

Now, all of these things will help, but how are we going to get the standards? There are two things that we're going to do in the next 4 years, I hope, that I believe will make all of the difference. Number one is we are going to hire 30,000 reading specialists to mobilize a million volunteers to teach every 8-year-old in the country to read independently by the third grade. Now, we can talk all about the standards in the world, but if the children literally cannot read—an astonishing percentage of our young people are not proficient in reading when they have to learn these things—then we can't achieve very much later on.

It is true that our student population is the most diverse in history in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, national origin. But that can be a great asset for the United States. There is no other large democracy as diverse as ours. And in a global society, in a global economy, that's a huge, huge asset. But we have to have the language of common parlance in order to enable us all to function together. And we simply have to provide the resources and the people, and we're going to need a lot of volunteers to do this, but it will literally revolutionize education in America if we have universal literacy by the third grade. And that is the goal of this, and I hope all of you will support that.

But the most important thing we can do is something that the Federal Government should not do directly, but something I'm convinced will not happen unless we get out here and beat the drum for it and work for it, and that is to have recognized high standards for math and science and other basic subjects that are national in scope, measured by national and international standards, adopted locally, implemented locally, but nationally recognized and nationally tested throughout the United States. Until we do that, we will never know whether we have achieved our goal of international excellence in education for every student in the United States. And I ask your support for that.

This has never happened. People have talked about this. When we wrote the national education goals, we anticipated that we would have to develop a set of national standards, not Federal Government standards, national standards. The councils of mathematics teachers and science teachers have done a lot of work on this. A lot of work has been done on this.

But nobody has yet been willing to say, or at least we haven't had enough people willing

to say, whether they were Governors or State superintendents of education or local school boards, "We're all going to accept these, and we want to have some tests we can give to our students which will measure not how smart they are, not what they might have happened to learn but whether they know the things that we say are essential for every student to know in math and in science in order to succeed and win in the world they're going to live in." That is what we must do as a nation, and we have delayed too long. We shouldn't delay anymore. By the time we start the new century, we ought to have these standards adopted, embraced, and evaluated in every school district in the United States, and I want you to lead the way, just as you are here.

I have heard all the arguments in the world against this. But no one has yet made a compelling case to me for how calculus is different in Chicago from Little Rock, Arkansas, or Cody, Wyoming, or for that matter, Germany or Singapore or any other place in the world. That is what is the genius behind what you've done here with this First in the World education consortium.

We already know we're not doing well enough as a nation. What our students in general learned in math in the eighth grade is learned in Japan in the seventh grade. Even more troubling to me, what each year students in Germany and Japan learn 10 to 20 math subjects in depth, our students are asked to cover 35 math subjects and therefore don't learn any of them in depth.

Last year, educators around the world gave a half a million students, including 40,000 in the United States, the same test at the same time to give us a clear picture—our first clear picture—of what world-class education really means and how close we are to meeting it. We learned that our eighth graders are above the international average in science but below it in math. We know that every child in America, however—we can see that from the tests—we know that every child in America can meet these high standards if we have the courage and the vision simply to recognize the standards, to set them as the bar we're trying to jump over, to teach them, and to test whether children have learned them.

I do not understand why we are so afraid to do this. Don't we believe in our children more than this? And I do not believe there