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Convocation of Richmond School Teachers

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Notes For Speech

Convocation of Richmond School Teachers

I. Highlights of the Past Ten Years

Pupil enrollment: from 30,142 in September 1950 to 40,155 in September 1960.

Number of teachers from 1,300 in 1950 to 1,800 in 1960

Construction program:

New buildings	15
Major additions	<u>12</u>
Total	27
Cost	\$18,500,000

Teachers' salaries -- B.A. Degree:

	<u>1950</u>	<u>1960</u>
Minimum	\$2300	\$3900
Maximum	\$3600	\$5400

In 1950 there were 14 steps of \$100 each. Now there are 11 steps of \$150 each.

School budget:

\$6,527,703 in 1950; \$13,100,980 in 1960

Progress in quality of education:

More important than statistics -- but more difficult to measure.

Teachers can judge extent of progress better than School Board members.

But surely there has been notable progress -- examples:

- (i) New high school requirements
- (ii) Advanced Placement program (90 students)
- (iii) Foreign languages in elementary grades
- (iv) Consulting teacher program in elementary schools
- (v) Dept. heads for math, science & foreign language
- (vi) Guidance service (1 to 700 formerly) (1 to 360 now)
- (vii) Summer school (growth quadrupled)
- (viii) Remedial Reading Clinics

II. Performance of Graduates

(a) One interesting yardstick -- those who go to college:

508 out of 1149 -- 44.2%

90.8% were promoted

87.6% -- promotion rate in high school

(b) Merit scholarship contests.

(c) General reputation of our schools -- excellent.

III. Elements of a Superior School System

Mr. Willett requested that I make some informal comments on this. I will not discuss all elements, as many are quite obvious -- e.g. quality of leadership, adequacy of finance, etc.

(a) Importance of balance.

No question of math and science vs. history and English.

(b) Extracurricular activities are necessary.

Develop personality, emotional stability and physical well being -- but must not be over emphasized.

(c) Motivation of pupils.

Never fulfill all of our expectations in this respect as relatively few pupils perform in accordance with their real ability.

(1) Teacher-inspiration -- most important factor.

We in education must resist vigorously the trend in America toward "softness". We must avoid softness morally, physically and intellectually.

(d) Quality of faculty -- hallmark of a good system.

The heart of any school system is its faculty.

(e) Continuing education for teachers -- a necessity.

223 did summer work (14%)

At this rate, it would take 8 years for entire faculty

Lawyers, business men, etc.

IV. Aspirations for the End Product of our School System

Let me summarize my aspirations for the Richmond Public School System from a somewhat different approach.

(a) Unique American high schools.

High schools are the end of our education production line. Every stage in this production line is equally important, and is essential to the adequacy of the end product. But the high school does produce this product.

What, then, should be the broad educational objectives of our high schools? The American comprehensive high school is unique. America is the only major country in the world which expects all children to remain in school, at public expense, at least through age 16 -- and it is hoped through high school. Public education beyond the rough equivalent of our eighth grade is not generally provided in other countries.

(b) Three educational objectives.

Dr. Conant (Dr. James B. Conant, "The American High School Today") summarizes the three main objectives of the American comprehensive high school as follows:

(1) To provide a sound general education for all future citizens;

(11) To provide elective vocational and commercial

training for boys and girls who do not expect to go to college; and

(iii) To provide challenging and adequate programs for those who do go on to colleges and universities.

We must continually evaluate our school system to answer the question whether we are adequately attaining all three of these objectives.

Comment, very briefly, on each of them.

First. The strength of a democracy, with universal suffrage, obviously depends upon an educated and intelligent electorate. We are especially reminded of that at this season of the year every fourth year (by the quadrennial madness of the Presidential campaign).

In providing the requisite general education for all future citizens, it seems to me that English, history and government are perhaps the most important courses.

Second. In addition to a general education for all, it must be remembered that only about 48 % of our students who enter high school eventually go on to college. Thus, some 52 % of them must commence earning their livings when they leave us. It is obviously essential that our elective programs provide appropriate vocational and commercial training for these.

Third. The third objective, namely, the proper training of students to enter colleges or universities, has perhaps received

the greatest attention in recent years. It was this objective that prompted the enriching and stiffening of our curriculum by including at least three years of foreign language, four years of mathematics and three years of science. We certainly have an adequate program in Richmond on paper, and I believe we actually have it in fact.

V. Capacity to Speak and Write English

Passing from broad objectives and overall evaluation, may I now comment briefly on one of my pet subjects. At the convocation in September a year ago, I alluded to a basic weakness of education in America -- in the public schools, colleges and indeed in the universities.

This is a weakness in the teaching of how to speak and write our own language. No skills are more important to success at all levels of human endeavor than being able to communicate thoughts and ideas clearly and intelligently. We communicate with each other by the spoken and written word. Yet, few Americans are trained at any level in our educational system to perform adequately these elementary skills.

Whatever your subject may be, and whether it is in Junior Primary I or the 12th grade, I urge each of you to require higher standards in these essentials.

VI. Patriotism

As Mr. Willett asked me to share ideas with you -- however unrelated they may be -- I have one final aspiration for the Richmond Public School System.

That is, that we train and inspire our young people to have a sense of duty and devotion to America. In a word, we must inspire patriotism.

It is thought by some to be oldfashioned even to speak of patriotism. But, for my part, I can think of no more erosive philosophy than to de-emphasize loyalty and devotion to our country.

In speaking recently to our history and government faculties, I referred to the story in the press a few weeks ago about the "comment book" maintained by the Soviets in the Square in Moscow where the ruins of the U-2 were being exhibited for many weeks. Foreign tourists were invited to record comments in this book on the U-2 episode.

There were some 15,000 American tourists in Moscow last summer, and a great many of these signed the Communist's book.

The author of the story reported that few American comments reflected the slightest disposition to defend or speak up for this country. There were lots of platitudes on "peace and friendship," but not one American defended the necessity of seeking intelligence information on a country which has threatened to destroy us by hydrogen attack! The most sickening example came from the pen of some warped American mind who wrote:

"The U-2 flight was a wanton act of aggression which is deplored by peace loving Americans."

Let us hope that the Richmond Public School System will never produce a spineless Judas of this kind.

VII. Conclusion

Having served on the Richmond School Board for more than ten years, and with my retirement scheduled for next June, I have the sentiment -- without the wisdom -- of an elder statesman in public education. I believe deeply in the basic soundness of the American public school system. I am unmoved by those who urge that the European or Soviet system is better. I believe that our free public schools, with all of their faults, have played a major role in the development of this great country of ours.

And although there are some who choose to disparage America and her leadership in the world, no person can deny that in a relatively short space of time this country has progressed from modest beginnings to the most powerful nation the earth has ever known.

We are not only the most powerful, industrially and militarily, but we have also attained the highest standard of living for the greatest number of people; we have shared our enormous wealth generously with less fortunate nations; and we have established and maintained standards of freedom which are the hope and aspiration of countless millions in other nations.

I say to Admiral Rickover, and other detractors of American education, that this country's unparalleled attainments -- both spiritual and material -- are hardly the product of an inferior educational system.

And yet the past is never so important as the future. I believe it was H. G. Wells who, as early as 1920, predicted that the world was confronted with a "race between education and catastrophe." I would have thought his figure of speech was somewhat over-dramatic in 1920, but few would disagree with it today. The world does face catastrophe -- of unimaginable proportions. This catastrophe, stemming from International

Communism, looms in two ominous forms -- nuclear destruction or dominance by governments that would blot out the freedom of men.

I agree with Wells' implication that education, in America and throughout the world, is the best and almost the only means of avoiding catastrophe. Having this belief, it seems to me that being a teacher or working in education is perhaps the highest form of public service.

I am proud to have been associated with you for the past decade in rendering this service.