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Subject: Paige Blasts "Soft Bigotry of Low Expectations"
From: "Miller, Maria" <Maria.Miller@mail.house.gov>
Date: Wed, 12 Mar 2003 18:10:51 -0500

Wanted to share this with those of you who may not have already seen this...apparently he 'blew them away.' The Secretary's remarks are attached beyond the press statement.

-----Original Message-----

From: U.S. Department of Education
Sent: Wednesday, March 12, 2003 5:05 PM
To: U.S. Department of Education
Subject: Paige Blasts "Soft Bigotry of Low Expectations"

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Public Affairs, News Branch
400 Maryland Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

FOR RELEASE
March 12, 2003

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PAIGE BLASTS "SOFT BIGOTRY OF LOW EXPECTATIONS"
Says Every School Must Teach Every Student to High Level with High Standards

PALO ALTO, Calif. -- In impassioned remarks to the Commonwealth Club of California, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige today blasted what he terms the "soft bigotry of low expectations" and insisted that educators must "let go of the myths and perceptions about who can learn and who can't," so that all children can reach high academic standards.

Paige decried that "some of the biggest skeptics are those whose job it is to believe in children," noting that, "teachers who believe that certain social groups are slower to learn -- and react by lowering the bar for performance -- rob those children of opportunities to grow intellectually and achieve their dreams."

The secretary spoke from the heart when he added that, "any system and any person that gives up on any child because of what he looks like or who his parents are is no less discriminatory than a jeering mob blocking the schoolhouse door. It is every inch the bigotry that once exiled some people to the back of the bus."

Paige's powerful remarks addressed one critical goal of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 -- to correct the previous and pervasive "separate and unequal" education systems that "taught only some students well while the rest -- mostly poor and mostly minority -- floundered or flunked out." Under NCLB, the landmark education reform law that has for the first time injected accountability into state and local education systems, states must develop and implement a single accountability system, including academic standards, assessments and proficiency goals, for all students in a state.

Most significantly, all students must make steady progress toward full proficiency by 2013-14. A central principle of NCLB is that holding all children to the same high standards, including high expectations and challenging curricula delivered by highly qualified teachers, will enable all children to excel.

Unlike those who make excuses and insist that "all children cannot learn," advocates of the disadvantaged have applauded and supported the central tenets of NCLB, as well as President Bush's insistence that the progress of each subgroup of students, including low-income, ethnic and racial groups, and children with disabilities and limited English proficiency, be measured and reported for all to see. In that way, educators, schools and parents will have powerful information to improve and target instruction and extra help based on each child's needs.

Paige also added that research shows that teachers tend to under-estimate the intelligence of low-income children, and that their subsequent low expectations have "incredible power" to undermine potential. He cited a Stanford University study that found that high-achieving African-American students perform worse on tests when they are reminded in subtle ways about derogatory stereotypes.

There are "thousands of schools and teachers that are producing incredible results," Paige observed, naming several, and noted that, "it not only can be done, it is being done every day."

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NOTE TO EDITORS: The text of Secretary Paige's prepared remarks follows.

Remarks of The Honorable Rod Paige
U.S. Secretary of Education
Commonwealth Club of California
Palo Alto, California
March 12, 2003

Thank you, Dr. Wilcox for that introduction.

I want to acknowledge Michael O'Farrell and Applied Materials for providing support for this luncheon.

I thank the department's regional representative here in California. A California education leader for more than 20 years who I have had the opportunity to work closely with over the past several years...the department's liaison and trusted source of information for all of you here, Mary Jane Pearson who is based in San Francisco.

I also want to thank my good friend, Bill Evers, from the Hoover Institution.

I thank you for having me. It's a great honor to be here. For a century now, the Commonwealth Club has played an important role in the public discourse on key issues that mold our society and make us who we are.

So it is with a great deal of pleasure that I come before you to talk about something that is very important to me and to the president as well, and that's the quality of public education in America.

It's been nearly 20 years now since A Nation at Risk first sent shockwaves far and wide about a growing crisis in our schools. That report touched off decades of well-intentioned reforms.

Yet when President Bush took office in January 2001, we were no closer to solving the problems identified in A Nation at Risk. In the greatest, most prosperous nation in the world, we had created two education systems--separate and unequal--that taught only some students well while the rest--mostly poor and mostly minority--floundered or flunked out.

Last month, I spoke at the Hoover Institution about the president's efforts to implement fundamental change to close the growing achievement gap identified two decades ago. I talked about how his efforts led to the bipartisan passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001--an historic body of legislation that provided unprecedented levels of

2

funding coupled with reforms to ensure the money is wisely spent.

And it didn't come a day too soon.

In the decades before and since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, generations of young people in our public schools have tumbled into a void--all victims of low standards and low expectations.

When President Bush stood on the steps of the U.S. Capitol to take the oath of office, he knew our nation faced an urgent education crisis. We had invested trillions of federal, state and local dollars in public education. K-12 per pupil spending had nearly doubled. Yet student achievement remained flat.

National report cards showed:

two out of three fourth-graders are unable to read proficiently;
seven out of 10 inner-city and rural fourth-graders are unable to read at the most basic level; and
America's 12th-graders ranked among the lowest in math and science achievement among their counterparts around the world.

More than a year ago, *No Child Left Behind* became the new law of the land and insisted that schools be held accountable for improving student achievement. It insisted on instruction and methods that work. It insisted that schools empower parents with information and choices for their children. And it insisted that every child learn by third grade the one skill upon which all others are based: reading.

No excuses.

My remarks at Hoover last month made the case that *No Child Left Behind* provided a key ingredient missing in all previous reform attempts: a framework for change that demands high standards and high expectations for every child in every classroom.

Today I want to take the discussion a step further. Changing the law is just the start of reform. To produce great schools worthy of a great nation, we must also change our hearts and our minds. We must let go of the myths and perceptions about who can learn and who can't.

The evidence is clear that we've got a lot of work to do. And some of the biggest skeptics are those whose job it is to believe in children.

Anyone who's been in education as long as I have has heard all the excuses. "Those kids" are too poor. "Those kids" are too disadvantaged. We're doing the best we can with "those kids."

What they're really saying is: We don't believe intellectual heft is in the DNA of poor and minority children. As one Los Angeles high school teacher put it: "The mindset is that these kids can't learn."

That's certainly true in the case of one elementary school principal from Arizona. He began a recent newspaper op-ed with this startling pronouncement: "Educators know the truth but are afraid to say it: All children cannot learn."

In San Diego, a school board member told a reporter that "he shouldn't be held responsible for any declining scores under his 12-year tenure because the 'demographics' had changed, leaving fewer white students."

Despite that stunning admission, he won the strong endorsement of the National Education Association affiliate and re-election.

One morning I was working out and heard someone on NPR reading a first-grade teacher's letter complaining that her students were so disadvantaged and she was thinking of taking another job in--and I quote--"a district where kids don't fail so much."

What other profession can get away with an attitude like that?

3

Imagine if a doctor called up a radio station and complained: "Jeez. I'm sick of sick people and all the work it takes to make them well."

You'd want his license yanked.

Imagine if a firefighter arrived at a disaster and whined about all the smoke and water while the house burned with all the people in it.

You'd want him fired.

What we face in education today is a crisis of national proportions--and some experts suggest, of national security proportions.

Our children need our help and they need it now. The president and I believe in the bright potential of every child, and the research is clear: teachers' attitudes affect student achievement. Children--no matter their race, their family income or their zip code--show the greatest achievement gains with teachers who really believe they can learn.

Research tells us that teacher expectations vary by gender and ethnicity. For example, evidence suggests that teachers don't expect boys to do as well as girls in reading and that teachers have higher expectations for White children than for African-American or Hispanic children.

The evidence also shows that teachers tend to over-estimate the intelligence of children from middle- and upper-income families. They tend to under-estimate the intelligence of children from lower-income families.

And the research tells us that children internalize those expectations. If expectations are high, then they will thrive. If expectations are low, then they will come to believe they are hopeless causes and surrender to failure.

A recent study at Stanford University showed the incredible power of low expectations to undermine potential. Specifically, the study found that high-achieving African-American students perform worse on tests when they are reminded in subtle ways about derogatory stereotypes.

The study found the same applied to the math scores of high-achieving college women when they were reminded of the myth that females are less capable at math than men.

If a teacher's attitude can undermine even a young adult with a track record of high achievement, just think of the damage that can be done to an impressionable child.

My friend, Hugh Price--president of the National Urban League and himself the object of low expectations in grade school--points out in his book *Achievement Matters* that a Harvard study found:

"Black students were three times more likely than their white classmates to be identified as mentally retarded; almost twice as likely to be identified as emotionally disturbed; and 1.3 times as likely to be identified with a specific learning disability."

Teachers who believe that certain social groups are slower to learn and react by lowering the bar for performance rob those children of opportunities to grow intellectually and achieve their dreams.

A 2000 study by MetLife produced dramatic evidence about just how deep and wide the chasm between hope and expectation really is in our schools:

60 percent of secondary school students polled said they were "very confident" they'd achieve their goals for the future,

52 of their parents showed the same optimism,

But only 19 percent of the teachers believed their students would achieve their dreams.

In other words: 4 out of every 5 students are being taught by a teacher who is pessimistic about their future.

So you can imagine my irritation when a teacher called me up on a talk show once and started down that road of: You just don't understand the kids in my classroom.

I thought: Oh, I understand all right--more than you know.

I grew up in a little segregated town in Mississippi where the school kids outnumbered the textbooks--where people with not a lot had the strongest motivation there is to do better. Only there wasn't a big movement afoot to make sure we weren't left behind. In those days, there was no President Bush saying education is a civil right and, by golly, we'd better do right by these kids.

I was one of those kids who could have been left behind. And I thank God every day that I had parents who were educators who made sure it didn't happen. But not a day goes by that I don't think about those children who aren't as lucky--those children who are counting on you and me and that teacher on the phone to do right by them.

Low expectations can take many forms.

It may be as explicit as buying into the stereotype that some people just are not as intelligent, so why bother?

It may take the shape of a misguided sense of compassion that says it's kinder not to give some children difficult material because they will get discouraged and give up.

It may even come from the simple fact that the teacher--also the victim of low expectations and poor preparation--has no idea how to fix the problem.

But explicit or implicit, intentional or not, the effect is the same.

President Bush calls it the "soft bigotry of low expectations." And so it is.

Any system and any person that gives up on any child because of what he looks like or who his parents are is no less discriminatory than a jeering mob blocking the schoolhouse door. It is every inch the bigotry that once exiled some people to the back of the bus.

There is no room for that kind of attitude in the schools that President Bush envisions. In our nation's classrooms, every child will be educated and no child left behind.

No doubt about it, teaching is hard work. Even our First Lady, Mrs. Bush, struggled when she was a young teacher. In an ideal world, all parents would read to their children and make sure they arrive at school ready to learn. But it's not an ideal world--and many children, often from rural and urban areas, begin school needing help with the basics.

So anyone who wants to teach must be committed to the proposition that every child can be taught to a high level, and every child can learn. And in this effort, we have many great models--teachers who are genuine heroes to so many children whose lives they've changed forever. We are blessed in America to have many great teachers who truly are--in the words of General Omar Bradley--the real soldiers of democracy.

And I praise them and thank them for choosing this noble profession.

We are also blessed to have schools that are getting the job done by placing the needs of the children above their own. They are creative and persistent in fixing minor problems before they become big ones.

Most of all, they communicate to the children that they believe in them and care about their success.

One of the best in the business is Joyce Bales, the superintendent of public schools in Pueblo, Colorado.

To Dr. Bales--low-income does not mean low expectations. She believes that every child can learn.

So all the things the president and I talk about--she did. She got a research-based reading program. She got the parents involved. She set high standards and high expectations and insisted on results.

And now people in Pueblo know what history has long shown: When you raise the bar, people rise to the challenge. Student achievement in Pueblo soared.

Recently, the Council of Great City Schools honored large urban school districts that are actually closing the achievement gap. Their study, Foundations for Success, produced new evidence that, even under the most difficult circumstances, children can learn if you get it right.

One of the districts honored was right here in California--the Sacramento City Unified School District--under the great leadership of Dr. Jim Sweeney, superintendent of Sacramento Schools.

Jim had heard all the excuses, too. "We can't do it with these kids." "We can't do it with these resources."

He knew that while Sacramento faced many challenges, they paled in comparison to the problems of other schools in poorer areas of the country that were racking up high test scores.

So Jim packed off dozens of his staff and set off to do what others should do as well: learn first-hand how schools with high-need populations are successfully turning out young scholars. And they came away not only inspired by what they saw but also fired up with new ideas and a new attitude.

Now he's looking to work his magic on the local high schools. And we wish him luck.

At Rolling Hills Elementary School in Orlando, Florida, they are doing more with less. Last year, per pupil spending decreased, yet student achievement increased significantly.

On the state's accountability system, the school's overall performance grade rose from a 'C' to a 'B.'

All across our nation, thousands of schools and teachers are producing incredible results with what some call "those children":

Places like the KIPP academies that have taken under-achievers and turned them into scholars.
Places like Waitz Elementary School in Mission, Texas, where migrant farmers' children are scoring higher than their peers in more well-off suburbs.

Places like Samuel Gompers High School in the Bronx in the district with the lowest per-capita income in the nation, where the majority of the graduates go on to college.

Places like Banneker High School in Washington, D.C. and Bennett-Kew Elementary in Inglewood, California, where low-income, minority students are blowing the lid off achievement.

As we at the Department of Education work in partnership with the states to implement the reforms of No Child Left Behind, we have all of these schools to remind us that it not only can be done, it is being done every day.

I will leave you with a story about one of them.

On the street in the Bronx where Colin Powell grew up is a small high school called Banana-Kelly--named both for the street where it sits--Kelly--and the shape of the street--like a banana.

Timothy Brown is a senior at Banana-Kelly who says if someone had told him in ninth grade that he would not only

6

graduate from high school, but would go on to college to major in business, he would have called them crazy. Because he wasn't headed in that direction. All kinds of mischief was more like it.

But Banana-Kelly turned his life around. And the reason is that the teachers and principals looked at him and they didn't see a minority kid with nothing to offer. They saw potential. And a spark of curiosity that just needed someone to fan it.

For his part, Timothy saw teachers who knew his and every other kid's first names and last. He saw people "who were there for us 24/7."

"We may not have a lot of things," Timothy said of his school. "But we do have love and caring and communication."

Now, this same kid who once couldn't imagine graduating from high school sees things on the horizon when he thinks about his future. He says: "I would like to be a person in Congress. I would love to do something like that."

Timothy Brown has had many teachers over the years and his advice for those new to the profession is to expect the best from every student.

"You need patience," he said. "You need communication. You need the love that, what if this was your child?"

"And if you have students who look different or act different, you have to do it from your heart."

Amen to that.

Thank you very much.

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