

May 4 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

should not offer opportunities for the commercial exploitation of its students and/or its mission. However, there are numerous ways that faith-based groups and employers can play a positive role in creating and supporting public charter schools, just as other community organizations do. These guidelines would augment the existing guidelines for public charter schools and the guidelines for religious expression in public schools that I released in December.

Increasing the quality of education in this country for disadvantaged students is a national priority but requires the active involvement of

every affected community. In economically distressed communities, faith-based organizations and business partners can play critically important roles in providing needed support services and job-focused experiences for students who too often lack either. Ensuring that faith-based and business institutions can play a vigorous role in expanding educational opportunities while respecting the separation of church and state and the limitations on commercial involvement in schools is an important step to providing high-quality educational experiences for all children.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Webisode Chat With Tracy Smith of Channel One in St. Paul

May 4, 2000

Ms. Smith. So now we're going to go live, to the live webcast. So everyone out there watching us on your computer, thank you so much for joining us. Welcome to everybody. Thank you, City Academy. And thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you, Tracy. Are we ready to start?

Ms. Smith. We are ready to start.

The President. Well, let me begin by thanking Channel One and the Channel One schools and all those who are taking part in this Presidential Webisode Chat.

This has a rich history, really. Fifty years ago and more, President Roosevelt used the radio to bring democracy into the homes of the American people, with his Fireside Chats. Thirty years later, President Kennedy regularly used televised press conferences to do the same thing. And I think it's quite appropriate to use this newest medium of communication to answer more questions from more students. And I think we ought to get right to it.

All of you know that I'm speaking to you from the City Academy in St. Paul, Minnesota. It was the Nation's first charter school. I believe in these schools, and I've tried to promote them and want to do more, and that's why I'm here.

The most important thing that we can do today is to reach out and answer questions from the students of America, so let's begin. How do you want to do it, Tracy?

Education and Technology

Ms. Smith. Well, our first question is actually from Amy, who is from City Academy—we do have it in the computer here; it's question number zero—which is: What more can education do to improve people's lives and move them out of poverty?

The President. Well, I think the obvious answer is just to look at the difference in the job prospects and the income prospects of people who have education and people who don't. Education in this economy, where we have the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years—if you have enough education, you have almost a 100 percent guarantee that you'll have a good job and you can move out of poverty.

But it is, by and large, necessary to do more than graduate from high school. Most people, to have good job prospects, need at least 2 years of college. And I have worked very hard in the last 7 years to open the doors of college to everyone. We've increased the Pell grants. We've made student loans less expensive. And we have given a tax credit worth \$1,500 a year to virtually all Americans for the first 2 years of college. So the most important thing for you to know is, you'll get out of poverty if you have an education, but you need more than high school.

Ms. Smith. All right, great. A tech question, of course, since we're talking to a bunch of techies out there. This is question number 200: Mr. President, my math teacher uses technology

to teach us every day. Do you think this is an important part of learning?

The President. Yes. I don't think it's a substitute for knowing the basics, but it facilitates learning.

And one of the things that we know now—and I bet a lot of you here at City Academy have learned this—one of the things we know now is that people learn in different ways. And sometimes, like in grade school, some kids will be identified wrongly as being slow learners or maybe not very smart when in fact they learn in different ways. We know that some kids learn by repetition, doing basic math on a computer, better. Some kids learn by listening better. Some learn by reading better. So I think that's important.

But the main thing that technology is going to do for education is something entirely different. Look at this. We've already got over 2,000 questions; we're talking to people all over the country here. Because of technology, we can bring what's in any textbook, anyplace in the world, not only to a place like the City Academy in St. Paul; we can bring it to poor villages in Africa, in Latin America, in east Asia. Technology can enable us to bring all the knowledge stored anywhere to anybody who lives anywhere, if they have the computer—the poorest people in the world. And so it is going to be, I think, the most important fact about education for the next 20 or 30 years.

Ms. Smith. I guess the followup question to that is question number 721: Mr. President, how can the Federal Government help provide enough money to have enough computers in school for everyone to be able to have access to a good computer?

The President. Well, let me tell you what we have done. In 1996 we passed something in Congress called the Telecommunications Act. And Vice President Gore led our fight to require in that law something called the E-rate, the education rate, to guarantee that all schools and libraries could afford to log on to the Internet. It's worth over \$2 billion a year in subsidies to schools. That's why 95 percent of our schools are hooked up now to the Internet, connected to the Internet, because they can afford it.

I have also worked very hard to try to get the Government to give all the computers we could to schools and to go out and work with the private sector to get more computers in the schools. Frankly, the big issue now is making

sure that the teachers are well-trained to maximize the potential of the computers and the educational software. You know, most teachers will tell you that in every school, there are always a few kids that know more about all this than the teachers do. So what we've had to do is to go back and re-emphasize training the teachers.

And let me just say one other thing. I believe that the next big move will be to try to make personal computers in the home available to more and more people who can't afford them now, lower income people.

When Tom was up here talking earlier, he said he was born in Mexico. I went to a school district in New Jersey where most of the kids are first-generation immigrants. And the school district, with Bell Atlantic, put computers in the homes of more and more of the parents so they could talk to the principals and the teachers during the day. And it had a dramatic impact on the learning of the kids and on reducing the dropout rate. And the kids, of course, could then use the computers at home as well.

So I think that's the next big frontier. Can we make the use of the computer as universal as the use of the telephone is today? I wish I were going to be around, but I think that's a big frontier the next President should try to cross.

School Violence

Ms. Smith. This is question number 2,173. We are getting a lot of questions today. This is from Lawrence, from Fayetteville, Arkansas.

The President. I've been to this school. This is the town that Hillary and I were married in. I lived there when I went home to Arkansas and taught in the university.

Ms. Smith. All right. He's in the seventh grade, and he wants to know what you plan to do about making students feel safer in today's classrooms.

The President. Well, first of all, I think the only way to make you feel safer is to try to make sure you are safer. But you should know that, in spite of these horrible examples of school violence we've seen—we just celebrated the anniversary of Columbine; we had the terrible incident in Arkansas and Mississippi, Oregon, lots of other places—that, overall, school violence has gone down. And I think the main thing you have to do is to keep guns and weapons out of schools, to try to keep people off

the school grounds that don't belong there, and to have a zero-tolerance policy for guns in the schools and for violence.

Then I think it's also important to have positive ways of dealing with conflict. I think there need to be peer mediation groups in schools. I think students need to have access to counselors and, if they need it, to mental health services. I think that we have to teach young people that there are nonviolent ways that they can resolve their legitimate conflicts, and there are nonviolent ways they have to get their own anger and frustration out.

So I think there's partly a law enforcement strategy to keep guns and knives and other weapons out of the hands of kids at school, to keep people off the school grounds who shouldn't be here. And then I think there has to be a positive human development effort to get people to adopt nonviolent strategies for dealing with their anger, their hurt, and their conflicts.

Education Infrastructure

Ms. Smith. Let's do 201. This is from Elena—I hope I'm saying that right: President Clinton, do you think that the physical condition of a school building has an effect on learning in the classroom?

The President. Yes, I do. If it's bad enough—in two or three ways. First of all, I think if a school is in terrible physical condition, when children go through a school every day, if the roof is leaking and the windows are broken and it's stiflingly hot—I mean, young people are not stupid; they're smart. They say, "Okay, all these politicians and teachers say we're the most important people in the world. If we're the most important people in the world and education is the most important thing in the world, why are they letting me go to school in this wreck of a building where I'm miserable?" That's the first thing.

The second problem is, it's actually harder to teach in difficult physical facilities. I was at a school, actually a very beautiful school, yesterday in Davenport, Iowa. It's 93 years old. And there are rooms in that building where there were no electrical outlets in the walls, and there are all kinds of problems there. It's a magnificent building. They shouldn't tear it down, but they need to modernize it.

And so I do, I think it makes a big difference. That's why for over 2 years now I've been trying

to get Congress to adopt a plan to let the Federal Government help build 6,000 new schools and help repair 5,000 more every year for the next 5 years, because it's a terrible problem. The average school building in Philadelphia is 56 years old—65 years old; in New Orleans, over 60 years old. In New York, there are school buildings that are heated still by coal-fired furnaces.

And also, there are all these overcrowded schools. I went to a little grade school in Florida with 12 housetrailer out behind it to house the kids—12, not one or two. So yes, I think it makes a big difference.

School Uniforms

Ms. Smith. Let's go to—here's one I know you have an opinion about—2,987. This is Brandon: What do you think about school uniforms?

The President. I support them in the early grades. I think—and I'll tell you why. I have been a big supporter of school uniforms—well, I support them for high schools, too, if people want them. But let me just say, we have a lot of evidence that particularly in elementary and junior high schools, school uniforms perform two very valuable functions: They promote discipline, and they promote learning. Why? Because in the early years, school uniforms remove the economic distinctions between kids.

I went to a junior high school out in California, in the third-biggest school district in California, where they have a school uniform policy. And I had an inner-city young boy talking and a young girl who was probably upper middle class. And both of them loved the uniform policy because they said it removed the distinctions between kids, and it removed the pressure to try to show where you were in some economic or social hierarchy by what you were wearing.

But I also can tell you, there is lots and lots of evidence that it reduces conflict and violence and promotes an atmosphere of discipline among younger people. So I think—you know, I really think that having that policy is good. I've seen it all over America. I've done everything I could to promote it. I've been ridiculed and attacked and made fun of for promoting it, but I believe in them. I think they do good. I do.

Ms. Smith. We've done lots of stories on that. I don't think every kid in America agrees with you, but—

The President. I know they don't. [Laughter]
You ought to see my mail about it. [Laughter]

Community Service

Ms. Smith. Question number 296. This is from Melinda, from Dublin High School. We don't have where Dublin is.

The President. Ohio, I think, isn't it?

Ms. Smith. Is it Ohio?

The President. I think so.

Ms. Smith. Do you believe that students should be required to do community service as a part of their core curriculum?

The President. Yes. That's the short answer. I do. Maryland is the only State now that requires community service as a requirement. To get a high school diploma in Maryland, at some point you have to do some community service.

You know, I've been a big supporter of community service. I founded the AmeriCorps program, and now 150,000 young people have served their communities and earned some money to go to college through various AmeriCorps projects. We started a program called America Reads. There are now people from 1,000 different colleges going into the grade schools of America, helping make sure all of our third graders can read—and a lot of retired groups, too.

I believe community service is one of the most important things that happens in America to bind us together across the lines that divide us. And in 1987, 13 years ago, I was on a commission on middle schools which recommended that community service be made a part of the curriculum. So I've been a believer of this for a long time.

I would leave it to the schools or the school districts to decide what the young people should do. But I think it does us all good to get out and deal with people who are drastically different from ourselves and who—no matter how bad we think our lives are, there is always somebody with a bigger problem and a bigger need and a bigger challenge. And I just think it's good for people to serve other people in the community. So I would make it a part of the curriculum. I would.

Assistance for Higher Education

Ms. Smith. Okay, this is 3,348, from Mission Junior High, in Texas: What is being done to ensure that economically disadvantaged students

are provided the opportunities for higher education?

The President. Good question. Let me give you all the answers. This has been a big priority of mine. Here's what we've done. Since I've been President, we have increased the number and the amount of the Pell grants, which is the scholarship the Federal Government gives to the poorest students. We have also changed the student loan program, so that it's now cheaper to take out a loan if you get one of the so-called direct loans, issued directly from the Federal Government. The interest rate is lower. And then when you get out of school, if you take a job that has a modest salary, you can limit your repayments to a certain percentage of your income. It's saved, in 5 years, \$8 billion in student loan costs for America's students.

We've raised the number of work-study positions from 700,000 to a million. And we passed the HOPE scholarship. That's the biggest deal. It's a \$1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of college, and then also for the junior and senior year and for graduate schools you get a tax break. And I'm now trying to get Congress to adopt a law which allows people to deduct up to \$10,000 in college tuition from any tax burdens they have. So I think that will help.

If that passes, I think we can honestly say that income is not a barrier to going to college. Between the scholarships, the loans, the work-study programs, and the HOPE scholarship tax credit, which 5 million families have already used, that's why college-going—67 percent of the high school graduates in America are now going on to college. And I want to get it up as close to 100 as we can get it. So if you have any other ideas in Mission, Texas, let me know. But we've done a lot on this, and I think it's very important.

Incentives for Teachers

Ms. Smith. Question 4,641, this is Mike from Buffalo: What do you think the Federal Government can do to attract quality teachers to inner-city public schools?

The President. Well, we've got a little program we started a couple of years ago—this is a really good question—based on the old health service corps idea where we would pay off people's loans to medical schools if they'd go practice medicine in isolated rural areas or inner city areas. So we have a small program now to say

to young people, "If you'll go back and teach in an inner-city school where there is a teacher shortage, we'll pay off your college loans." And I think that will help. I would like to see that program dramatically expanded.

I think the other thing is, though, we're going to have to pay these young people more if we want them to do that. In the next few years we could have a real problem with teacher shortage, because we've got the largest student body in American history. You finally—all of you are bigger than the baby boom generation I was a part of, for the last 2 years. We have about 2 million teachers slated to retire over the coming 5 to 8 years. And we have a greater need for teachers than ever before because our student bodies are more diverse, in terms of language and background and culture.

So I think the States and the Federal Government are going to have to look at this. I'm trying to put 100,000 more teachers out there now in the early grades. I know the Vice President has said that he believes we ought to have—the Federal Government should help the States and school districts hire 600,000 more over the next 4 years after that. But this is going to be a big issue.

My own view is, the best way to get young people to go into the inner cities, though, is to defray the cost of their own education—say, "If you teach for 2, 3, 4 years, you get this much knocked off"—because I have found that there is a great desire, again, for community service. And there is a lot of interest in doing this if we can make it reasonably attractive.

Home Schooling

Ms. Smith. Question 2,627, this is Brenna, from Lamar: President Clinton, what are your views on parents home schooling their children?

The President. I believe two or three things about home schooling. I've had a lot of experience with this, because I was a Governor at a time when this was being debated around America.

I think that States should explicitly acknowledge the option of home schooling, because it's going to be done anyway. It is done in every State in the country. And therefore, the best thing to do is to get the home schoolers organized, if they're not organized in your State, deal with them in a respectful way, and say, "Look, there is a good way to do this and a not so good way to do this, but if you're going

to do this, your children have to prove that they're learning on a regular basis. And if they don't prove that they're learning, then they have to go into a school, either into a parochial or a private school or a public school. But if you're going to home school your kids, the children have to learn. That's the public interest there."

And that's what we did in Arkansas. The Home School Association strongly supported it, accountability for what their children were learning. There will always be, in any given State, a certain percentage of people, normally a small percentage, for reasons of personal values or educational philosophy, will want to do that. And most of the time they're very dedicated parents, deeply committed to what they're doing. And I can tell you this: It's going to happen regardless, so it's better to have laws which have standards on it.

From my personal point of view, I never—it wasn't an option in our family, but if it had been I wouldn't have done it, because I wanted my daughter to go to school where she would be exposed to all different kinds of people and see how the larger society worked and be a part of it. But I think that we should explicitly make that option available; we should respect the people who choose it; but we ought to say, "If you do it, your children have to demonstrate that they know what they're supposed to know when they're supposed to know it."

Ms. Smith. Just an update, we've received more than 10,000 questions so far. Pretty good.

The President. I need to give shorter answers. [Laughter]

Goals of Education

Ms. Smith. Question 4,154, this is Howard from Providence: Do you consider the goal of public education to be to make someone ready for employment, practical, or to make someone a well-rounded, enlightened individual?

The President. Both. That is, I think—when I say ready for employment, if you're talking about getting through high school, I've already said I don't think that will make most people ready for employment.

We live in a world in which what you know is important, but what you're capable of learning is even more important, because the stock of knowledge is doubling once every 5 years, more or less. So I think that being able to be a useful member of society is important. But I also think being able to be a good citizen and having a

liberal arts background is important. So I think we should pursue both.

I've never thought of education as purely a utilitarian thing, just something that is a meal ticket. It also makes life more interesting. All these young people here—you know, if you develop the ability to read and to think and to feel comfortable with ideas and emotions and concepts, it makes life more interesting. It makes your own life more fulfilling. So I think education should both prepare you for the world of work and help you live a more fulfilling life and be a better citizen.

Standards Testing

Ms. Smith. Okay, this is question 5,492. This is Eliza from New York: How can the testing system be changed so that teachers are not pressured to the point that they are cheating for the kids? Don't you see it as a flaw in the system more than in the teachers? I guess they're talking about high-stakes standards testing.

The President. Yes, well, here's the problem. First of all, I think that it is almost unavoidable, if you believe, as I do, that there has to be some measure at some point along the way in school of whether young people have actually learned what their diplomas say they have learned. And what I think is important—the way—I can tell you how it can be changed so that the teachers aren't pressured to cheat: You can have one or more second chances.

Ms. Smith. So if you failed the test—

The President. Yes, yes. Let me give you an example. In Chicago, for example, which most people believed a few years ago had the most troubled big-city school system in the country, they adopted a no-social-promotion strategy. And if you didn't pass the exams and make appropriate grades, you couldn't go on. But they gave 100 percent of the people a chance to go to summer school and do well. As a result of that, today, the Chicago summer school is—listen to this—it's the sixth-largest school district in America, just the kids going to summer school. But as a result of that, there aren't very many people who are held back, and that dramatically reduces the tension to cheat.

I think an even better system is to make sure that all the kids who are having trouble, and particularly all the schools that are low performing, have really rich and substantive after-school programs, weekend programs, as well as

summer school programs, so that the tests measure whether the children are learning.

Look, we know nearly—literally right at 100 percent of the people can learn what they need to know to go from grade to grade. You know, this whole business that all children can learn is not just a slogan. So I think it's very important not to blame the children when the system fails them.

So the answer is, to reduce the tension to cheat, is to have a lot of second chances but to make sure that when a young person is told, "You get to go on because you learned something," that the stuff has really been learned.

Education Then and Now

Ms. Smith. We want to squeeze in just one more question, question 249, from Leah in Cybervillage: Mr. President, how would you compare your education in grade school to public education today?

The President. Well, I think first of all, in many ways, it's better today, although one of the things I will say is I was very blessed; I had great teachers. I had—my sixth grade teachers, Kathleen Scher, was typical of the teachers of the early—the first 50, 60 years in this country. She was a lady who—she never married; she lived with her cousin. They were both teachers, and they lived to be 90 years old. And I corresponded with her until she died. She came to see me once a year. We were friends, and she was a great, devoted teacher.

The discrimination against women in the workplace in the first part of this century worked to drive the smartest and most gifted and most dedicated of public servants among women into the classroom. They were teachers and nurses—women—because that's what they could do. And the end of discrimination among women, which has been a great thing for women, has given women lots of other options.

But I had good teachers. So that's the good thing I will say about that. I was very fortunate and blessed. But I went to segregated schools, which I resented at the time. I knew it was wrong, before the civil rights movement. And it's better today that we have a diverse student body, and we're all learning to live together and work together in school.

There were no computers, although we read a lot. And at the time, it was assumed that most people would not go to college, instead

of that most people would. So in that sense, I think things are better today.

Now, violence was having a fist-fight on the playground. Nobody had a gun. So there was less fear. The only thing you ever had to fear was whether somebody that hated you was going to beat you up. You never had the fear that somebody would pull a knife or a gun. So I'd say those were the differences.

But if you look, on balance, we're better off today than we were when I was in grade school. We just have to deal with today's challenges. There will never be a time that's perfect and without challenges. But we're better off being integrated than segregated. We're better off with the new technology. We're better off with the assumption that we ought to try to prepare every kid and give every child the chance to go to college. That's my view.

Ms. Smith. As you see from the number of questions, we could do this all day, but we're out of time.

The President. These are great questions—I mean, great.

Ms. Smith. Aren't they great? There are so many, one after the other.

The President. I wish that they all had yes/no answers; I'd just run down. *[Laughter]*

Ms. Smith. You know what, they can all E-mail you, right? *[Laughter]* Just kidding.

Well, I want to thank you so much for being here, Mr. President. This was a treat. I want to also thank the distinguished guests that were here, thank City Academy, thank Yahoo! for providing this chat auditorium, and of course, all of the students across the country who logged in and participated in this. Sorry we couldn't get to all of you. Great questions.

The President. Thank you. Great job. Thank you.

NOTE: The question-and-answer session was taped at 10:13 a.m. in gymnasium at the City Academy and was broadcast on-line via the Internet. In his remarks, the President referred to Tomas Gonzalez, 1994 City Academy graduate.

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on Reforming America's Schools in Columbus, Ohio

May 4, 2000

[Barbara Blake, principal, Eastgate Elementary School, welcomed participants and outlined improvements in student performance at her school. She then introduced the President, noting that she had requested information on educational reform from him while he was Governor of Arkansas.]

The President. Thank you very much, Ms. Blake. I guess I should begin by saying I'm certainly glad I answered that letter—*[laughter]*—so many years ago. I want to thank you for welcoming me here. And thank you, Mayor Coleman, for your leadership and for welcoming me also. Thank you, Superintendent Rosa Smith; Representative Beatty; City Council President Habash; House Minority Leader Ford. I'd like to thank the leaders of the Columbus and Ohio Education Association, John Grossman and Gary Allen, who are here. And I'd like to thank all of our panelists who are here.

I have been on a tour these last 2 days to highlight the good things that are happening in education in America, to highlight the reforms that make these good things possible, and most important, to highlight the great challenge before the United States today to turn around all low-performing schools and give all of our children a world-class education.

Yesterday morning I was in western Kentucky in the little town of Owensboro, which has had extraordinary success in turning around its lowest performing schools. In 1996, the State identified 175 of them. Just 2 years later, 159—over 90 percent—had improved beyond the goals the State set for them. In the little school I visited, where two-thirds of the children were eligible for free and reduced lunches, in 4 years they had recorded the same sort of improvements that you mentioned here, on a trend line, which proves that income and station in life are not destiny, that all of our children can