

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB SPEECH

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MR. SHANKER: We are meeting here today, and I am addressing you, because it is time once again to take a major step forward in trying to improve the schools of our nation.

Five years ago, A Nation At Risk and numerous other education reports were published. We at the American Federation of Teachers were open to the criticisms presented in the reports, and our response was an unprecedented one from the educational community. We said that we were willing to talk, we were willing to consider the various recommendations in the reports, and we were willing to negotiate; we were open to discussing changes in our schools.

We did not do that because we agreed with all the analyses or accepted all the remedies proposed in those reports. We took that position because we felt that public education in this country was indeed troubled. It still is.

Public education needed to change, and it still does. And it needed allies. We saw that these reports represented a new commitment by the business community and the political community, especially governors, and we wanted to act in such a way as to encourage their increased support and involvement in public schools.

So we agreed to open for discussion even items that had been "no-nos": items that, traditionally, no union would discuss;

you just said, no, that is not something that we can talk about.

The reforms that resulted from A Nation At Risk and the other reports constituted a much-needed corrective to the softness of schools in the late '60s and throughout the '70s. Yes, we needed schools that had standards, and we still do. And we needed schools that require students to take certain subjects. All of these changes were needed. These reforms essentially were state regulations and mandates telling all the school boards that the public is not spending its money to allow children to do what they want to do; it's spending money to accomplish certain important social objectives.

However, there was a naive assumption in all these reports that learning something or being educated is something like taking a pill or eating a meal: all we had to do was pass a law saying, "Take four years of math or three years of math and four years of English and two years of history and something else," and the mere "taking" of it would mean that the stuff called education would be poured in, and we would get the desired results.

We saw the problems with these naive assumptions, but also saw these reports and reforms as an important first step. We remained open. We were also stimulated by the reports and the discussions which took place and came up with many bold new ideas of our own, including the proposal for a national, teachers' certification board and assessments. That proposal included the notion that there were ways of providing for differentiated staffing that would not engender the traditional problems found with merit pay proposals. We also pioneered

provisions for peer review, where teachers themselves would play a role in helping their fellow teachers and, if necessary, help to say that they don't belong in the school system because they could not be improved. These and other ideas and proposals were quite different from those found in the long history of teacher organizations in this country. And they ended up not being merely the proposals of one leader or a handful of leaders; they were actually ratified by thousands of delegates to conventions of the American Federation of Teachers, who embraced them enthusiastically.

Now here we are five years later; we have no regrets about our stand on education reform. A lot of good things have happened. The public responded to the schools, it responded to our receptiveness to some new ideas, responded to the governors, responded to the business community. Teacher salaries are now higher, in some places quite a bit higher. More students are taking math and science. More teacher candidates are being tested before they can come on the job -- not that the tests are very good, even now, but at least they're better than what existed in most places before. And issues like tuition tax credits have at least temporarily receded in the public mind as the public sees the public schools trying to improve and trying to change.

But there are other things that have happened as a result of education reform that are not so good. One is the great obsession with standardized testing, where we spend lots of time getting kids to figure out how to pass these idiotic tests instead of how to read good books or how to do real mathematics

-- but that is not the point of today's talk.

In fact, so many things have happened as a result of reform that we are at a point where there is now more than one reform movement in this country. There are really two.

The first reform movement is the one you read about in the newspapers; it's the one that Secretary of Education Bennett talks about and says is being "hijacked." It's the one that comes from state legislatures and is signed into law by governors; it's the one that the public knows about. It's top-down, it's regulatory, with thick books of legislation telling everybody how many minutes there should be in the school day and the school year, how many hours there should be of this and that, and what should determine whether someone passes or fails -- all those kinds of things.

[Before I move on to the second reform movement, I'd like to make some comments on the first, major reform movement.] I'd like to take issue with Secretary Bennett and say that that reform movement has not been "hijacked." On the contrary. Just look, for example, at the transcripts of students now coming to the schools. They are taking four years of English, they are taking mathematics, they are taking science -- they are spending the required number of hours on different subjects, they are taking more and more tests, and they are doing more homework than they've done in a long time.

In California, Professor Michael Kirst, who is with a research organization called PACE, looked at these transcripts and asked the question: "Is reform really taking hold? Is the law being implemented?" And the answer is yes. This is the

most broadly implemented set of reforms within my memory and probably within the memory of anybody here.

However, I think that the response to reform, in my view, at least, has been very disappointing. Usually, when you get regulations like this from government, it's because you haven't been doing a very good job yourself. And basically, schools were not doing a very good job. They got too loose, they got too soft; and therefore the kind of reform that raised standards and requirements was needed. But that should have been only a beginning.

In private business, for example, when the government comes down and says, "You have not been doing a good job, so we're going to pass all these laws regulating you, telling you what to do," you know exactly what happens -- and it's different from education. The business itself will say, "Look, maybe we deserved that kick. Maybe we deserved that push, but, you know, that's no way to run a business. You can't tell us how to run it from the state capital. We've learned our lesson now; now we're going to come up with our own ideas, and we're going to show you that we've got ideas that are better than yours."

In other words, the hope of many people who sponsored or supported that first wave of reforms was that it would not be the end, but that it would be the beginning, that it would stimulate people in public education to come up with their own and, indeed, with better answers than would be imposed on them from some distance by those not actually involved in the field.

However, what we have now is still that first wave of reform. We're doing more and maybe a little better of the same

things we've always done. We're back at one end of the pendulum swing this country seems always to move in. Now we have tight standards -- and that's very good for the kids who are able to fit the traditional system, but it tends to say to all the other kids: "Don't go on, because you're not going to make it." And then we say, "That's no good, because we're pushing too many out." So we soften up the standards and then we say, "That's good, because that is keeping a lot of kids in school." But then the kids who used to learn a lot aren't learning as much, because they know they can get a free ride.

We are now moving back to higher standards, but we always seem to be moving back and forth between easy and tough, hard and soft. Very few people are asking, "Can we do something that's different? Can we move out of this pendulum swing, neither end of which is very good for anybody?"

The reform movement is not bypassing the schools. It's in most schools in this country. It's not bypassing teachers. But unfortunately, it is bypassing about 80 percent of the students in this country. That is, these reforms are very good for kids who are able to learn in a traditional system, who are able to sit still, who are able to keep quiet, who are able to remember after they listen to someone else talk for five hours, who are able to pick up a book and learn from it -- who've got all these things going for them. The reform movement is very good for them because now they have to do the things that they should have done and could have done all along. It will likely improve their grades and their abilities, and it may broaden the bases of the top 10, 15, 20 to 25 percent of the students.

But it will not do anything for those students who are not able to sit still and listen for that many hours, and are not able to read that long. It will not do much for those kids who, every time they are asked a question, stand up and are humiliated in front of all their colleagues in class, because they never get it right -- it's not doing anything for them. This is not, as some would like to believe, a problem only for the disadvantaged. They have special problems and deserve lots more help. What I'm talking about is not a "special" problem because the traditional ways of learning don't seem to work for the majority of our kids.

What we have now is a school system which, if I can give an analogy, goes something like this. Suppose you went to a doctor and the doctor prescribed a certain medicine for you. After a few days on the medicine not only didn't it work, but it also made certain other things happen -- you broke out in various ways, it actually provoked certain reactions. You go back to the doctor and say, "Doc, this pill not only didn't help me, but look at these other bad things it's done to me." If the doctor were our school system, he would look at you as the patient and say, "You've got a hell of a lot of nerve not responding to my pill. What's wrong with you?"

Essentially, we have one remedy, one pill, one way of reaching kids. And then we say that something is wrong with the kids if they don't respond to our remedy. Unlike the doctor, we don't say, "I'm sorry, here's what I should have given you. I'm sorry it didn't work. Try this and try that, try something else." We don't have the flexibility; we don't adjust. We

don't assume that the patient's body or mind is right, and that we have to find a way of reaching it. We just assume that we are a God-created institution; that if some individual doesn't respond to us, then something is wrong with that individual. We'll help, but usually by doing more or even less of the same thing that didn't work. And that's the point of view that needs to be changed.

I've said all this in order to bring you to the second reform movement in this country, a movement that has as its underlying view the notion that I just expressed in the story: namely, that we need an institution that responds to people in the best way other professions and institutions respond.

It's a view that's reflected in the Carnegie report, in the vision at the very beginning of the report. It's a small reform movement, and it's very fragile. It's not something that you'll see in every school across the country; it's not something that every teacher or supervisor is talking about. It may very well be that neither the Carnegie report nor the few places where the second reform movement is happening would have happened if there hadn't been A Nation At Risk or these other reports and reforms. But nonetheless, even though they may owe a lot in terms of their history and existence to this first wave of reform, they're very different.

Those who are engaged in this type of reform are aware of the fact that 80 percent of the students do not learn well in traditional settings. That's true in the United States; that's true in England; it's true in France; true in Germany. And so these people, a small group of people in a small number of

places across the country, are developing a bottom-up approach to reform. They are trying things out of their own experience, their own understanding of children, their own understanding of these conclusions. They're trying to build something new and they're trying to build something that will be different, that will be effective for more than the 10 or 15 or 20 percent of the students who have been able to learn throughout history. They're trying to reach that 80 percent of the students who have not been reached in the past.

Some interesting things are happening in a number of places. They are all places where there is a strong collective bargaining relationship. You don't see these creative things happening where teachers don't have any voice or power or influence. These things are all happening in places where there is no external threat to the superintendent, or to the leader of the union, or to the union itself. These are people who can say, "We can take some chances, we can take some risks; because even if we lose some support, we are still going to lead here."

These mostly are places where the bread and butter issues -- while they are never solved and people always want more -- are in good shape and people feel "We've been treated pretty well. We don't have to spend every minute of the time thinking about the peeling paint or the falling plaster, or the lousy salaries, or the no toilet in the bathrooms," or something like that. It's not that they have everything they want, but it's no longer the only or main issue that's before them.

These are also places where there's a strong union leader and there's a strong management leader and a relationship of

trust or respect between them. In some of those systems there are also some academics, some foundations, and some business people who work with them to help them change the rules, help them to negotiate with the terribly bureaucratic system.

This is a radical and tiny movement. We can count its districts on the fingers of both hands. You've been reading about them, and they are not many. There's Dade County and there's Rochester, Toledo, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Hammond, Indiana, and some schools in New York City. I'm going to leave out two or three, but we're still not up to the fingers of the two hands. That's about what it is.

Then you can also add a few school networks, like those of Ted Sizer and those of John Goodlad, that are trying things that fit into this second reform movement approach. Then there are some individual schools or programs, like the Key School, schools-without-walls, cities-in-schools, and things like that.

Now when it comes to the first, the major reform movement, there's a very big, thick book out of the U.S. Department of Education, The Nation Responds, to show you how extensive that movement is: every state, every locality -- here's what's happening, here's what the kids are taking, here's the homework requirement, here's the teacher testing requirement, here are the changes. Yes, there's a huge, massive response to that first wave of reform.

Fine, but the problem is that when it comes to documenting wave two, the movement concerned about reaching the 80 percent, not just succeeding a little better with the 20 percent, there's not a thick book; there's hardly a page-ful of places to talk

about.

Therefore, I would like to make a proposal today. The proposal is based on the notion that we have not moved reform fast enough; not the first wave -- that's moving along very well -- but the second one, that one that looks at trying to reach the 80 percent who are not making it.

We can't wait until all the districts throughout the country have the strongest and the best bargaining relationships. We can't wait until there are more districts that have both charismatic union leaders and superintendents. We can't wait to find places where everyone feels free to risk things.

The question is, can we come up with a proposal which will move us from five or six or seven or ten districts that are doing these very exciting things to reach many, many more students? Can we expand that number very rapidly; not from 10 to 20, but from 10 to 1,000 or 2,000 or 3,000? Can we put in a new policy mechanism that will give teachers and parents the right to "opt for" a new type of school, to "opt for" the second type of reform?

I believe that we do not have to wait for the impossible to create the possible. I do not believe that all the conditions have to be right throughout the system in order to do the possible.

What is it that I propose to get us there? I propose that just as we said collective bargaining is the way of improving things system-wide for schools and for teachers, and just as within the last few years we have developed ways in which entire schools, by a method of consensus or majority vote, can decide

to do things that are very different from the rest of the system and to move out of a lock-step situation -- this union now needs to seek ways that will enable any group of teachers -- let's say six or seven or eight or twelve teachers in any building -- and any group of parents to opt for a different type of school.

How would this work? The school district and the teacher union would develop a procedure that would encourage any group of six or more teachers to submit a proposal to create a new school. Do not think of a school as a building, and you can see how it works. Consider six or seven or twelve teachers in a school who say, "We've got an idea. We've got a way of doing something very different. We've got a way of reaching the kids that are now not being reached by what the school is doing."

That group of teachers could set up a school within that school which ultimately, if the procedure works and it's accepted, would be a totally autonomous school within that district.

The district should create a panel that would be used to either approve or reject the teacher proposals that would come in. The panel could be a joint panel between the union and the board; it could include outsiders, or it might be a system in which the union and the board would separately have to ratify such proposals.

What should the proposals look like? Obviously, I'm not going to lay down a master plan, because the whole point of this is to have people within a school develop their own proposals; so they are all going to be different. Schools all across the country now, unfortunately, look very much alike. These schools

will look very different, and they should follow certain guidelines that don't tell you what the school is going to look like, but what you're going to look for in terms of approving such a proposal.

I would approve such a proposal if it included a plan for faculty decision making, for participative management; team teaching; a way for a teaching team to govern itself; and a provision that shows how such a subunit would be organized so the teachers would no longer be isolated in the classroom throughout their professional lives, but would have the time to be available to share ideas and talk to and with each other.

I would approve such a proposal if it showed how teachers would work with individual students, coaching rather than lecturing most of the time. I would also include the following: How would you design a school that would eliminate most of the harmful aspects of schools at the present time? We know that everybody learns at his or her own rate, but schools are organized so the kids better learn at the rate the teacher is talking, because otherwise they're not going to learn. We say that everyone learns at his own rate, but then we develop a system that says: You'd better learn at the same rate.

I would approve a school in which kids are not placed in unfair competition with others -- which is what we do now by age-grading but failing to recognize that the oldest kid in a class is a year older than the youngest. And then we find that the youngest kids in the early grades end up having a higher dropout rate and so forth years later, because they're convinced that they're dumber when actually they've only been competing

with kids who are a lot older than they are.

I would approve a school that shows how, when children are trying to learn something, they would not be humiliated in front of the whole class. (Most people who didn't learn how to drive early on were probably taught by their husbands or wives or someone who they cared for -- because it's a humiliating experience. Most of us are willing to pay for a driving instructor so that we don't have to face the consequences of personal humiliation. Kids are the same. They don't want to see their efforts at learning, especially when they're still groping and trying, exposed to someone else.)

Can we come up with a plan for a school which does that? Can we come up with a plan for a school which doesn't require kids to do something that most adults can't do, which is to sit still for five or six hours a day listening to somebody talk? Most adults can't do it; most kids can't do it. Kids who are able to do it later become college graduates. That's the greatest educational requirement that we have.

What about developing a plan which shows we understand that some kids don't learn right away by listening to someone talk or by reading a book, which are the only two ways the system uses to get kids to learn in school? What about a school in which there are videotapes and audio tapes and computers and simulation games, and one kid teaching another kid and volunteers within a school helping those kids -- that is, a variety of different ways of learning, and its maximization?

What about a plan that says that learning mathematics or social studies is more than repeating and regurgitating back

things on standardized examinations, that we're going to have a school that also develops creativity and other aspects of intelligence? Because the kids who do the best on these tests are not necessarily people who later on in life make the greatest contributions to society. (As a matter of fact, if you look at the Einsteins and the Churchills and the Edisons, they all had trouble in school, because they asked creative questions and they were considered wiseguys. They didn't care as much about the facts as they did about ideas.)

I would also include a provision for cooperative learning, the notion that kids can sit around a table and help each other just as the kids help each other on a basketball team or a football team or a baseball team -- kids working with each other. The research on that is extremely strong.

I would also ask the teachers who submit a plan to show that the group of kids that they're taking in reflects the composition of the entire school. That is, we are not talking about a school where all the advantaged kids or all the white kids or any other group is segregated to one group. The school would have to reflect the whole group.

And then the teachers would have to show that they've done some thinking about what they want to show at the end of this. They would have to think of some good goals and be able to get away from some of the standardized tests and look at some of the better things that the National Assessment of Educational Progress has done: goals such as, can kids read and understand an editorial in the newspaper when they're finished with this school? Can they look at an advertisement of a supermarket and

understand what the shopping list is going to cost? Are they able to understand a railroad or a bus timetable? Can they write persuasively, argue, attack problems? Are they able to do a whole bunch of things?

The school would announce in advance to the community what it is that it's trying to achieve and announce how it's going to test it, how it wants to prove what it can do. And then, finally, it would also admit something: that we really do not know just how to reach the 80 percent of these kids; that nobody has ever really educated all of them, and that therefore we are engaged in a search. It's a lot like trying to find a cure for the common cold, or for AIDS, or for cancer, or for a chip that we don't yet have.

Therefore, it is important to organize this school in such a way that people have a chance to keep records of what they have done, of what works and what doesn't work. And just as doctors are honored because, when they try something, they publish the results so that no one else need die of the same cure again, we need to honor those educators who try something and when it doesn't work, they inform all of us that it didn't work.

That's a picture of sort of a set of guidelines, of what I would look for in a school proposal if I were on one of these panels.

I also would say that in order for such a school-within-a-school to exist, the other teachers in the school and the principal would have to sign off and say, "We agree to it." It's very hard to have a subunit like that working in a hostile environment. Six or twelve teachers ought to be able to say,

"Here's our plan; it's a good idea." But they also ought to be able to say to the others: "Look, we're doing this in such a way that it's not going to hurt you and it's not going to upset you." And then they ought to get a budget, their per capita share of what a school spends on students, and be able to find different ways of spending the money.

This would be a school of choice; that is, no teacher would be forced to be in this subunit, and neither would any parent be compelled to send a child to this school. It would be a way for parents and teachers to cooperate with each other, to build a new structure.

It is also essential for there to be a guarantee that such a school would be left alone for five to ten years, provided that parents wanted to keep sending their kids there, teachers wanted to continue teaching there, and there were no precipitous drop in certain indicators. One of the things that discourages people from bringing about change in schools is the experience of having that effort stopped for no good reason. I hear this all over the country. Somebody says, "Oh, Mr. Shanker, we tried something like that 15 years ago. We worked around the clock, and we worked weekends. We read and discussed books. I never worked so hard in my life. And then a new school board was elected or a new principal or superintendent came in and said, 'That's not my thing.'" And that's the end of the school or program.

You'll never get people to make that kind of commitment if our educational world is just filled with people who went through the disappointment of having been engaged and involved

and committed to building something only to have it cut out from under them.

There is a role in all this for the federal government, state government, the local government, the business community, and foundations. We do need some grants. It would not be operating money. These schools will have to operate on the same money that all other schools do. But these schools do need some technology, they will need some networking capacity, they will need time for teachers to meet after school and perhaps during weekends and summers to develop these programs. The teachers will need to attend conferences, and they will need training. And then probably we ought to develop some sort of a computerized, national network, a databank, so that some teacher in the eighth grade can say, "I used the following National Geographic videotape; it worked very well, and here are the questions I used." Other teachers could then dig into that and find the eight or twelve or fifteen ways that have been found by other teachers to work, and add their own comments. There's no reason why we can't build a national pool of teacher experience as part of this proposal.

This proposal is not pie in the sky. It's small. The reason I'm proposing it is that I think it is almost impossible to change an entire school system. Why? We've got the same schools today that we had 100 or 200 years ago. There has been no shortage of reformers. Every couple of years the reformers come along. We've got to admit to ourselves that even though people have known that the system doesn't work, and even though there have always been reformers, it hasn't changed; and it

hasn't changed because we're trying to change everybody at the same time.

When you try to change everybody at the same time, you get tremendous amounts of resistance. Not only is that true of an entire school system, it's even true of an entire school.

I know that, for instance, New York City has a provision, an excellent provision in its agreement, which says that if 75 percent of the teachers in a school vote to modify the union contract, they could do it, because they wanted to create better conditions. It's a marvelous provision, and in some schools it's happening. But in other schools, I hear that even if 80 percent of the people agree, they don't want to shove it down the throats of the other 20 percent, because it's very unpleasant to have lunch every day with one person at your table who says, "You're forcing me to do something that I didn't want to do."

We've got to take that into account. That's reality, so we've got to give that 75 percent the chance to do something and leave alone the 25 percent who don't want to do it. At least the 75 percent will do something.

This is a way of getting around the question of, do you shove reform down people's throats, or do you try and change a whole state at once? You'll never do it. If you try to change a whole system at once, you won't do it, or you'll water it down so much it's meaningless. You can't even change a whole school at once. If you have a charismatic leader who holds everyone's hand so he develops consensus over one or two or three years, it will happen for a while, but it's very difficult. You have to

wait for a magical person to come along and to work real hard with everybody, but then eventually that person leaves or gets burned out, and away it goes.

So we need to provide a policy mechanism to allow smaller groups of people to be able to do these things. The great advantage that this will have is that we could do this in practically every district in the country. People won't have to say, "Well, that's in Rochester or that's in Dade County or that's all the way at the other end of the district. They had ideal conditions. Someone or ones let them do it." There is hardly a school in this country where you can't find six or seven or eight or nine teachers who will sit together and come up with ideas that are quite different, and who will make this work.

I would like to say that we in the American Federation of Teachers intend to make this work. We're going to go to each and every one of our locals across the country. We're not going to ask them to change the whole system; we're not going to ask them to even change a whole school, though if they can, great. We're going to say to them, "Make it possible for any group of six, seven, eight, nine, twelve or more teachers who want to do this to do it."

There will be other teachers in that same building who will not do it but they will be talking about it and watching it. And if it works -- and I believe it will, over time, for this is no magic bullet but a way in which people can do things more intelligently and in a way that is not going to harm kids -- I think that other teachers are going to say, "Hey, that looks

pretty good to me. We'd like to try it next year."

It's a way of building by example. It's a way not of shoving things down people's throats, but enlisting them in a movement and in a cause. I believe that this proposal will take us from the point where the number of real basic reform efforts can be counted on the fingers of two hands to a point where, if we meet here again a few years from now, we'll be able to talk about thousands and thousands of schools in this country where people are building a new type of school that reaches the overwhelming majority of our students.

[Applause]

THE MODERATOR: Mr. Shanker, we have a number of questions regarding the proposals. First off, will your proposal for small groups of teachers to create autonomous schools evolve into a form of educational anarchy and weakened discipline among teachers? And one that follows up on that: What right would a principal have to approve or disapprove the proposed school-within-a-school?

MR. SHANKER: Well, I indicated that unless the other teachers and the principal and the school board and the union end up agreeing to it, it's going to be a hostile atmosphere and it's not going to work. But I think that there are principals and school boards and teachers and unions all across the country who, if presented with a plan that does not have adverse effects on others, will say, "Go ahead. Try it." Why not? I have faith that that will happen.

Anarchy? I doubt it. We're asking people to submit

proposals, and there will be guidelines and reviews. But the main reason you're not going to have anarchy is that the parents do not have to send their children to the school. If there's anarchy, the customers will be gone in no time at all; so it will take care of itself.

THE MODERATOR: Won't there be a stigma on students that you propose be put into a school by participating in such a program being labeled as perhaps inferior students?

MR. SHANKER: I indicated that the mix of students in those schools would have to reflect the school as a whole, and therefore what we're talking about is not inferior students or superior students; we're really talking about a group of parents and teachers who want to do something that is different.

Now, it's true that the parents of those students who are able to sit still and learn in the traditional way and who are doing very well right now might be less motivated to move their children to a different setting. They might say, "My kids are making it under the current system." But they might instead say, "My kid is really fast. You know, he is doing very well now, but if he were in a set-up where he could really work at his own rate, he would learn twice as much as he can by sitting in a traditional class, even though he is learning everything he can learn in this class."

So I don't really think it would be stigmatizing. It would really be a question of different styles of working, the one found in a regular school and the other being what I'm outlining here. And I imagine these teachers would develop a school that would appeal to all types of students.

THE MODERATOR: What is the difference between what you are proposing and the increasingly popular magnet school concept?

MR. SHANKER: A magnet school is frequently an entire school, and it's often a new school or one which has been closed down or emptied out. Magnet schools have worked, I think, quite well, and we think that ought to continue. However, it is a very slow process, very slow, with an existing school. Often you've got faculty who were there before who don't want to be part of the magnet school.

With a new school, it's easy to do. You can select those teachers and those students who want to go to the magnet. With an existing school, which has 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 students and a large faculty, it is very difficult to turn it into something like that. So here is a way in which you could turn parts of that school into a magnet.

THE MODERATOR: Doesn't your new school plan risk the expending of effort on the solution of the minute and not on long-term plans, in effect?

MR. SHANKER: On the contrary. I think it is the long-term problem that is the problem right now. We have a school system in which we find that those students who are still in school at 17-1/2 -- let's not count the dropouts, they are gone -- our successful students, only 20 percent of them are able to write a decent letter to an employer giving one or two reasons as to why they should get a job.

If you give these graduating students six common fractions, the ones we run into every day in our arithmetic class, and ask

them to place these fractions in size order, only 12 percent of them can do that. Almost none of them are able to figure out which train they would take in Philadelphia to get to Washington at a certain hour on a certain day.

The fact is that we are not making it now. And, therefore, doing the same old thing a little better isn't going to work. We've got to think of something that is totally different.

THE MODERATOR: Mr. Shanker, you have said that your school-within-a-school concept should have its own budget in each case and their own per capita share. Wouldn't this require more than their per capita share for a smaller teacher/student ratio and for special equipment?

MR. SHANKER: Well, special equipment is one shot. I would hope that all levels of government and the private sector would be helpful with that, especially since these are going to be small departments and not system-wide. But other than that, it may very well be that the smaller outfits would take less of a bite of the budget. They might also figure out ways of saving money.

In the long run, if an entire school were to operate on the basis of self-contained teams, you might save an awful lot of money on administration. You might have a lead teacher in each team. You might have a team of teachers shaping each other up. Just imagine the amount of money that is spent now to have somebody walk into a teacher's room once a year to see if that teacher is doing a job. And that's not a very good way of finding out. But suppose you have eight teachers working with each other and responsible for the same group of students.

Guess what happens when one of those teachers is not doing a good job or one of those teachers is creating a problem for the other teachers? You've got accountability, and you've got it very quickly. The other seven teachers are likely to turn to the eighth and say, "Listen, Jack, if you're having problems at home, we'll carry you for a couple of weeks. Otherwise, what's the matter? Why did you do this?"

So there are a great many benefits, not only accountability benefits but cost savings benefits. In the future, I would think that people who are now assistant principals and department chairmen wouldn't be down the hall in some office, but they would actually be the heads of these teams, working with kids and with other teachers. So there are savings there rather than expenditures.

THE MODERATOR: Several questioners have asked a similar question. What if the money for this, or what if this system experiment fails? What would happen to the children if they are not educated in this process? And part of that same question is, what is the estimated cost of this program?

MR. SHANKER: Well, I indicated the costs will be the same. As far as experiments failing, I am not saying that if you do this that tomorrow the scores will go up or everything is going to work very well.

I indicated that we have to treat the question of how to educate the 75 or 80 percent of our kids who are not being reached the same way as we treat finding a cure for a disease. Therefore, I don't know whether we're going to find answers in three years or five years or ten or fifteen years. But I do

know this: that if we don't try this, we won't have an answer five or ten years from now; we'll have exactly the same results. It's hard to say for sure, but we have about the same results now in our schools as we had in 1940, as to the percentage of kids who are able to master certain intellectual tasks. We are doing a lot better now because we're holding more of those who used to drop out. They now stay longer. So we're doing better with lots of them, but we are not reaching that other point of educating the majority well.

Now, what's the alternative? The alternative is to turn to some huckster who says, "I've got the magic bullet. This is going to do it. We all know what to do." It's nonsense that we all know what to do. If we all knew what to do, we would be doing it. If we all knew what to do, we would arrest everybody who is doing what they're doing now.

We're engaged in a search. A doctor comes before you and says, "I'm doing the best I can for you, but I can't guarantee that I'm going to produce this result tomorrow." A lawyer can't guarantee that he is going to win the case for you. And we can't guarantee that this or that child is going to be well educated. What we can guarantee is that we won't harm the kid. And we are harming many of them now by humiliating them or saying you can only learn this way.

We can say, "We are not going to harm you. We are going to do everything that we know. And when we don't know, we are going to do the best we can; we are going to keep looking." That's all we can say as honest people to the public. Anybody who promises anything else is like the people who are selling

all sorts of cures for incurable diseases out there. And sometimes we think we are getting our money's worth from these people, but basically we know that advances in any field are not made by those people. They are made by the people who work at it long and hard.

THE MODERATOR: The next questioner asks, would you advocate that states and school districts automatically waive regulations and requirements for these new schools, including accountability provisions?

MR. SHANKER: I would recommend that the states, districts, and the federal government waive many of them. There are all sorts of regulations that get in the way of change. But I would only waive them if the group of teachers forming this school with parents and children can show that they have some alternative way of taking care of the problem. That is, I am not saying get rid of accountability procedures. But if, for example, you've got a bunch of people who are working as a team with each other, who are going to shape each other up, then you may not need somebody walking in twice a year to inspect teachers.

If the group provides a better, an alternative way of accomplishing the same purpose, then the rules and regulations should be waived.

THE MODERATOR: To move on to another subject, you don't like standardized tests, but how are you going to know if all these little creative schools you are advocating will be teaching kids the basics they need to be creative, like the very basics: reading, writing, and arithmetic?

MR. SHANKER: Well, as we are doing it now, we are teaching the basics and we are testing every year, and then when we are all finished we find that only 4.9 percent of the high school graduating kids can understand a railroad timetable and only 20 percent can write a decent, persuasive letter.

What I mean is, let's recognize that the current system isn't working, and that is because we are not teaching kids to write letters and we are not teaching them to read good books; we are teaching them to pass tests. And the tests don't mean very much by themselves.

By the way, I like tests, and I even like standardized tests. I would like to have a standardized reading test where you have to read something that is worthwhile, or write something that is worthwhile. But what we have now is a national scandal in testing.

A doctor in West Virginia has pointed out that, according to the tests, everyone in America is just like everyone in Lake Woebegeon: we are all above average. And that means that the tests are really not tests; they are cosmetics. They are designed to make everybody look good.

The tests show that every state is above average and the averages go up and up every year, except for the three states that don't allow anybody to look at the tests in advance or that follow some different procedure. So that tells you what is going on in the other states, just how many are cheating.

There are also different sets of norms for the tests. There are urban norms and there are suburban norms, and so forth, and districts can decide to compare themselves against anybody they

choose. So, if you are a clever school board or superintendent, you can first match yourself against affluent districts and make yourself look real bad. Then you can say, "Now I'm going to do something about this," and next year you'll match yourself against New York City, Detroit, et cetera, and you will look better all of a sudden. And there is no legal requirement that you have to tell the people that you have changed the rules of how you are reporting or who it is that you are comparing yourself with.

If you look at the same standardized test today and ten years ago, you will find that there was decent poetry on it ten years ago. Today, it's pure doggerel, as are the tests themselves.

I would love to have standardized tests that we could have confidence in, and I hope that somebody is out there building them. I am a strong believer in testing. I believe the public is spending a lot of money on education, and they've got a right to know what the schools are doing and what the schools are not doing. They are not getting that today with the tests that are out there.

THE MODERATOR: Mr. Shanker, in view of your past strong opposition to bilingual education, would you support any of the groups that propose using a language other than English as the dominant language for instruction?

MR. SHANKER: I am not opposed to bilingual education, nor have we ever been. We just said that the federal government should not mandate any particular way of teaching anything because that depends on individual children, it depends on

teachers, it depends on settings. There are bilingual programs that are excellent. There are some that are junk. There are programs of immersion that are excellent. There are some that are terrible. There are English as a second language programs that are good and those that are bad.

In other words, the final word is not yet in. And my guess is that, just as some medicines will work for one person and not for another, we are not going to end up with one single magic bullet in education which is going to work for everybody. It may very well be that for some kid bilingual education is an excellent approach, and for the kid next to that one some other approach is better.

My objection is that a bunch of lawmakers who haven't been near a child for years shouldn't sit there and, without any research, say that there is only one magic bullet that has to be used for everybody. That is legislative malpractice. That is not original, entirely.

THE MODERATOR: Japanese schoolchildren spend an average of two months longer in school than American schoolchildren each year. Should we lengthen our school year?

MR. SHANKER: The Japanese have a lot of other things going for them, too. When a Japanese student is sick, the Japanese student's mother goes to school and sits in the child's seat, takes notes all day long, and then goes home and teaches the kid in bed. And in a Japanese street, if there is a kid who is supposed to be in school, nobody will pass that kid by. They will say, "Why aren't you in school?" And they will pick up the phone and call the school or call the police department.

So, if you want to do what the Japanese do, we have to have all of our mothers devote their full lives to one thing, and that is the education of their children. We have to have everyone in society devoted to that. America would have to become just like Japan.

The point is, it is not just doing one thing like Japan, and it'll all be fine. It is not just doing two or three or four months or weeks or hours more of what we do right now. That isn't going to do very much. When you've got so many kids who are leaving school without being able to write a good letter or without being able to understand the newspaper, you can't convince me that twice as much of something that doesn't work is going to be the cure. You've got to find a different medicine.

When we do find a different medicine, we ought to be open to the question of how long should the school year be and how long should the school day be. But we shouldn't just say that if something isn't working, give someone twice as much of it.

THE MODERATOR: Mr. Shanker, we are nearly out of time, but before we ask you our last question we would like to present you with this Certificate of Appreciation for speaking to us again, and a National Press Club Medallion.

Our last question is similar to one that was asked the last time you were here. But now that the likes of Hart, Biden, Gephardt, DuPont, Dole, and others, have dropped out of the race for the White House -- and we did ask you this the last time you spoke to us -- we ask you again, will there be, or when will there be a teacher President?

MR. SHANKER: With all the other problems we have --

[Laughter]

MR. SHANKER: I think the important thing is to have a President who cares for children and schools and teachers and families. We haven't had one for a while. And if we look at the statistics on kids who are at risk and at the increase in deaths during childbirth and the increase in various diseases and deformities, I think the future of our country is being determined by many shortsighted policies. And one doesn't have to be a teacher to be intelligent enough to understand what this means to individuals and the tragedies in their lives and what it means to the future of the country.

Just as Franklin Roosevelt didn't have to be a poor person to understand the plight of the unemployed and the plight of workers, a President doesn't have to be a teacher in order to understand these things. And somehow we have to find a President who cares about the future of the country. You can't care about the future of the country if you don't care about children.

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