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THE SCHOOLS AND HIGHER EDUCATION:

A PARTNERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE

California School Boards Association

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Anaheim, California

University of California

November 30, 1984

Thank you very much for your kind invitation to speak. The conference theme--"Turned On To Education"--is an upbeat, positive, and constructive sentiment about our schools and their future that I fully endorse. My remarks this afternoon are intended to keep us turned on. I sincerely hope that they will do so.

These are especially interesting times for all of us involved in education. So much so, in fact, that it is often difficult to find the time to reflect on what we do and why, and conferences like this help us take stock, share ideas, and break the daily pattern of our routine, thus permitting reflection and thought of a kind we so desperately need. Absent such opportunities, the weight and momentum of our obligations simply carry us on, too often with unexamined assumptions guiding our behavior and unwise policies dictating our practices.

Caught up in our round of responsibilities, we can lose sight of the fact that we are engaged in one of the most important functions of a society: the transmission of the culture from one generation to the next. In a very real sense, every society stands just one generation away from catastrophe; societies and civilizations can only endure by passing along to the next generation the knowledge, skills, and values that define their cultural and intellectual heritage. Formal schooling is the principal means for accomplishing this task in our large and heterogeneous society.

For our society, the task takes on special complexity as the scale and significance of what students must know to meet the demands of modern life are growing exponentially. This fact helps us understand John Gardner's assertion that "The ultimate aim of the educational system is to shift to the individual the burden of pursuing his own education." While this has always been a long and painstaking task, it is probably more difficult to accomplish today than at any time within memory.

Thus, what we are engaged in is neither trivial nor easy. It is, on the contrary, bristling with challenges. That we succeed is absolutely essential to the functioning of our democracy, to our free society, and to our way of life.

Most Americans also believe that the schools are essential to our future. I am often asked why the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education had a major impact on the American public. My answer is that our report, and those of similar groups, acted as a catalyst, transforming a vague public unease into a clarion call for reform. But the two dozen or so reports on education issued in 1983 did not create the national concern about education. It was the other way around. The national concern about education created the reports.

What the reports did, in my opinion, was both to reflect and to reinforce a growing national consensus that American education needed attention and improvement. The public worried because the public cared; and a worried or even a hostile public, in my opinion, is far preferable to an indifferent one. Owing to the remarkable public reaction to the 1983 education reports, we presently possess the first national opportunity in a generation to bring about real and lasting reform in our schools. We cannot count on another one for some time--at least not within the working lifetime of most of us assembled here for this conference.

What will we do with this opportunity? That is a question that American education, from kindergarten to graduate school, is in the process of answering.

The answers would more likely be forthcoming if our schools on the one hand and our colleges and universities on the other were to begin to think critically and creatively about their relationship with each other.

Cooperation between secondary and postsecondary education is rich with possibilities because schools and colleges already influence each other in a variety of formal and informal ways. The most obvious way colleges and universities influence the schools is through their admissions requirements--the skills and knowledge students are expected to have mastered before embarking upon college-level study. Such expectations substantially influence the school curriculum, the allocation of school resources, patterns of staffing, and the school ethos.

Besides fixing their standards for admission, colleges and universities influence the schools in other ways as well: through the training of teachers; through research on learning theory and curriculum models; through the preparation of diagnostic, aptitude, and achievement tests; through the writing of textbooks, to mention a few examples.

But the schools also influence our colleges and universities by the attitudes toward learning, study habits, values, and academic preparation students graduating from high school bring with them to college. Indeed, much of what colleges and

universities can accomplish with such students depends on what the schools have imparted to their graduates.

In short, we have an interlocking set of relationships in which, ideally at least, teachers and administrators and those in higher education work together in the best interests of the schools, colleges, and students alike.

In recent years, I regret to say, this cooperative relationship has unravelled some, the victim of many different kinds of stresses and strains on both higher education and the schools. You do not need me to tell you, for example, that the past twenty years or so have not been easy ones for elementary and secondary education. While the social and educational upheavals of the 1960s brought increased educational opportunity to millions of previously underrepresented youth and many useful changes to the schools, they also brought a dilution of the curriculum, increasing disciplinary problems, growing conflicts between public and private education, and a shifting onto the schools of responsibilities that had traditionally belonged to the family, the church, and other institutions in our society. We have also seen the decline of the teaching profession as a respected and rewarding life's work. These problems, coupled with those that are fiscal in origin, have made the work of education seemingly less attractive than it had been for the millions who committed

their professional lives to education in the post-World War II years and in the 1950s.

The sixties and seventies were a difficult and troubled period for higher education as well. It was a time of widespread student disquietude, and curricular experimentation (other euphemisms would do as well) in colleges and universities; and one result was the loss of any clear sense of coherence in the undergraduate curriculum. Many colleges and universities, uncertain of what they should demand of their own students, reflected a similar tentativeness about what they should expect of students seeking admission. Many institutions simply lowered or diluted their admission requirements, sending a signal to students and to schools alike that rigorous preparation did not matter.

The message is reinforced by the practice of granting credit for remedial courses--that is, for high school level courses, mostly in English and mathematics, offered for credit by our colleges and universities. Both practices--the lowering of admission requirements and the offering of college credit for high school work--amount to telling the schools and their students that acquiring basic skills need not be done in high school because it can be done on campus. Why, then, should those of us in higher education have been surprised when students and schools took us at our word?

These developments were just one symptom of the fragmentation of the cooperative relationship between the schools and higher education. A director of admissions at a Midwestern university presented testimony to the National Commission in which he contrasted the era of the 1950s, with its cooperative and cordial ties between the schools and higher education, with the late seventies and early 1980s. "The inward look of the late 1970s," he said,

may be viewed as a self-serving period in which institutional survival was paramount and student and societal interests were secondary. For sure, cooperative relationships between colleges and high schools were left unimproved. It was an era in which financial constraints brought about by the combination of declining numbers of eighteen year olds and double-digit inflation caused educators to depart from long held beliefs that certain educational principles must be preserved regardless of the forces that are operating against those principles. A country, shaken by Vietnam and Watergate, sought excuses if not answers for what was perceived by some as rapidly deteriorating educational offerings.¹

¹Cliff Sjogren. "College Admissions and the Transition to Postsecondary Education: Standards and Practices." Paper prepared for the National Commission on Excellence in Education under the sponsorship of the National Institute of Education, June 1982, pp. 22-23.

But we would be wrong to assume that we are the victims of forces beyond our control. The National Commission on Excellence in Education put it this way: "We are confident that America can . . . reverse the current declining trend--a trend that stems more from weakness of purpose, confusion of vision, underuse of talent, and lack of leadership, than from conditions beyond our control." We can change things and we can make a difference. The best evidence for that assertion is that change has already begun to happen.

Nationally, efforts to forge partnerships between the various levels of education are burgeoning. Summer institutes for gifted students, projects to inform high schools of how their students are performing in college, programs to encourage promising minority students to think about and prepare themselves for college, on-campus summer and in-service programs for talented teachers wishing to enhance their skills or change their teaching emphasis--these and similar efforts are springing up all around the country. These are encouraging signs that colleges and schools are more willingly sharing their talent and resources to improve schooling in America.

Here in California we have a compelling set of reasons for strengthening the links between the schools and our institutions of higher education. According to an April 1984 study of the condition of education in California, we face several disturbing issues:

Compared to other states, California students do somewhat less well overall on nationally administered tests. Recent changes in high school graduation requirements--and in college and university admission requirements--may boost student performance, however.

Despite California's relative wealth, it spends less per pupil than most other states. If spending is adjusted for inflation, California spent \$6,000 per classroom less in 1982-83 than in 1977-78.

Over the next decade, California faces the enormous task of employing approximately 100,000 more teachers to meet the needs of its school system--at a time when salaries for teachers are low compared with other professions and working conditions are difficult at best.

California also faces the challenge of increasing the number of minority students who complete high school and move on to further education. This is especially important for Hispanic students, who by the year 2000 will comprise the largest single segment of school-age children in the state. California has a very high drop-out rate among minority students, and especially among Hispanic students, more than one-third of whom do not graduate from high school. (That figure, I should add, is probably conservative. It is entirely possible that

the percentage of Hispanic students who do not finish high school in California is closer to the national rate of 43 percent.) In any case, it would be hard to overstate the urgency of increasing the number of minority students who complete high school.²

With the exception of school finance--which is a responsibility of all Californians--each of these issues involves a role for both higher education and the schools.

As I have already noted, the quality of education students receive in the schools bears directly upon the ability of higher education, including the University of California, to carry out its functions. We all know, for example, that despite the fact that UC admits only the top one-eighth of California high school graduates, many of our entering students are unprepared for their University studies and need to take remedial courses in English or mathematics. Over the past six years, four University committees have examined the problem of underprepared students from various perspectives. Their efforts have led to some constructive results and we hope others now in the proposal stage will be realized as well.

²Information from "Conditions of Education in California," Policy Analysis for California (PACE), James W. Guthrie and Michael W. Kirst, Directors, April 1984, pp. 3-4.

For example, a few years ago the Academic Senates of the University of California, the California State University, and the Community College system jointly issued a statement on competencies in English and mathematics expected of entering students; statements on expectations in other disciplines are now in preparation. Another step has been to increase our efforts to inform high school students of the kinds of courses they will need to prepare themselves for college. And the University has tightened its requirements for admission, requirements that will take effect in the fall of 1986. The California State University, just this month, has also taken steps to tighten its admission requirements.

But it is clear that much more needs to be done. My own concern about this matter led me to appoint two committees in the first month of my administration to advise me on what more the University of California could do to help. I asked the Committee on Student Preparation, chaired by the University's Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, Professor William Frazer, to review our work with the schools and to suggest new ways of building a long-term partnership with them for the purpose of improving the preparation of students for college and university studies. I also asked the Program Review Committee for Education, chaired by Professor John Goodlad, former Dean of UCLA's Graduate School of Education, to examine the University's current role in precollegiate education as a field of study, and to suggest ways in which the talents and

resources of the University as a whole, but especially the talents and resources of our Schools of Education, can contribute to the current movement for educational reform in California.

Both committees have now completed their work and sent forward a total of forty-three recommendations for action. We will be reviewing and discussing these recommendations with our colleagues within the University and in the schools during the weeks and months ahead. You may be interested in some of their suggestions, and I would like to mention just a few.

First of all, there was remarkable agreement between the recommendations of the committees in several areas. Both agree, for example, that the University must seriously address its responsibilities for the education of teachers by working harder to attract students of high caliber and exceptional promise to the teaching profession, and by contributing more to the pre-service and in-service needs of professional teachers. Both emphasize the need for greater faculty involvement in the state's schools and in research bearing upon the problems and opportunities of primary and secondary education. Both committees stress that a firm commitment to strengthening the ties between the University and our state's schools is indispensable.

Second, while there are many excellent individual and campus efforts underway to assist elementary and secondary education, more needs to be done if we are to establish a coherent and consistent effort to help the schools. We have some projects directed toward improving teaching skills and subject matter knowledge, for example, but little scholarly work designed specifically to develop or evaluate curricula, and even less research directly aimed at a particular school problem or interest. We need to build on efforts already underway, but build on them in such a fashion as to begin long-term academic partnerships with the schools.

The University of California has included in its 1985-86 budget request several programmatic initiatives responsive to this effort. We are seeking funds to enable University faculty to work directly with teachers and administrators in the schools to help teachers keep their skills and knowledge current. We have asked for support for a program to provide opportunities for faculty to work with teachers and administrators to develop model curricula and instructional strategies. And we are seeking funds to develop and administer diagnostic examinations to students before their senior year in high school to identify areas students need to improve to get ready for college level work. The ultimate aim of these academic partnerships is to establish a community of excellent schools within the geographic region of each of our nine campuses.

We are, in sum, making a serious and concerted attempt to shoulder our responsibilities for making education in California as excellent as it should be, for the sake of our children and for the sake of the future.

The success or failure of the current school reform movement has implications that stretch far beyond California. California is, by history and tradition, a bellwether state. If it can be done here--if higher education and the schools can work as equals and partners in strengthening the education of our young people--then our experience will make a difference elsewhere.

Now that the reports have been issued, the problems analyzed, the possibilities assessed and education established near the top of the nation's agenda of major domestic concerns, it remains for those of us who are most instrumentally involved and most professionally accountable to do our part. The time is ripe. We should be turned on to education. You are; I am. Let's do it and have some fun while we are at it.

Thank you.