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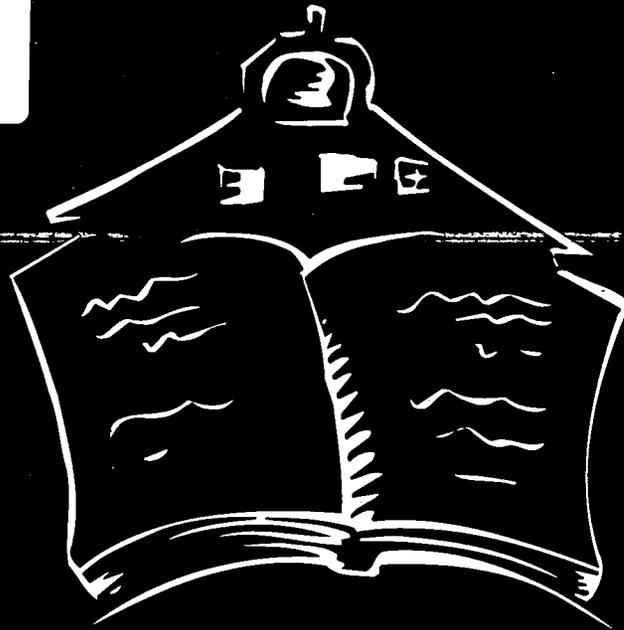
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ABSTRACT

This speech by U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley discusses how education is improving as the country moves into the 21st century. Section 1 sums up the United States' history of giving millions of Americans the education so long denied to them (immigrants, minorities, individuals with disabilities, and women). Section 2 examines a new realism mixed with hope for the 21st century, explaining the country's current willingness to take an honest accounting of its situation; understanding of changes being experienced and challenges ahead; and resolve to overcome the challenges and offer all children a quality education. Section 3 discusses where U.S. education is today, explaining that new academic standards are being established in 48 states, and 2 states have raised standards at the local level. Section 4 discusses the importance of emphasizing the early years of childhood and the basics of education, noting the need for parent participation. Section 5 discusses the need to create a democracy of excellence for the 21st century by providing new levels of accountability and raising achievement for all students. Section 6 describes how to reinvigorate the teaching profession. Section 7 discusses recruiting America's future teachers. Section 8 discusses preparing teachers for modern classrooms. Section 9 describes the need to retain, support, and reward teachers. Section 10 discusses how to spark creativity and innovation. (SM)

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# The State of American Education

*Sixth Annual Address*

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**New Challenges,  
A New Resolve:  
Moving American  
Education Into the  
21st Century**

**The Sixth Annual State of  
American Education  
Speech**

**Richard W. Riley**  
U.S. Secretary of Education

Long Beach, California  
February 16, 1999

Chancellor Reed, President Maxson, Superintendent Eastin, Secretary Hart—who is representing Governor Davis—members of Congress, distinguished faculty, ladies and gentlemen, and, most of all the many, many future teachers in the audience. It is my great pleasure to come to Cal State-Long Beach to give my sixth annual report on the state of American education.

Chancellor Reed has made teacher education his top priority and there is nothing in my opinion that is more important to the future of public education. So I welcome this opportunity to join the Cal State family and the many other university and education leaders from across this Golden State.

We are joined by thousands of other citizens at over 250 downlink sites across the country from Atlanta, Georgia to Yakima, Washington and my two alma maters as well, Furman University and the University of South Carolina. This speech is also being simulcast on the Internet.

This is an exciting time for American education and a time of great change and that is why I have come to California. The people of this great state have once again made education their passion. You have set out to rebuild and reclaim the glory of your broad system of public education. I believe that you are up to the challenge. For it is clear to me that the people of California believe, as I do, that education is our future.

As we look to the future, let's remind ourselves first about the advance of American education in the 20th century. We've had our peaks and our valleys. Let me tell you about a few of them.

I grew up in the South and I can tell you that nothing good came from the segregation of our nation's schools. I lived in the same town as Jesse Jackson—Greenville,

South Carolina. We both played football for different high schools that were only blocks apart. Yet segregation prevented our schools from ever playing against each other. That was wrong—and it was just as wrong to deny millions of children with disabilities even a breath of an education.

For decades, we accepted the premise that poor children went to poor schools because that was the way of the world. We were content to give these young children a watered-down curriculum. We were passive in the face of a great moral failing.

But we've had our victories too. We have given millions of Americans the education so long denied them: immigrants, minorities, the disabled and women too. We opened the doors to college wider and we now have a higher education system that is the envy of the world. That is some of our history and it is an enormous achievement.

### **A New "Realism Mixed with Hope"**

Now we look to the 21st century, a time of new challenges and a time for new resolve. Last month, I had the privilege to attend a millennium lecture at the White House that was given by the noted religious historian Martin Marty. I was most taken by Dr. Marty's assertion that we should look to the future with what the great theologian Reinhold Niebuhr called a "realism" that is "mixed with hope." This is an apt way to look at America's future, which is inextricably tied to the future of American education.

So let me report to you today on the state of American education. Across America there is a new realism mixed with hope: a willingness to take an honest accounting of our situation; a clear under-

standing of the changes we are experiencing and the challenges ahead; and a new resolve to overcome these challenges to give all of our children real hope for the coming times – to get serious about providing a quality education to every American.

Today, there are powerful dynamics reshaping American education. You can't get ready for the future if you don't see the future coming at you. So let me describe some of the dynamics that are transforming American education.

We have more young people in our nation's schools than ever before—all 53 million of them. I am here today to speak on behalf of this millennium generation, the largest in America's history. All you baby-boomers—get ready to make room.

This millennium generation is entitled to its day in the sun. The 21st century will be very much their century and it will be an American Century if we educate them well. How we educate their minds and shape their values now will go a long way to defining the destiny of this nation for decades to come.

One in five of America's children now live in poverty and the diversity of our school age population is rapidly changing. Our increasing diversity can be a great strength if we make change happen for everybody—all races and all cultures.

By 2010, families with school age children will account only for a quarter of our entire population, the lowest level in U.S. history. America is aging and family structures are changing. This means that we will have to work much harder to help people see that education really is a community-wide partnership.

Here is another powerful dynamic. The knowledge gap is rapidly increasing the earnings gap. College educated Americans now make 76 percent more than

Americans who simply have a high school diploma. Getting some college experience must become our new educational benchmark.

How we learn is changing and technology is very much at the heart of this transformation. I assure you, if our children make us look silly now when it comes to using the VCR, just consider what they are going to do with the Internet in the years to come.

All of these dynamics will define American education well into the next American century. They require us to be realistic—yet hopeful—and have the tenacity and resolve to meet these challenges together.

### **Where We Are Today in American Education**

So where are we today in American education? Here is my candid accounting. New academic standards are being put in place in 48 states and two states have raised standards at the local level. Our task now is to get those standards into the classroom. This will require an enormous effort to raise the quality of our nation's teaching force, and that is the main topic of my address to you.

New brain research challenges us to help parents in the earliest months when the minds of our children just seem to be sparking. Our early childhood efforts, however, are still very much a patchwork of programs defined by high turnover, little training and minimal compensation for the staff.

We have a new national focus on reading and we are hopeful that we have ended the reading wars. A landmark study by the National Academy of Sciences has laid out a balanced plan to improve reading. And, last week, we released new data that tells us that our nation's reading

scores are up for the first time in all three grade levels—fourth, eighth and twelfth. That's progress. But 38 percent of our fourth graders are struggling to learn this very first basic.

Our achievement scores are up for math and science. New standards have helped. Yet, we have an increasing shortage of quality math and science teachers. And our nation's math and science curriculum does not come close to matching world standards in our middle and high schools.

We have a stubborn achievement gap between the well off and the poor. This is a hard, cold reality; too many of our schools are failing some of our children and some of them shouldn't be called schools at all. We need to turn this around.

At the same time, ACT and SAT scores are now at their highest level in two decades. And 65 percent of all high school seniors are going straight on to college. That's good. Many of these same students, however, find themselves in remedial classes in their first year of college.

The American high school experience simply has to become more rigorous. Only 54 percent of our nation's high schools provide their students with the opportunity to take Advanced Placement courses. Why not 100 percent?

In my opinion, this nation is coming up very short in teaching our children foreign languages. I believe that every American child should be fluent in at least two languages. Surely we can give our children the added advantage of being better prepared for the global world of the 21st century.

Many of us are working hard to help elevate the teaching profession. But not enough is being done to prepare the next

generation of America's principals. This is a looming problem. Even the best of teachers can be helped by a principal who is a strong leader.

Another fact of great concern: our nation's school buildings are overcrowded or simply wearing out. The American people know that and so do I. The president is going back to the Congress for the third year in a row to get you the help you need to modernize your schools. Congress needs to get it done.

Access to college is one of the great achievements of American education. Increases in Pell Grants and college work-study and the creation of the Hope and Lifetime Learning tax credits will give many more Americans the ability to get a higher education. We estimate that 5 million Americans will use the Hope tax credit for the first time this year when they fill out their income taxes.

But our system of higher education is not there yet when it comes to preparing the next generation of America's teachers. Our nation's colleges of education are still very much the forgotten stepchildren.

This brief, candid accounting suggests that we have made progress but that we still have our work cut out for us. This new realism, however, is a sharp and healthy break from the past. The new expectations we have set for ourselves represent a fundamental change in the direction of American education.

No child should be left behind. No child should be allowed to drift through school. No child should have an unqualified teacher. And no American should be denied the opportunity to go on to college because he or she cannot afford it.

What we seek is a democracy of excellence for all of our young people as we move into the 21st century. The pace of

change is too slow for me. I remain impatient. The changes we are making certainly have not touched the lives of enough of our students.

We need a new resolve to meet the many challenges before us, and I ask all Americans to begin by putting aside the tired politics of division. This last year of politics has exhausted America's patience, and now we need to move on to the big issues that really matter.

Let's put civility back into the process and recognize where the American people are coming from. They want practical solutions and concrete answers. They understand that education is everybody's business. When ideologues assert that the only way to improve public education is to destroy it, nothing is gained. Absolutely nothing.

I've talked to you about some of our history, the powerful dynamics we face, and given you an accounting of where we are today. Let me suggest to you what we can do together with a new sense of hope and commitment: a "realism mixed with hope."

### **The Early Years of Childhood And the Basics of Education**

Our hope for the future surely begins by keeping a strong focus on the early years of childhood and schooling where we have the most potential to make the greatest gains. This is why so much effort is now being made around early childhood initiatives, improving reading and reducing class size.

I've told you about the new brain research. It's a wonderful new window of opportunity to advance learning. When excited parents leave a hospital with a newborn baby, they need to know what practical steps they can take to spark their child's brain development.

To their credit, state leaders including Delaine Eastin are moving forward vigorously to create effective universal pre-K programs. There is still, however, much to be done. I urge local and state leaders to help give child care providers much more extended training when it comes to early language and reading development.

As I reported to you earlier, our nation's reading scores are finally moving up. This is good news. A great deal of effort has been made to get this nation focused in on making sure every child can read well by the end of the third grade. This has been a personal crusade for me. But we still have a very long way to go.

I believe, for example, that every elementary school should have the reading specialists they need to make a difference. Governor Gray Davis here in California is right on the money in putting reading at the head of his education agenda.

I commend the Los Angeles Times for its special "Reading by 9" initiative, which makes reading improvement both a school and a home activity. I challenge every media outlet to follow this good example because education really is everybody's business. Let's keep America reading.

President Clinton and Vice President Gore are working hard to reduce class size, to help children with disabilities who have serious reading difficulties, and help the many adult immigrants who want to learn English. They are also working just as hard to expand after-school and summer programs.

But all of our public efforts pale beside the power of every parent to make a difference. If America's families will read, and keep on reading to their children — at least 30 minutes a day — they will literally revolutionize American education.

To do that, we have to help parents slow down their lives. In our haste to do all things all the time, we sometimes forget the most essential—giving our children that deep, abiding sense of trust, guidance and security that tells them that they are truly loved, cared about and respected. I believe that with a passion.

As our children master the basics, we have to make sure that they go to schools that are safe and disciplined. Here in Long Beach, you have set a national example for school uniforms, but there is much more that needs to be done. Last year was a terrible time of random killings in our nation's schools. This school year has started somewhat more quietly. But we must always remain vigilant.

We have sent out 200,000 copies of our "Early Warning Guide" with its strong emphasis on prevention and it has been very well received. Now, we need to turn these good ideas into practice to reduce drugs and violence.

### **Increasing Accountability and Achievement**

Giving our children hope for the future begins then with the early years of schooling and keeping them out of harm's way. Creating a democracy of excellence for the 21st century requires a new level of accountability so we can raise achievement for all of our young people.

The American people have made education a national priority. It is their agenda and it must be ours. It follows then that they are going to be a lot more attentive to the progress we are making. The attention may initially be uncomfortable, but we as education leaders should welcome it.

Now change can be unsettling. The unexpected rigor of new and demanding tests can be a shock, but the shock of

initial failure is often the starting point for long-term success if people will only stay the course. Real improvement in education does not happen overnight.

It is sustained progress that brings about real success. North Carolina, Maryland, Texas, and Kentucky are already seeing test scores rise because of their commitment to high standards, vigorous assessments and increased accountability.

As I have said, the states are doing the very hard work of creating new standards of achievement. Goals 2000 funds have helped states with this effort and we have made progress. Now each state is challenged to move standards from the statehouse to the classroom and make them part of every teacher's daily lesson plan.

We have to give teachers and principals the resources they need and free up their creativity to achieve results and reach high standards. We must make sweeping efforts to make teaching a first-class profession. And, then, we must hold schools accountable for results.

This is why President Clinton will send to Congress a significant revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This revision is based on a comprehensive three-part strategy: 1) targeting increased investments to disadvantaged children, with particular attention to the early years of schooling; 2) improving teacher quality; and 3) promoting real accountability for results.

Ending the practice of social promotion is an important part of this strategy. In its most basic form, the president's call to end social promotion is a demand not to close our eyes when a child is desperately struggling. A policy of retention is not the answer either. Let's develop a policy of providing the necessary support to prepare our children to pass.

And if a school is failing its students, we ought to react like our house is on fire. The new realism that I've talked about requires a no excuses attitude, and a willingness to take action.

We know a good deal more now about how to turn around low-performing schools: from giving teachers more time for training and collaboration; to redesigning the curriculum; to removing a principal who doesn't provide leadership; to issuing school report cards that measure real achievement over time; to enforcing effective discipline policies.

There are other ways that we can raise achievement as well. The American high school experience has to become much more credible. This is why I support challenging high school exit exams. Now, you just can't spring exit exams on young people who haven't been prepared for them. That's not fair. You need to give students and schools adequate preparation time. But setting the bar higher is the right way to go.

I want to strengthen our public schools, not weaken them. I say that because some hold the mistaken belief that the only way to improve public education is to take money out of public schools for private school vouchers. My friends, that is a mistake.

The truth of the matter is this: the choice of academic subjects has much more to do with the prospects of a young person going on to college than whether or not that person goes to public, private or parochial school. I am a strong supporter of quality private and parochial education; they add important elements to American education. But vouchers will take public tax dollars out of public schools and make our nation's private and parochial schools less private and less parochial.

I encourage the many new efforts to expand public school choice. Charter schools that are publicly accountable, schools-within-schools, school-to-work opportunities, theme and option schools for science, technology, the arts, and many other areas of study are all new ways to give parents and students more choices. I can tell you that going to school in America can be exciting.

Now, we need to work harder to get the message out about getting ready for college much earlier. Here are some statistics that explain it all. Almost 100 percent of parents want their children to go to college. Yet seven out of 10 parents say they don't have enough information about how to pay for college and how to prepare their children academically.

This is why I am pleased to announce that next fall, hundreds of college and university presidents will join me in what we are calling national college week. We will go to schools all over America to get the word out that many more young people can go to college if they start planning earlier for it.

That's the strength of mentoring programs like the Berkeley Pledge at the University of California or Project GRAD in Houston, Texas. We have developed an exciting new program called GEAR-UP to build new links between our public schools and our great system of higher education. We are well past the time when our institutions of higher education can remain aloof from the task of helping to rebuild America's public education system.

The Long Beach Education Partnership is a wonderful example of all the parts of American education fitting together. I am so proud of Bob Maxson, Superintendent Carl Cohn, and Mayor Beverly O'Neill and others who have pulled together to form

this exciting partnership. Seamless education really is the wave of the future.

## **Reinvigorating the Teaching Profession**

I want to talk to you about America's teachers—America's future. All of the things that I have talked about so far—from early childhood, to improving reading, to preparing young people for college—will not happen unless we make teaching a first class profession.

General John Stanford, the late school superintendent of Seattle, who gave that city so much hope, had a wonderful motto that explains it all. "The victory," he said, "is in the classroom." America's teachers are some of the hardest working Americans I know.

I am so very proud of them. Yet all too often, we take their hard work for granted. We can't afford to do that anymore. We need to hire more than two million teachers in the next ten years to meet the demands of the baby-boom echo and the fact that close to a million veteran teachers are on the verge of retiring. This is an enormous transition.

These next few years are, in my opinion, critical for the future of American education. We must make some far-reaching decisions about how to elevate this profession. Here a story is in order. I have on my staff a former national teacher of the year.

Her name is Mary Beth Blegen, and she was chosen as the National Teacher of the Year in 1996. After 30 years of teaching, Mary Beth made only \$36,000. Nevertheless, Mary Beth passed her love of teaching on to her daughter who also became a teacher. One year later, however, her daughter left the classroom and her salary more than doubled. This story

is going to become much more common unless we act now.

We can no longer fiddle around the edges of how we recruit, prepare, retain and reward America's teachers. This is why I call on Governors and state legislatures to rise to the challenge and take a comprehensive look at the needs of this vital profession. We need a sea change in public thinking about the value of teaching.

I ask state leaders to recognize the full dimension of the problem. Too many potential teachers are turned away because of the cumbersome process that requires them to jump through hoops and lots of them. Too many veteran teachers tell me that the process of maintaining their license adds little value to their professional expertise. And too many of our best teachers are leaving the profession because of low pay, poor working conditions and weak school leadership.

As a result, a growing number of school districts are throwing a warm body into a classroom, closing the door, and hoping for the best. This is not the way to reach for high standards. And many schools, especially in our high poverty areas, are now using teacher aides as full-time teachers; that's not fair to the students or to the aides.

And then there is a unique American phenomenon that really makes no sense—the practice of assigning teachers to teach “out of field.” Foreign education ministers who visit me are just stumped when I try to explain this practice. Their translators simply have no words to describe it.

We've got work to do. And we can begin by putting a sharp focus on the critical shortage of high quality math and science teachers. This is why I am pleased to announce that John Glenn will chair a

National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century. I talked to John yesterday, and I can tell you that he is excited about accepting his next mission for his country. Isn't he a great American!

## **Recruiting America's Future Teachers**

To recruit teachers, we must first overcome this paradox: in every poll, Americans tell us that being a teacher is one of the most important and valued jobs in this land. So often, however, these same Americans discourage their children from entering the profession because of low salaries.

Low salaries are a very real problem. I ask public officials to recognize—sooner rather than later—that we aren't going to be able to get good teachers on the cheap any more. That's just going to be a fact of life in the 21st century.

And I ask parents to encourage the dreams of their children who want to become teachers. In my book, becoming a teacher is just about the most patriotic thing you can do as an American.

What else can we do? We can create rigorous alternative paths to give many more Americans the opportunity to become a teacher. The president's proposal to expand "Troops to Teachers" for retired military and other mid-career professionals will help to accomplish this goal.

We should also be building career ladders for those qualified teacher aides who are in our classrooms now who want to become teachers.

We can also do a much better job of matching future teachers to job opportunities. A young woman in Pennsylvania who wants to teach in Florida shouldn't have to spend an hour on the phone

waiting for someone to talk to her. This is why my Department will set up a National Job Bank and Clearinghouse for Teacher Recruitment this year.

I have also asked the Entertainment Coalition for Education to use their creativity and imagination to help us launch a major public recruitment campaign for teachers across America. I believe they will be shooting their first ad during Oscar week.

### **Preparing Teachers for the Modern Classroom**

To prepare the next generation of teachers, we must turn to the presidents of our great colleges and universities for new leadership. Our colleges of education can no longer be the sleepy backwaters that many of them have been. There must be greater collaboration from all parts of the university community, including the arts and sciences.

Bob Maxson, your very fine president here at Cal State-Long Beach, may have put it best when he said that it "takes a whole university to prepare a teacher." The Cal State system is setting a national standard for thinking ahead. I am particularly intrigued by the decision of Cal State Long Beach to offer a warranty on every one of its graduates.

- But there is still much more work to be done. This is why I am announcing today a National Conference on Teacher Quality for university presidents, teachers and other education leaders. This conference will seek to develop a road map for the future to help states and communities meet their need for well-qualified teachers.

Our colleges of education simply must be supported in reaching for a new level of rigor. I urge colleges of education to move swiftly to create many more clinical

experiences for their students. Future teachers need to be learning how to teach alongside master teachers.

A new emphasis on preparing teachers by using a clinical model may also require universities to take a look at their own current incentive structure for promotion and pay. Can there be a better balance between research and the practice of teaching and service to educators in the K-12 system?

## **Retaining and Rewarding Teachers**

State and local education leaders have a key role in elevating the teaching profession.

First, I call on states to end the practice of issuing emergency permits or licenses over the next five years. Now, some say that this can't be done given the overwhelming number of young people in our schools. They simply must have teachers, qualified or unqualified. But this view is based on making no changes in the current system. And that is what I am urging policymakers to do. Change the system!

We really do need to take a comprehensive look at established rules about the portability of pensions, credentials and years in service. The current maze of disconnected state laws has become a significant drawback to keeping good teachers in the profession in our increasingly mobile society.

The issue of how we test teachers must also be addressed.

The failure of so many prospective teachers to pass such a state test in Massachusetts has brought this issue to the forefront of public discussion. There are many questions. What do these tests really measure? How well do they predict

teacher effectiveness? How does one state test compare to another? This is why I have asked the National Academy of Sciences to launch a benchmark national study of teacher testing.

I also encourage many more states to follow California's lead in creating a broad system of support for first time teachers. We give new teachers the toughest assignments and leave them to sink or swim. Then we wonder why we lose more than 20 percent of them in their first three years and close to 50 percent in our urban areas. This brain drain has to stop.

As state and local leaders consider new strategies to improve teaching, I ask them to avoid the either/or mentality that is dominating the current debate on teaching. One side argues that the current licensure and compensation system keeps talented people out of the profession, does not ensure quality, and provides few incentives for teachers to improve their practice. Others contend that teachers need proper training and rigorous standards for entering the profession.

My friends, both sides are right. We need to lower our voices, get practical and think in a new way.

This is very much a state and local issue. But I have been thinking a lot about this matter. So let me try to start a national dialogue about this very important aspect of the teaching profession. I ask you to consider the following suggestion to start this conversation. There are three parts to this proposal:

First, a new teacher would be granted an initial license for up to three years after passing a written exam of content and teaching knowledge and an assessment of teaching performance. During this trial period, schools would offer new teachers annual contracts and be able to

counsel out those individuals who really should not be in the profession.

Second, I suggest the creation of a professional license. The standards for this new license, developed at the state level, would be higher than those for an initial license, and would involve peer review by a panel of teachers and a supervisor.

Peer review is very important, but it must be done right. Veteran teachers will tell you that the people who are hardest on a teacher who doesn't cut it are fellow teachers. And that's what professionalism means. Teachers, themselves, must take an active role in improving their profession.

If a teacher has worked hard to earn a professional license, he or she deserves to be rewarded. Raising standards for teachers must be accompanied by raising salaries as well. It's a balanced equation.

The conditions for renewal of this professional license should be determined by each state. This suggests that teachers need to keep their knowledge and skills up to date. It is so very important to recognize that professional development as we know it simply has to change. And those of us who are policy leaders must listen to what teachers are telling us.

Last month, we released a first time report on teacher quality and teachers are telling us in no uncertain terms that the current practice of one-shot workshops really has to go. Teachers are asking us for more depth, more planning time, and greater opportunities to learn from each other. And they want help in addressing the realities of the modern classroom: student diversity, students with disabilities, technology and new high standards.

The third part of my proposal would be a voluntary advanced license such as the

advanced certification that now exists through the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Some states are moving to support and compensate teachers who pass these rigorous standards. California is one of 13 leading edge states and I encourage every state to follow this example.

All teachers should be encouraged to continue to learn and grow. That's why I ask districts to take a serious look at a new and developing concept called knowledge and skills-based pay.

This three-part model of an initial, a professional, and a voluntary advanced license seeks to strengthen teaching by linking it more closely to high standards. I ask you to consider it and join me in a national conversation to make teaching the first class profession that it deserves to be. This is an example of realism mixed with hope.

The many future teachers who are here with us today are as vital to the strength of this nation as the patriotic men and women of our Armed Services. I want to thank every one of you for your dedication and commitment. And I thank every classroom teacher in America who is making a difference in a child's life. The most important thing we need to say to teachers is thank you for a job well done.

## **Sparking Creativity and Innovation**

Now a few thoughts about the future. Let's stretch our minds and ask ourselves how we can make American education more engaging.

I believe the schools we design in the future should be built as centers of community. Americans of all ages are going to want to be learning all the time. The idea that a school building is open more than 12 to 14 hours a day is not as far fetched

as it may seem — and surely the power of technology is a starting point to make that happen.

I've spoken to you about the need for every young person in America to speak at least two languages. Doesn't that make so much sense in this new global world? Let's move beyond the American habit of stumbling along, phrase book in hand, when we visit a foreign country.

Last month, with the support of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and with the help of NASA, the National Endowment of the Arts, the Jet Propulsion Lab at Cal Tech and the J. Paul Getty Trust, we launched the Mars Millennium Project.

This project is a fusion of the arts, science and technology and it will ask thousands of young people to imagine and help us create the first American colony on Mars. We need to develop hundreds of projects like the Mars Millennium Project to make learning exciting and challenging.

We live in a world that is so much more visual and our young people see the world around them bursting with ideas. We need to foster their creativity and give them that sense of excitement that comes with a true search for knowledge. The arts are not a frill but an essential in this Information Age.

The imagination of our young people is so often captured by music, dance, the touch of a poet's words, the sweep of a painter's brush, or new images created on a computer. There is a fusion coming, for example, between the arts and the computer. We need to be ready for it.

We are, my friends, at the edge of a new time. The 21st century is just hovering, like the sun coming up on a new day. It will be an Education Century, of that I am sure. If we give our young people — America's millennium generation — the

education they deserve, just think of the opportunities. You have to be excited.

I am optimistic. With a realism that is mixed with hope, we can achieve the democracy of excellence we seek. Let us build those new connections that bind us together. And let us always remember that the victory is the classroom with America's teachers—America's future.

Thank you.

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