

tests. In return, we expect States to set standards of basic knowledge and to make steady progress toward meeting those standards. Every student in grades three through eight will be tested in reading and math.

Every time I talk about testing, I sometimes see people wince—particularly the students. They don't like to take tests. [Laughter] My attitude is, too bad. [Laughter] How can you correct problems if you do not diagnose the problem in the first place?

In order to make sure children are not simply shuffled through the system, we must measure. We must determine what needs to be corrected early, before it's too late. States must show us that overall student achievement is improving, and as importantly, they must show that the achievement gap between the disadvantaged students and other students is closing. And in particular, in grades three through eight, all school districts—I mean all school districts—must show that students can read and write effectively.

I expect most schools will rise to the challenge. I believe that. Some may not, and they must be held accountable. They will have time to improve; they will have incentives to improve; and they will have the resources to improve, as a result of this bill. And if they still do not improve, there are real consequences and new options for parents.

The local and State officials in charge of America's schools carry a great trust, and we really are counting on you all. You are the rising generation of reformers. You can serve your community, and you can serve your country. Do not settle for mediocrity. Accept no excuses. Set high goals, and raise them again, and keep raising the standards. That is the task of leadership, and we trust you to take it on.

The success of these reforms also depends on parents. To be a mom or a dad is to be your child's first and most important teacher. So under this new law, par-

ents will have the information they need to do what is best for their children. Parents will have access to an annual report card on school performance. And they'll have access to statewide results. They will know the qualifications of the teachers and their children's achievements in key subjects. If schools persistently fail their children, parents will have more options: a better public school, a charter school, or a tutor.

In return, we expect that parents will use this information. Parents need to pay attention to school performance. They should insist on results, and when necessary, they must be strong advocates for change. They should offer praise when they can and pressure when it's called for. If you're a parent, visit your child's school; get to know the teachers and principals; support the school; and demand excellence. And remember that every child should come to school ready to learn. Good manners and respect for teachers are learned at home. Good study habits are reinforced by mothers and fathers who are willing to switch off the TV set and turn off video games to make sure the homework gets done. As parents, you're entitled to expect a lot from schools and teachers, and schools and teachers are entitled to expect some things from you as well.

This Nation has waited many years for major reform in education. We've now achieved it. And we're wasting no time in implementing it. Tonight Secretary Paige will meet with State education leaders on plans to put these reforms to work.

This is an hour of promise for America's public schools. My signature is now on the law, but it was the work of many hands. Together, we have overcome old arguments and outdated policies. And now, together, let us see these changes through until every school succeeds and no child is left behind.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:28 p.m. at DAR Constitution Hall. In his remarks, he