

---

---

# Response to America 2000

*Eunice N. Askov*

---

In 1989, former President George Bush convened the 50 governors to formulate six national education goals to guide school reform. The governors also pledged that students would obtain competency in challenging school subjects such as English and mathematics.

The bipartisan effort was later, in 1991, dubbed *America 2000* by President Bush. The *America 2000* strategy, while voluntary, would be the "catalyst" to help the country achieve the six national education goals, including the development of high standards and a national system of examinations.

*America 2000*, a "crusade" for educational reform, has, for the most part, bypassed professional educators and students. To be useful and effective as a strategy, all stakeholders, including those most closely associated with the educational process, must be involved. As Goodlad (1992) states in his astute analysis of the *America 2000* strategy,

Top-down, politically driven education reform movements (such as *America 2000*) are addressed primarily to restructuring the educational system. They have little to say about educating. Grassroots reform efforts, on the other hand, have little to say about restructuring (p. 298).

The two reform efforts must now join forces.

How can professional educators and researchers work together with political and business leaders to improve our nation's schools? By becoming involved in the political process, we can guide these enthusiastic (and probably well-intentioned) efforts. If *America 2000* is truly a local effort, then we ought to be involved in our local communities: As our communities assess their educational needs, we need to encourage

political and business leaders away from the "one size fits all" mentality for education. Rather than spending energy and funds on more standardized test construction, we should help our schools assess the needs of their constituencies and design instructional programs to meet those needs.

We must be cautious about endorsing education as the primary means for curing an ailing economy. If the economy does not improve, the temptation exists to "blame the victim." Political and business leaders need to become *more* (not less) involved in substantive ways in our schools to realize that education is not a simplistic remedy for complex social problems.

We must work with our teachers locally, regionally, and nationally, assisting them in assessing learners' needs and designing instruction to meet those needs. We need to help teachers see learners not as isolated individuals but as part of social systems, especially as part of a family system (Kazemek & Kazemek, 1992).

Now that school reform has the attention of the community at large, let's seek partnerships to bring about real and lasting change. Let's work as individuals and through our professional associations guiding school reform efforts, regardless of the name they bear in the new political administration. Finally, let's not forget that powerful tool, the media, which can rally public support at all levels. Partnerships must include public and private television, radio, and newspapers so that public opinion supports and enhances our efforts.

## References

- Goodlad, J. I. (1992). *On taking school reform seriously*. *Kappan*, 74(3), 232-238.
- Kazemek, C., & Kazemek, F. (1992). Systems theory: A way of looking at adult literacy education. *Covergence*, XXV(3), 5-14.