



JOB EXPO PARTICIPANTS—On hand with St. Augustine's College students during a recent Job Expo at the College are: (3rd from left standing) Chuck Quon and Earl Simpkins (Far Right) both representatives of Atlantic Richfield Company.

Poor Children Need Financial Support To Improve Condition

BY DR. RICHARD L. LESHER

President, U.S. Chamber of Commerce

WASHINGTON, D.C.—One out of every four children in the United States under the age of six is living in poverty, according to the National Commission on Children.

Of course, many children of poor homes received the basic necessities of life—food, shelter, discipline and love.

But the grim reality of today is that children of the poor suffer disproportionately from malnutrition, poor health, psychological stress, physical abuse, learning disabilities, and lack of ethical and moral guidance. They are more apt to engage in drug abuse and criminal activity than children from economically advantaged homes, and three times as likely to drop out of school.

This situation poses ominous implications for our country's future in both social and economic terms. The social aspect is obvious. Ill-educated people prone to antisocial behavior do not generally make good citizens, or contribute to civic stability.

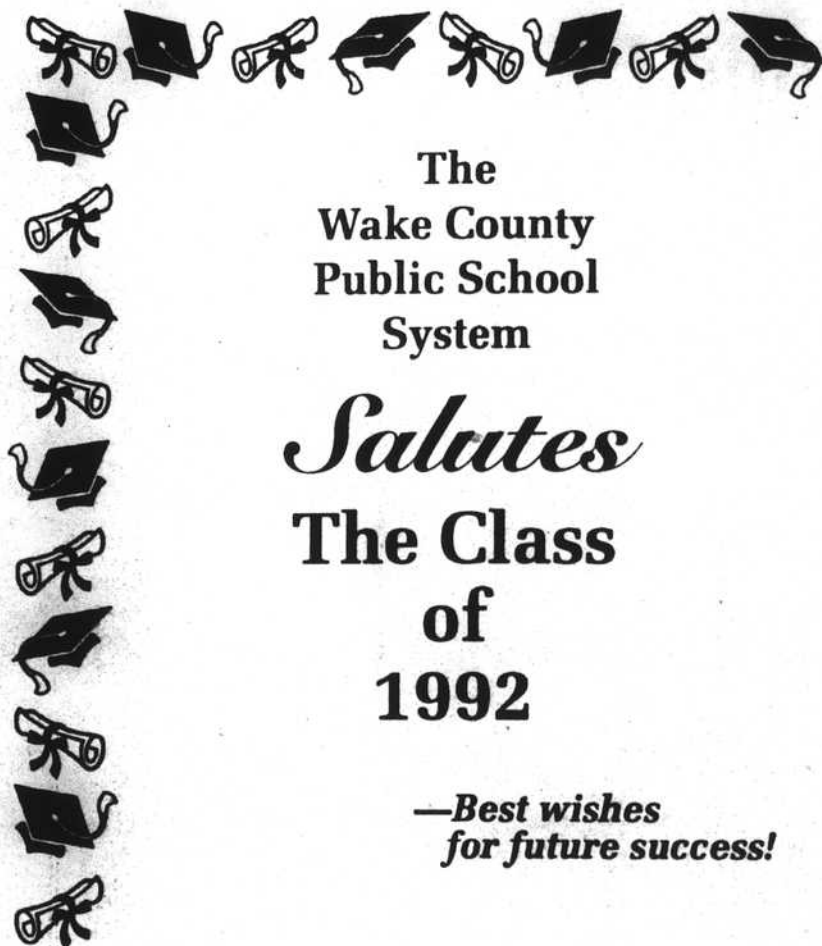
But the economic implications are most ominous of all. We live in an age of sophisticated technology. It used to be that anyone with minimal education, and a tad of mechanical aptitude, could look forward to a useful place in our industrial economy. No more. In the future, employees on the shop floor must be computer friendly and able to deal with rigorous intellectual challenges.

We look to public schools to prepare our young people for the workforce. However, there are limits to what they can do with kids from unstable home environments who come to school malnourished, unhealthy and apathetic.

The National Commission had no trouble identifying the source of this pathology—family breakdown. The story of childhood poverty is almost exclusively a story of broken homes.

Part of the solution must be financial. President Bush has supported steady funding increases for proven programs, such as Head Start, that help poor children. More recently he proposed a series of tax changes to benefit poor families. These recommendations deserve speedy action by Congress.

Beyond that, we all must take a more active hand in our communities to help struggling families overcome their poverty and improve their condition. There are hundreds of religious and civic organizations actively engaged in this critical work. They need our financial support, and also our volunteer time.



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