

**TO: FRIENDS OF CER**  
**FROM: JEANNE ALLEN**  
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## **15 YEARS AND STILL A NATION AT RISK**

(Washington,DC) Thought you might be interested in this update on a closed meeting held at the Willard Hotel, Friday, April 3, 1998. It was prompted by continuing evidence that American students still suffer from poor academic performance. Some of the most prominent reformers in education met to discuss the progress of education reform in this country 15 years after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*.

The gathering of 35 of the top education reformers was hosted in part by the Center for Education Reform and included three of the original members of the National Commission in Excellence on Education, Albert Quie, former Governor of Minnesota, Emeral Crosby, a Detroit school principal and Jay Sommer, former National Teacher of the Year. The group also included other educators, (elected) local, state and national education officials, parent group representatives, and other education researchers and policy analysts.

### **THE TOPICS COVERED IN THIS FORUM INCLUDED:**

- Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) results and the depth of US curriculum.
- Mediocrity of the graduates going into the workforce.
- Teacher qualifications, merit based salaries and career incentives.
- Education power structure; influence of charter schools and school choice.
- National and local standards.
- Parents accessibility to good information.

The group agreed that not much has changed since 1983 and many of the concerns set forth in the analysis *A Nation at Risk* still persist today. A striking example is the steady decline of SAT scores. Statistics show from 1963 to 1980 verbal scores fell 50 points and mathematics scores dropped nearly 40 points. In 1995 the average combined SAT score had fallen 70 points from 1963 scores, despite changes in the test to make it easier.

A prevailing conclusion at the meeting was that the power structure in education must be changed to provide all children excellence through equity in education. Howard Fuller, Director of the Institute Transformation of Learning, and former Superintendent of Milwaukee, the first city to offer its poorest students full school choice, stressed, "We want a system that believes

in our children, we want dollars that follow students to the school of their choice and we want it understood that consequences will occur if we do not reach competitive levels of competency."

"Too many of our students are being cheated. They are not learning enough, they are not aspiring high enough and our expectations for them are not high enough," said William Bennett, former US Secretary of Education and Co-Director of Empower America.

Rep. Dwight Evans (D-PA), author of the Pennsylvania charter and black caucus member said, "All children can learn, and good people are trapped in bad systems."

Parent representatives championed the group's pledge to end the complacency that has prevailed regarding the deteriorating state of education in the United States over the last few decades. "The fact that this group of individuals have come together validates what we have been seeing for sometime, that our children are not getting the academic preparation to compete in our global economy," said Leah Vukmir, Director of Parents Raising Educational Standards in Schools (PRESS).

Jeanne Allen, President of the Center for Education Reform, said, "The need for such a forum, a full decade and a half after the call was sounded for America to shape up its schools, is a sad testament to our attitudes toward the importance of education. But the honest, earnest and determined mindset of the attendees, working to create education that is both rigorous and relevant for the 21st Century, is cause for hope."

A full report on the findings and recommendations of the forum 15 Years And Still A Nation At Risk group will be available later this month through the Center for Education Reform by calling (202) 822-9000.

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