board, parent-teacher, or administrative leaders about developing high standards for my schools? Are they keeping me informed about what world-class expectations would be, and how they apply to my community?

As a Concerned Citizen

- Have I ever volunteered my time to help mentor or tutor a student?
- Do I support, through donations, time, or my vote, programs that serve children, from local library exhibits to before- and after-school day care?
- Do I offer help to students, such as career counseling or supplemental science instruction, through organizations with which I am affiliated?
- Do I view the quality and results of the schools as my concern and the whole community's, and not just that of parents of school children?
- Do I seek to be informed about how to improve the schools by attending public forums, volunteering to serve on advisory committees, or offering my knowledge to help educators understand and keep up with the fields that they are preparing students to enter?
- Do I ask principals, teachers, or other school administrators about what the barriers to better education are (e.g., inadequate classroom resources or unequal access to advanced classes), and do I participate in finding solutions?

Moving from school to work and further education is a haphazard journey for many young people and adults. This was never a major policy issue—until we realized how important constant learning had become.

As a Parent

- Have I checked with my principal to be sure that my child's high school offers college-preparatory classes, if that is what he or she wants? Advanced placement courses? Or specific vocational and other courses that will help ensure successful entry into the workforce?

- Do I insist on my child completing high school so that those options stay open?

  Do I talk to the principal or guidance counselors to be sure that the counseling services at my child's high school are encouraging us to consider all the options available and to prepare for them?

- If my child works while in high school, do I insist that he or she limit work time so that classroom learning and participating in extracurricular activities are the priority?

- If my child chooses to specialize in a vocational area while in high school, do I help plan his or her schedule to ensure that he or she also appreciates and takes important traditional academic courses as well?

- Do I know what my child is expected to learn in each class? Do I have assurances from teachers and administrators that what my child learns before graduation will prepare him or her for a very competitive workplace?

  Have I asked the admissions offices of the colleges that my child is interested in about graduation rates?

As a Concerned Citizen

- _ Do I think of myself as a learner, too? Do I read a range of materials regularly, seek out ways to advance my skills for career/jobs, and take advantage of cultural resources?

- _ Do I urge my employer to offer (or support through community institutions) a variety of education/training resources, from improving basic literacy skills to advanced training?

- _ Do I demand high standards from the institutions offering education and training, such as using the most up-to-date technologies, keeping track of their results, and making sure that they are "in sync" with future skills demands within my community?

A REMINDER . . .

We all have a stake in rebuilding our schools. And we all have a choice on how to proceed. Children can either get by with an education that places them at a disadvantage with their peers in other countries, or they can be challenged to become lifelong learners prepared to succeed in today's world. Our schools can either continue to produce too many workers whose low skills lower the standard of living for all of us, or we can have schools that prepare workers to compete successfully in an increasingly complex, fast-paced and high-tech international marketplace.

This is an urgent but exciting time to be involved in the business of building the American education system of the 21st Century. It wasn't easy to build a transcontinental railroad, send a man to the moon, or win the Cold War. But we did it. We need the same determination, and sense of unity and purpose, to design a system of teaching and learning that makes us proud.

The National Education Goals and high education standards will help us prepare for crucial improvements in early childhood, schooling, and workplace environments. We now have a vision of an American education system that rivals any other in the world. We simply need to get to work to make it happen.

Someday, as diplomas are awarded to our young people, we will be able to tell them confidently: "You are well on your way because you have graduated from the very best education system there is." Join with leaders and citizens in your community who are working to bring this day closer. Together, we can accomplish the vital mission of educating America.

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The National Education Goals Panel is a unique bipartisan body of state and federal officials created in 1990 to monitor national and state progress toward achieving the six National Education Goals. Membership consists of eight Governors, two Administration officials, and four members of Congress. The Panel issues its annual Report each September, on the anniversary of the historic Charlottesville Education Summit of 1989. To obtain copies of the 1993 Goals Report and further information about the Panel, please write to:

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