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The University and the Schools: A Partnership  
for the Future

David P. Gardner, President  
University of California

September 3, 1985  
Piedmont Unified School District

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As someone who has spent a great deal of time in recent years involved in the problems and prospects facing our schools, I am delighted to be here today--and to have this chance to talk to a group that is directly concerned with the process of schooling. I very much appreciate Bob French's invitation to address as you stand on the threshold of a new school year.

It must be very pleasant to begin this year knowing that the one just past was rich in achievement. I understand that this is one of the few districts to have passed a school tax measure last year, an encouraging sign of community understanding and support. And I know that the Piedmont Unified School District is blessed with an unusually active and concerned group of parents and interested citizens, some of whom are here this morning.

You must be most excited, however, about the national recognition Piedmont High School has won from the Department of Education. Piedmont High has been named as one of the hundred or so top schools in the country--a model for others--and that is a remarkable compliment to the talent and dedication that are abundantly present here. Besides, my wife Libby is a graduate of Piedmont High School, and I know more about this school than you might

suppose. In any event, it is a special pleasure to offer congratulations on this outstanding accomplishment.

Let me also point out that the very existence of a national recognition program for excellent schools reflects the persistent American interest in education. I am often asked why the education reports of 1983, including the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, had the impact they did on the American people. My answer is that our report, and those of similar groups, 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 was to reflect and 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 is, in my opinion, far preferable to an indifferent one. In any event, thanks to the remarkable public reaction to the education reports of 1983, we now possess the first opportunity in a generation to bring about major reform in our schools. We cannot count on another such opportunity for some time--at least not within the working lifetime of most of us here today.

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.

One of the most promising answers beginning to emerge is the effort to renew and strengthen the partnership between higher education and the schools. I am convinced that one of the best contributions we can make to improving education at all levels is to begin to think critically and creatively about the relationships between colleges and universities on the one hand and our schools on the other.

Cooperation between secondary and postsecondary education is especially rich in possibilities because schools and colleges already influence each other in a variety of formal and informal ways. Colleges and universities influence the schools through their admissions requirements--the skills and knowledge students are expected to master before embarking upon college-level study; 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, and through a host of other means as well.

But it is not just a one-way street. Schools substantially influence our colleges and universities. They do so principally through the attitudes towards learning, study habits, values, and academic preparation students graduating from high school bring with them to college. In fact much of what colleges and universities can accomplish with their students depends on what--and how much--the schools have succeeded in imparting to their graduates.

In sum, 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 individual students alike.

In recent years, unfortunately, this cooperative relationship has unravelled some, the victim of many different kinds of stresses and strains on both higher education and the schools. It is no secret that the past twenty years have been difficult ones for education at all levels; the ravages of inflation, the upheavals of social and economic and educational change, have all taken their toll. We have been too preoccupied with our own set of problems to spare much time and energy for those of others--or even for those problems we share. During the eighteen months in which the National Commission heard testimony about all aspects of education, one persistent theme was the deterioration of a once cordial relationship between the schools and higher education, and the pressing need to do something about it.

Much has happened during the two years since the education reports of 1983 galvanized American society into action on behalf of the schools. One of those developments has been a renewed sense that we can change things and that we can make a difference. The best evidence for this 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, 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--should help boost student performance, however.

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, despite urgently needed improvement, salaries for teachers are low compared

with other professions and working conditions are often 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 make up the largest single segment of school-age children in the state. And at the moment, the drop-out rate among minority students, and especially Hispanic students, is unacceptably high. It is entirely possible that the percentage of Hispanic students who do not finish high school in California approaches the national rate of 43 percent.

Besides these problems, there is the problem of inadequate student preparation, one with which we at the University are all too familiar. 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.

And 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 partnerships with the schools.

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, to take effect in the fall of 1986. The California State University has also taken under consideration steps to strengthen 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 fall of 1983, during 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 completed their work last fall, and their forty-three recommendations for action have been reviewed and discussed with our colleagues within the University and in the schools during the past year. 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.

The University has included several programmatic initiatives in its 1986-87 budget request to the state that are responsive to these recommendations. One of them that may be of interest to you is the proposed University/Schools Cooperative Research and Extension Program in Education. Developed by our Davis campus in cooperation with teachers and administrators in the schools, this program is modelled on the University's Cooperative Extension--the program that provides the citizens of California with both the results of applied research and educational programs in agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, community development, and other areas. This research/extension model, common to land grant universities throughout the country, has been responsible in major ways for the phenomenal success of American agriculture.

We believe the same techniques can be applied to education. Under this program, basic and applied research methods will be brought to bear on educational problems. Research results and ideas for educational improvement will be brought to K-12 schools through extension programs in key schools and work with master

teachers and student teachers. Ideas tested in the key schools will be disseminated to other schools through in-service training for teachers, conducted primarily by excellent K-12 master teachers.

The primary goal of this proposed program is to increase students' capacities to read, communicate, compute, and make judgments in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences so that, by the twelfth grade, they are well-prepared for either employment or further education. And the secondary goal is to plant the seeds of a lasting partnership between the University and the schools so that we can work together smoothly and cooperatively on problems of mutual interest and great importance to the future of education.

Another example is a three-year pilot program, approved by the State last year, to increase the number of students who transfer from the Community Colleges to four-year institutions. For a variety of reasons, the number of such students has declined during the past decade. We are concerned about this development, and particularly concerned because so many of California's minority students enroll in the Community Colleges. Under the pilot program, up to twenty transfer centers will be established at selected Community College campuses. These centers will be jointly operated by the Community Colleges, CSU, and UC, and their goal will be to boost the number of students who transfer to four-year institutions--particularly minority, handicapped,

low-income, and other students who are underrepresented among transfer students. We are very optimistic about this program and will be watching its progress closely.

These are just a few of the ways in which we are trying to shoulder our share of responsibility for creating an environment conducive to thriving, dynamic schools in California. We are very keenly aware of the opportunity to make a difference that I mentioned earlier, and of the critical need to seize that opportunity while we can. And we should also be aware of the fact that 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. And what an exciting prospect that is.

In closing, let me say how much I have enjoyed this opportunity to share my views on a subject I regard as important to each of us. You are on the threshold of a new year, a new chance to make a difference, to work on the side of creative and constructive change. You have chosen to take some time this morning to reflect on the challenges ahead. That is a deeply important task. 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 that task in our large and heterogeneous society. That we succeed is absolutely essential to the functioning of our democracy, to our free society, and to our way of life.

I know it is true here--certainly it is true at the University of California--that your task demands the efforts of everyone--faculty and administrators, support staff and parents, community leaders and concerned citizens. You have succeeded extraordinarily well, and as you begin a new term, I am pleased to offer my congratulations and to wish you a creative and rewarding school year.

Thank you.