

GUEST COLUMN

Educational Excellence Act expects more from schools

By Richard W. Riley

Ask most American parents what they want for their children, and the first answer is likely to be a good education. But how can you know if your child's school is really performing well? Recently, we proposed "The Educational Excellence for All Students Act," which would go a long way toward addressing some of your most important school-related concerns.

•How good is my child's school: States and school districts would be required to give all parents annual report cards that include essential information on student achievement, teacher qualifications, class size, attendance and graduation rates.

•How safe is my child's school? Schools would give parents an annual report of any gun, drug or violent incidents, and under the current Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Program, school districts would be expected to adopt only proven anti-drug and violence prevention programs, to intervene with troubled youth, and to expand character education programs that help children learn the difference between right and wrong.

•How can my child's school be improved? There would be special attention to low-performing schools—intensive teacher training and extra after school and summer help for students trying to catch up, based on proven school reform methods. (Nineteen states have already shown success by taking such actions. President Clinton's budget includes \$200 million to help more states and school districts make these important improvements.)

•How can classroom discipline be improved? States and school districts would adopt fair, consistent discipline policies, and students who are suspended or expelled from school would receive appropriate supervision, counseling and other services.

•How can the quality of teaching be improved? States would test all new teachers to make sure they have the skills and knowledge they need to teach the subjects they'll be teaching. This would help to make sure that no teachers are teaching 'out of field,' such as social studies teachers teaching math or science, as happens all too often. And there would be new efforts to recruit, retain and support good teachers, especially in high-poverty schools.

•How can we get smaller classes in my child's school? Under this proposal 100,000 new teachers would be hired, allowing class size in grades 1-3 to be reduced to a national average of 18 students. This would give teachers more time to give young students the individualized attention they need to get off to a good start.

What about after school time? Funding for quality after-school, weekend, and summer programs would triple. More than 1 million young people would receive expanded learning opportunities in academics, computers and the arts, and enjoy healthy recreational opportunities.

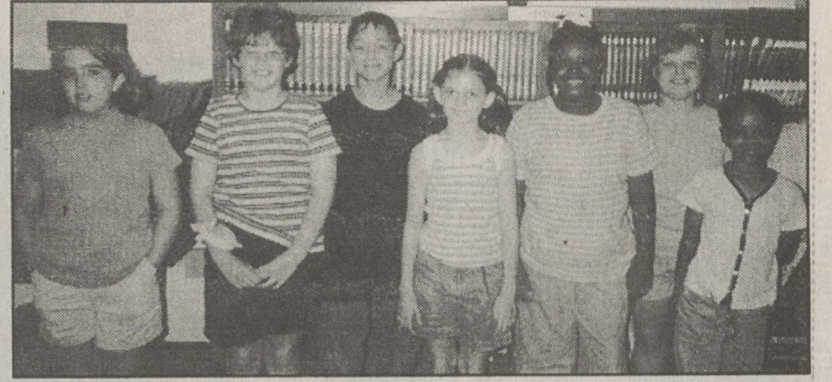
I want to challenge my child to do better. Can I expect the school to do the same? All students would be expected to show that they are meeting high standards of excellence at key points in their education, including graduation from high school. In addition, the practice of social promotion would be ended, not by holding students back indefinitely, but by providing qualified teachers, meaningful after-school and summer school programs, smaller classes, and other ways to help students make the

grade.

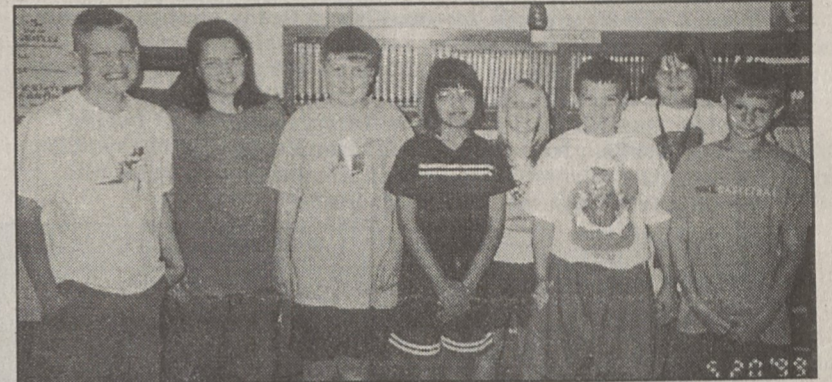
I look forward to working with Congress to pass the "Educational Excellence for All Children Act." I believe it will make a real difference. But as parents and family members, you also have an important role to play. Research shows that your personal involvement can make all the difference—read to young children, share and discuss books with older children, and encourage reading through the summer months. Check homework every night. Stay in touch with teachers and principals. Limit TV viewing. And engage in conversation—about values, the dangers of doing drugs, alcohol and tobacco, the everyday hurts and fears of growing up. Call 1-800-USA-LEARN for more ideas about ways to become more involved in improving your child's education.

Every child can learn and every adult can make a difference in the life of a child. We must expect much of our children—and be prepared to give much in return for their success.

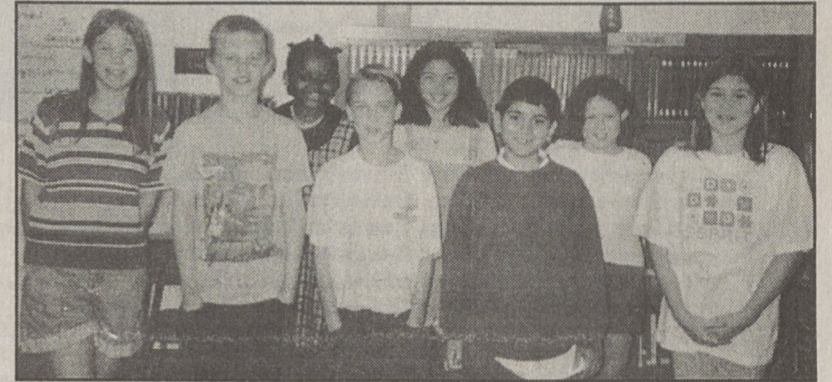
(Richard W. Riley is U.S. Secretary of Education)



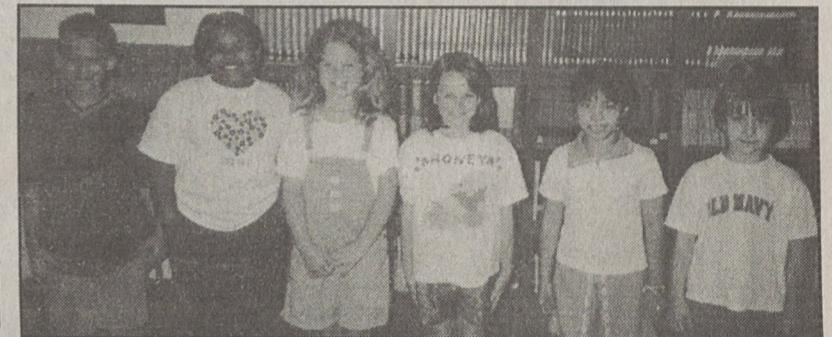
BENNETT'S WEST 3RD GRADE A/B HONOR ROLL - Front row, left to right, Kelli Bolt, Kim Bumgardner, Brittany Campbell, India Degree, Michelle McClain. Back row, Tyler Short, Hillary Smith.



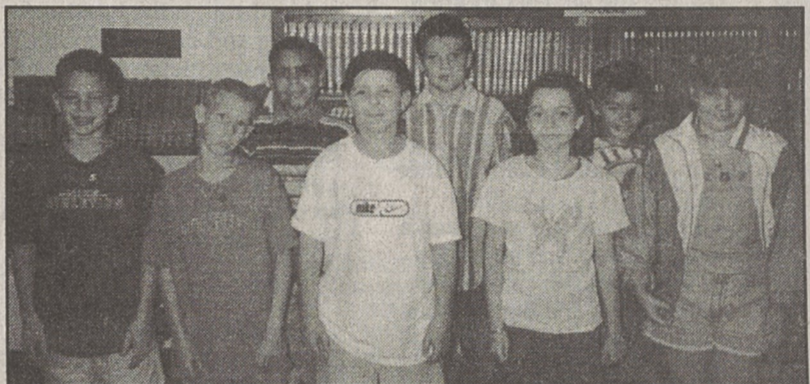
BEAM'S WEST 5TH GRADE A/B HONOR ROLL - Front row, left to right, Ryan Burton, Terri Carmichel, Matt Cash, Elizabeth Chantharath, Alex Childers and Josh Gilbert. Back row, Casey Ramsey and LaShay Scruggs.



HOPE'S WEST 4TH GRADE A/B HONOR ROLL - Front row, left to right, Jada Blanton, Tim Collins, Trey Mauney, Edmundo Obando, Lorrin Plyler. Back row, Shaunte Roseboro, Vanessa Sidavong, Sara Roberts.



GRAYSON'S WEST 3RD GRADE A/B HONOR ROLL - Left to right, Michael Bell, Leslie Boyd, Polly Etters, Hannah Locke, Elizabeth Thammachack, Katie Whiteside.



DENTON'S WEST 4TH GRADE A/B HONOR ROLL - Front row, left to right, Patrick Champion, Matt Henson, Jeremy Huffman, Kristin Long, Nikki Norwood. Back row, Lamar Robertson, Wesley Sipe, Chris Rudd. Not pictured, Caleb Bowen.

Hunt plans to fight violence

Raleigh - Recalling the senseless and untimely deaths of innocent people across the nation as a result of school violence, Gov. Jim Hunt made a passionate plea—and a powerful charge—for North Carolina schools not to fall victim to the violence that plagues our children and schools.

"We have done a lot in this state to keep our schools safe," said Hunt. "But none of that is enough when our students and teachers come to school afraid—and when we're afraid of them. We are serious about not adding a single school in North Carolina to that national list of horror. To do that is our top priority."

"This is not just a school problem. It is also a community problem. It is a family problem. It's a problem for all of our society," Hunt added.

Hunt charged Crime Control and Public Safety Secretary Richard Moore with forming The Governor's Task Force on Youth Violence and School Safety in response to the rash of school violence across the nation. The task force will focus on how North Carolina is doing with reference to prevention, intervention and response.

The task force will report back to the Governor by mid-July with specific recommendations for local leaders, school administrators, teachers, juvenile crime prevention councils, law enforcement, parents and students to begin implementing before the 1999-2000 school year. The report will compile resources and best practices for reducing school violence. The task force will also identify issues that should be dealt with at the state level.

Hunt urged the task force to do everything possible to make North Carolina's schools safe places for children to learn, including implementing zero tolerance and safe school plans in every school—and making students a part of that effort, reducing school size, encouraging communities to make schools a top priority, getting businesses involved and finding ways to boost parental involvement.

For the next several weeks, task force meetings will be held to address different perspectives on how to reduce youth violence and boost school safety. At each meeting, the task force will hear from experts describing model programs. In addition, the task force will hold regional town hall meetings across the state.

North Carolina began to focus on the problem of youth and school violence in 1993 when Gov. Hunt formed the Task Force on School Violence. Following the task force's rec-

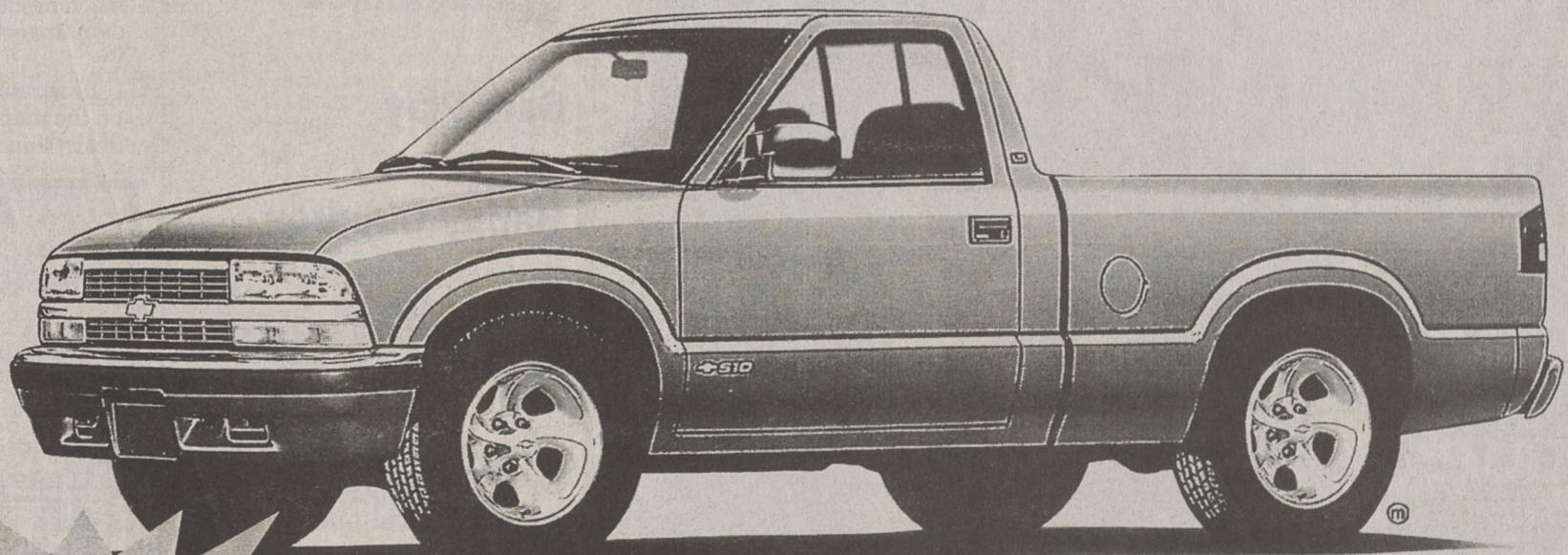
ommendations, North Carolina's schools have become safer places for students to learn and teachers to teach. Because of the efforts of the Hunt administration, North Carolina has created after-school and mentoring programs, pushed for tougher weapons laws, a stronger juvenile code, more effective programs for disruptive and violent students, more student involvement, and more time and resources spent on chil-

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