

is a rule that says if you happen to be poor, you can't learn these things. I don't believe that either. When we were writing these goals—I remember it was about 2:30 in the morning—we got to this thing, “What are we going to say about math and science?” And somebody said, “We're going to be first in the world in math and science in the 21st century.” And another person said, “Well, that will never happen. Now, how can we set a goal we know we can't meet?” So they looked at me and said, “What do you think, Bill?” And I said, “Well, okay, suppose we just say our goal is to be third in the world.” [Laughter] There was no more discussion. We wrote the goal. Our goal was to be first in the world.

And this is not political rhetoric. Every single examination of the capacity of the human brain has shown that over 90 percent of the people in our country can learn way over 90 percent of what they need to know to do very, very well in the world we're going to live in. Sure, it will be harder for some than others. Some subjects are harder for some people than others. Not everybody will know everything on every exam, but we can do this. And we can no longer hide behind our love of local control of the schools and use that as an excuse not to hold ourselves to high standards. It has nothing to do with local control. There's no school board in America that controls the content of algebra.

I just left a junior high school where I saw these young people making their own automobiles out of paper and rubber bands and paper clips. Stand up there. Where are the students in that class? Here they are. All of the students in the class I just visited, stand up. [Applause] So they built these light little cars with their paper wheels, and they wound up this propeller with a rubber band that was tied across the whole length of the car, and then it went ahead. And they said, “This demonstrates one of Newton's laws of motion, which is that every action generates an equal and opposite reaction.” And they also talked about how the wheels had to be round instead of flat, but they couldn't be too slick, because there would have been no friction, and then no motion would be possible.

Now, that is—the rule for that is not different in California. [Laughter] It is still the same. And I told these young people when I saw them with their cars, I said, “If I would have had a class like this when I was 13, I might be

in a different line of work today.” [Laughter] It was so exciting. But to pretend that somehow holding ourselves to these standards and agreeing that there has to be some uniform way of measuring them is giving up local control, is just an excuse to avoid being held accountable because we're afraid we can't make it. And it's selling our kids down the drain, and it's wrong. It is not right.

So what happened when you did it? What does that report say? It says, in effect, that the eighth graders from the First in the World Consortium tied for first in the world in science and tied for second in the world in math. I think that's pretty good for their first time out.

That happened because—look around this room. Can you imagine a school district or a set of school districts with more genuine local control than this one, with—more than these—more parental involvement, more committed teachers, more—you know, you've got local control. But you didn't use it as an excuse not to throw your hat in the ring. I think it's great that it came out this way. But if you had finished eighth and ninth, I would still be here to pat you on the back because you had the guts to do it.

That's the important thing. That's the important thing. When we were coming out here on the airplane, the Congressman and Mayor Daley and Secretary Riley and Kevin O'Keefe of our staff, we were talking about, you know, what men talk about on airplanes, we were talking about basketball—[laughter]—and how Michael Jordan scored 51 points last night. And Kevin O'Keefe reminded me that there was somewhere a basketball coach who had removed Michael Jordan from the high school basketball team. Now, what's the point of that? [Laughter]

You know, we laugh about it. The coach might have made the right decision, and the decision he made may have spurred him on to what he later did. But the point is, it's okay if you're not winning when you start. It's okay. I know more about—but Scottie Pippen, who is from my home State, was essentially the manager of a college basketball team when he was a freshman in a very small school—couldn't even make the team. By the time he was a senior in college, he was the best player in that division in the United States, and he was only beginning. When you play a game like that, you know how to measure people. I mean, there is a way you keep score there.