

## Archived Information

President Clinton's Call to Action for American Education in the 21st Century

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### Safe, Disciplined and Drug-free Schools

We cannot educate our children in schools where weapons, gang violence and drugs threaten their safety. For students to learn well, their schools must be disciplined and feel safe. While most schools do provide a secure learning environment, a growing number of schools in all types of communities--urban, suburban, and rural--are experiencing problems with violence and with alcohol and drug use.

Fortunately, schools, parents, and communities are finding practical ways to provide children the safe and disciplined conditions they need and should expect to find in school, such as by promoting smaller schools, respectful communities, fair and rigorously enforced discipline codes, teacher training to deal with violence, school uniforms, and after-school programs that keep kids productive and off the streets.

As a nation, we too must do everything possible to ensure that schools provide a safe and secure environment where the values of discipline, hard work and study, responsibility, and respect can thrive and be passed on to our children. We have a basic, old-fashioned bottom line. We must get drugs and violence out of our schools, and we must put discipline and learning back in them.

### Ensuring Safe, Disciplined and Drug-Free Schools

The Clinton Administration challenges all schools to have in place high standards of discipline and behavior with tough measures to keep guns and drugs out: a "zero tolerance" policy. In October 1994, the President signed into law the **Gun-Free Schools Act**, and issued a Presidential Directive later that month to enforce "zero tolerance" in our schools: If a student brings a gun to school, he or she does not come back for a year.

In last year's budget, the President successfully protected the **Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program**, which now provides school security, drug and violence prevention and education programs in 97 percent of America's school districts.

We must continue working to ensure that every child, every teacher, and the community can feel safe in and around the school building.

In 1994, the Long Beach, California School District implemented a mandatory school uniform policy for nearly 60,000 elementary and middle school students. District officials found that in the year following implementation of the policy, overall crime decreased 36 percent, fights decreased 51 percent, sex offenses decreased 74 percent, weapons offenses decreased 50 percent, assault and battery offenses decreased 34 percent and vandalism decreased 18 percent

- 1 *Schools should consider adopting uniform policies.* School uniforms are one way to deter school

violence, promote discipline and foster a better learning environment. The Administration sent a *Manual on School Uniforms* to the nation's 16,000 school districts last year. The manual is a road map for communities and schools that want children in their schools to wear uniforms and is a vital source of information about successful programs.

- 1 ***Communities should enforce truancy laws.*** One of the most effective ways to reduce juvenile crime is to crack down on truancy. The Administration has provided every school district in the country with a *Manual to Combat Truancy* to help communities establish fair and effective laws to reduce truancy and keep kids in school and off the streets.
- 1 ***Keep schools open in the afternoons and summers.*** The President's budget includes a new initiative to provide additional safe havens and to extend learning opportunities for children and their families at schools around the country. The initiative will help after-school, summer and weekend programs get started as Community Learning Centers, get us "back to basics" and foster active community involvement. Keeping schools open late can help give young people a safe haven from gangs and drugs, and peace of mind for working parents. They can serve as homework centers, offer enrichment courses and tutoring in reading, math, and science, and help prepare young people and other neighborhood members to go to college.

#### **Bringing in Parents to Increase Safety**

Fathers at Beech Grove City Schools in Indiana have joined together to be "Security Dads" attending school-sponsored sporting events, dances and other student activities. "Security Dads" ensure proper behavior, evict troublemakers when necessary, and generally keep the peace. As a result of this effort, parental involvement in their children's education has increased and student behavior has improved.

## **Making Schools Places for Values, Not Violence**

Schools are a place for values, not violence. They must teach the basic American values of respect, hard work, and good citizenship.

- 1 ***Promoting character education as part of every curriculum.*** We cannot raise standards in every other subject if we fail to teach our children good values and how to be good citizens. Toward this end, the President has hosted two White House Conferences on Character Education and has encouraged the development of character education through the Improving America's Schools Act.
- 1 ***Protecting the religious freedom of students and reaching out to America's religious community to support the learning of young people.*** With the support of a diverse group of religious and school leaders, Education Secretary Riley issued guidelines in August 1995 to make clear that students' religious rights do not end at the schoolhouse door. As a result of these guidelines, reported the National School Boards Association, there has been a dramatic drop in the need to help school officials clarify what is allowed in public schools when its students practice their religion. In addition, 33 religious communities representing 75 percent of religiously affiliated Americans signed onto the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. Two

successful religion and education local summits also brought together religious leaders, school officials, and the leadership of community organizations and businesses.

- 1 ***Promoting greater parental involvement.*** Thirty years of research shows that greater parental involvement in children's learning is a critical link to achieving a high-quality education for every student. Through the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, the Department of Education has played a critical role in helping schools to be more welcoming and inviting to families; encouraging employers to provide ways for parents and employees to be involved in education, including volunteering in their local schools; and expanding the support that youth, community, cultural and religious groups are giving to back greater family involvement in education. Over 2,000 employers, schools, religious, and community groups--including the National PTA, Urban League, John Hancock, Hadassah, Pizza Hut and United Methodists--have joined the Partnership and have pledged to support the education of children and the involvement of their parents.

#### Service in Support of Safety

In Los Angeles, AmeriCorps members are working with thousands of students to reduce school violence. AmeriCorps members mentor and tutor 2,000 community youth, train them in conflict resolution skills, and help establish after school programs.

- 1 ***Promoting community service by high school and college students through Learn and Serve and AmeriCorps.*** AmeriCorps is the new domestic Peace Corps that involves Americans of all ages getting things done to meet community needs. In just two years, AmeriCorps has given more than 70,000 Americans an opportunity to serve their country. The vast majority of AmeriCorps members are working on the critical problems of children and youth. They tutor, mentor, organize after-school programs, teach violence and drug prevention, and organize safe havens and safe corridor programs. National service promotes the core values of hard work, self discipline, and personal responsibility. It encourages people to give something back to their country. And it teaches its members to take responsibility for others, not just for a year, but for a lifetime.

Through Learn and Serve America, more than a half million students from kindergarten through graduate school are helping their communities and proving their academic skills in the process. They are learning citizenship in a direct and vital way, not by textbooks, but by service, by working on real problems in society. The skills and habits they develop-- teamwork, self-discipline, initiative--will help them become productive workers as well as responsible citizens. We must spread and develop this idea in every school, college and university, to engage an increasing number of students in America.

The Clinton Administration challenges all students, schools, parents, communities, religious and other groups to do what they can to make all our schools safe, disciplined and drug-free environments to engage and motivate students to learn, and to teach the values of hard work and respect.

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