

**President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education  
Accountability Systems Task Force  
March 13, 2002 // Des Moines, IA**

**Opening Remarks**

GOOD MORNING. I AM STEVE BARTLETT OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON EXCELLENCE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION. I WELCOME YOU TO THE FOURTH MEETING OF THE COMMISSION. OUR HEARING TODAY IS LED BY THE COMMISSION'S ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS TASK FORCE, WHICH I CHAIR.

WE ARE VERY PLEASED TO BE IN DES MOINES SO WE CAN HEAR THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL EDUCATORS AND PARENTS. I CAN ASSURE YOU AS A FORMER MEMBER OF CONGRESS AND MAYOR OF DALLAS THAT ALL THE ANSWERS ARE NOT FOUND IN WASHINGTON, DC. THE COLUMNIST ART BUCHWALD ONCE SAID, "THE FARTHER YOU GET AWAY FROM WASHINGTON, DC, THE MORE YOU THINK THAT THINGS ARE UNDER CONTROL." I SECOND THAT.

BEFORE WE GET STARTED, PERMIT ME TO BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE COMMISSION'S MISSION. THE PRESIDENT'S GOAL IN

ESTABLISHING THE COMMISSION WAS A SIMPLE ONE: “NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND.” THE PRESIDENT CREATED THE COMMISSION TO COLLECT INFORMATION AND TO STUDY ISSUES RELATED TO FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS. THE COMMISSION’S ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO RECOMMEND POLICIES TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.

THE “NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND” MESSAGE HAS BECOME A FAMILIAR AND IMPORTANT ONE. IT IS THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF THE NEWLY REAUTHORIZED ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT. NOW, IT COMES INTO PLAY WITH THE WORK OF THIS COMMISSION. WHY? PRESIDENT BUSH SAYS IT BEST:

(BUSH QUOTE) “ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT GOALS OF MY ADMINISTRATION IS TO SUPPORT STATES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN CREATING AND MAINTAINING A SYSTEM OF PUBLIC EDUCATION WHERE NO CHILD IS LEFT BEHIND. UNFORTUNATELY, AMONG THOSE AT GREATEST RISK OF BEING LEFT BEHIND ARE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.”

IN OUR WORK, THE COMMISSION WILL USE THE FOUR FOUNDATION PRINCIPLES OF THE “THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT.” THOSE PRINCIPLES ARE:

1. ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS;
2. FLEXIBILITY AND LOCAL CONTROL;
3. EXPANDED OPTIONS FOR PARENTS; AND,
4. USE OF EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES BASED ON GOOD SCIENCE.

AT THE OUTSET, I MUST REAFFIRM THAT THE COMMISSION’S WORK IS *NOT* DESIGNED TO REPLACE THE UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL REAUTHORIZATION OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT. RATHER, THE REPORT WE PRODUCE AND ISSUE THIS SUMMER WILL NOT ONLY PROVIDE VITAL INPUT INTO THE REAUTHORIZATION PROCESS, BUT ALSO INTO THE NATIONAL DEBATE ON HOW BEST TO EDUCATE ALL CHILDREN.

THE PRESIDENT HAS CHARGED US WITH PROVIDING FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE FOLLOWING NINE AREAS:

1. COST-EFFECTIVENESS.
2. IMPROVING RESULTS.
3. RESEARCH.
4. EARLY INTERVENTION.
5. FUNDING.
6. TEACHER QUALITY AND STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY.
7. REGULATIONS AND RED TAPE.
8. MODELS.
9. FEDERAL VERSUS LOCAL FUNDING.

OUR PURPOSE IN DES MOINES TODAY IS TO EXAMINE A SLICE OF THAT CHARGE. WE WILL LOOK AT TWO OF THE NINE KEY AREAS: ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESULTS. WHAT WE WILL EXAMINE CAN BE SUMMED UP IN THREE SENTENCES.

1. WE WILL LOOK AT HOW OUR STATE AND LOCAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR RESULTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION.
2. WE WILL LOOK AT HOW ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS CAN TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF CHILDREN RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES. FOR

EXAMPLE, WE WILL EXAMINE THE USE OF SPECIAL MODIFICATIONS AND ACCOMMODATIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES WHEN THEY PARTICIPATE IN STATE TESTING PROGRAMS.

3. WE WILL EXAMINE HOW SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS CAN PERFORM AT HIGHER ACADEMIC LEVELS.

THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT GAP BETWEEN CHILDREN RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES AND OTHER CHILDREN. FOR EXAMPLE, STATE-REPORTED DATA SHOWS US THAT FOR THE 1998-99 SCHOOL YEAR 57.4 PERCENT OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES GRADUATED WITH A REGULAR DIPLOMA. MEANWHILE, THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS TELLS US THAT THE 1999 GRADUATION RATE FOR ALL STUDENTS WAS 88.8 PERCENT.

THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP ALSO APPEARS IN SCORES ON THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS. FOR EXAMPLE, IN 1998, ONLY 28 PERCENT OF 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADERS WITH DISABILITIES MET OR EXCEEDED BASIC LEVELS ON THE NAEP

READING TEST COMPARED TO 74 PERCENT OF ALL STUDENTS IN THE 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE.

THOSE STATISTICS TELL US THAT SPECIAL EDUCATION CHILDREN ARE BEING LEFT BEHIND. WE HAVE TO DO BETTER. AS SECRETARY PAIGE SAID AT THE COMMISSION'S FIRST HEARING:

(PAIGE QUOTE) "THE WAY WE EDUCATE OUR CHILDREN REVEALS OUR CHARACTER. LET'S SHOW STRONG CHARACTER. NO AMERICAN SHOULD BE SATISFIED UNTIL EVERY AMERICAN CHILD IS LEARNING."

THIS IS AN OUTCOME-ORIENTED COMMISSION THAT IS TRULY CONCERNED ABOUT ENSURING THAT NO CHILD IS LEFT BEHIND. THAT'S OUR MISSION. IN ORDER TO DO THAT, WE NEED YOUR HELP. WE NEED YOUR SUGGESTIONS. TELL US ABOUT WHAT WORKS. SHOW US THE MODELS. WE WILL HAVE A PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD THIS AFTERNOON TO ENSURE THAT EVERYONE HAS A CHANCE TO PROVIDE US WITH INPUT.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST IN OUR WORK. WE  
APPRECIATE EVERYONE WHO HAS TAKEN THE TIME TO ATTEND  
OUR HEARING. WE WILL NOW OPEN TODAY'S HEARING OF THE  
ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS TASK FORCE.

(END)