

**THE JACQUELINE P. DANZBERGER
MEMORIAL LECTURE**

**SCHOOL BOARDS:
REBUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE
PUBLIC**

Presented by
The Honorable Richard W. Riley
U.S. Secretary of Education, 1992 - 2000

AT THE

**ANNUAL CONFERENCE
NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION
MARCH 25, 2001**



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Washington, D.C.
January 2002

Dear Colleague,

"School Boards: Rebuilding Relationships with the Public" is excerpted from the inaugural Jacqueline P. Danzberger Memorial Lecture. Given by Richard W. Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education, 1992-2000, at the National School Boards Association Annual Conference, March 2001, the lecture encouraged school board members to trust the public. "If you engage the public in what you are doing, develop a well-run program and articulate a vision of public education that is clear, inclusive and focused on excellence for all, the public will get behind you."

Jacqueline P. Danzberger was the director of governance programs at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) from 1983 until her death in April 2000. Jackie, as she was known to friends and colleagues, left an indelible mark on the world of school governance. A former school board member herself, Jackie saw school board members as dynamic leaders who looked to the future, who could "smell the future," and who could fully engage the public in the great task of improving public education.

Jackie's involvement with education began in 1968, when she became chairman of the Darien (Connecticut) Board of Education. Later, she became president of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education. Jackie's affiliation with IEL began in 1975 when she was a nationally recruited Fellow in the Education Policy Fellowship Program (EPFP), a mid-career leadership development program for individuals in education and related policy arenas. In 1976 she founded the Connecticut site of EPFP.

During her 17-year tenure at IEL, Jackie's work included initiating, developing, and managing programs and activities related to education governance, management, and evaluation. She directed IEL's 1986 national study of local boards of education and co-authored the report, "School Boards: Strengthening Grass Roots Leadership," developed a school board effectiveness program and conducted follow-up studies of school boards and school restructuring. The American School Board Journal referred to Jackie as one of a handful of people composing the "intellectual core" driving school governance reform.

We are indebted to the partnership between the National School Boards Association (NSBA) and the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) that established the annual lecture and to the many donors whose financial support make it possible to commemorate Jackie's work.

Elizabeth L. Hale
President, IEL

Anne Bryant
Executive Director, NSBA

My father always taught me that the most important thing that can be said about a person is to call him or her “a good citizen.” As I look out at this audience at the National School Boards Association’s annual meeting, I see many, many good citizens. I thank you for your service to your community, to your country, and to America’s children. You are true patriots of our time.

Being a member of a school board is not an easy task these days. You are often in the “hot seat,” and it is fair to say that a good many other people are looking over your shoulder and have an opinion about what you should be doing. It reminds me of the cover of the well-known children’s book, “Where the Wild Things Are,” which shows a young child in a forest surrounded by looming monsters of every sort. I suspect that you sometimes feel like that child in the woods surrounded by all sorts of wild things.

Everyone—from mayors, to business leaders, to governors, to former and current Presidents of the United States—now has an opinion about how to improve public education and about how school board members should do their job. That is to be expected and welcomed.

We have waited a long time for the American people to make education a national priority and we need to engage everyone in this great national effort to lift up all of our children. I was so proud that, when I left my office as Secretary, education had become the first priority for America’s people. School board members have been a part of the many good things that are happening in almost every school district in our country. You have a daunting task and it comes at a time when there is a sea of change taking place in American education.

We are confronted with a series of challenges that are almost breathtaking in their scope.

Challenge #1: We have more children in our schools than ever before, yet a shrinking percentage of American households with children in public school.

As Harold Hodgkinson, a distinguished member of the IEL family has written, "The average American adult can go an entire week without a significant contact with a child under 18." At the same time, an increasing percentage of Americans are getting older. Some of the baby boomers are just a few years away from retirement. Looming ahead of us may be increasing competition for public dollars between those trying to improve public education and those seeking more support for the elderly. This is a competition we should avoid at all costs. School board members need to think creatively about how to develop new alliances with senior citizens in order to improve public education.

Challenge #2: We must continue the efforts to create a new system of education that focuses on high standards for all of our children.

While there is a relatively new American consensus around high standards, much remains to be done to put in place the measures of accountability that can help raise student achievement. Some policymakers are putting the cart before the horse. They are pulling tests off the shelf without thoughtfully involving parents, teachers, and school board members in helping to develop new measures of accountability and new ways to help teachers prepare for high standards. The goal of high standards will not be achieved if teachers are reduced to teaching to the test, and important 21st Century skills such as the arts, music, technology, physical fitness, and others are suddenly considered nonessential.

I believe in measuring; you can't improve what you do not measure. Tests that allow teachers and parents to spot academic problems early are worthwhile and needed. We need tests to let us know how well schools, school districts, states, and our country are doing—that is important to policymakers. I believe in fair accountability. But, we need to be thoughtful and involve all stakeholders in the processes of developing new assessments and new methods of accountability, and we need to develop multiple ways to assess progress. Student progress should not be measured on one test.

We must also remember that education should be bipartisan. We do not educate our children as Democrats or Republicans or Independents. We educate them as Americans. So it is important to have a high level of bipartisan support for the federal role in education to give our states and local communities more resources and tools to improve our public schools.

Challenge #3: There is a need to prepare a new generation of leaders for American public education.

Jackie Danzberger wrote extensively about this challenge. She said, "The most salient issue facing growing numbers of school districts is the dearth of individuals interested in accepting leadership positions." The growing shortage of principals has already been added to the existing teacher shortage in many school districts. And where are we to find the 8,000 new school superintendents that we need in the next eight years?

Jackie also was a clarion voice for change in thinking through a new role for school board members. She recognized long before others that the "governance of public education will change in one way or the other." Jackie alerted school board members to these leadership changes and boldly challenged them to think in entirely new terms about their roles and responsibilities.

Mr. Morita, head of the Sony Corporation, said to me late one evening in the South Carolina Governor's Mansion that the most important thing a business or government leader had to do to be successful was to "*smell the future.*" This is what Jackie Danzberger asked school boards to do—to "smell the future" and to change their governance system to prepare for the coming times.

Challenge #4: We must reconnect with the American public in a new and more fundamental way.

This is quite possibly the greatest challenge we face. Several months ago, leaders from the National Issues Forum (NIF) came to my office to discuss their new report, "*Public Schools: Are they making the grade?*" The report listed six themes that resonated with the American people. To me, the most riveting of all the themes were the two about connections. According to the report, the public's concern "went far beyond the issues of choice, standards, and funding." People were most concerned that the "relationship" between the public and the public school system was "broken."

The public did not seek to control the day-to-day administration of the public schools. They wanted something deeper. They wanted to feel a sense of connection. They wanted schools to be the "hub of community life" with real links to business and community groups. They wanted schools to be smaller, and in the neighborhood, and designed with the community. They wanted new opportunities for parents to be involved. They wanted more after-school opportunities and more opportunities for the elderly to serve as mentors. They wanted to feel that the school belongs to the entire community and believed that the entire community could help improve education. Interesting, too, the deeper they got into the issues, the more the people rejected the use of public money for private school vouchers.

The NIF report suggests that we need to be doing a much better job of engaging and reconnecting with the American people to create and sustain a new sense of democracy. Public education cannot continue to thrive if school boards find themselves disconnected or cut off from the broader public.

Creating school, family, and community partnerships should be the hallmark of American education in the 21st Century. These partnerships are good for public education and good for democracy, as well.

Every one of these four broad challenges we face can be resolved if we see our schools as true centers of community.

- The American people are suggesting a way to achieve high standards that is far more inclusive and richer than that being suggested by some policymakers. They want schools that are “child-centered,” rather than school systems that move their children around to accommodate existing bus schedules or overcrowding problems.
- Building new schools that are open later and longer and for more people—including parents and senior citizens—is a smart way to head off the generational competition for public dollars. Building community learning centers may also be the future of public education. Senior citizens—and there will be a lot more of them in the years ahead—are in many areas the great untapped resource in public education. It is a two-way street. Creating inter-generational community-service projects and encouraging senior citizens to act as tutors and mentors during and after school should be promoted.
- The American people also want us to think seriously about getting smaller. Instead of building high schools the size of shopping malls, people want us to build schools that are smaller so that every teenager feels a sense of connection. Instead of building one high school with 2,500 kids, why not build three smaller schools? No teenager should

get so lost in the crowd that he or she suddenly feels compelled to pull out a gun and start shooting. We need to consider all of the factors: the availability of guns, violence in the media, and the need for more connectedness.

- We know that parents want to participate in their children's education in ways that are meaningful to them. The Sacramento school district, for example, decided to pay teachers and principals a stipend to visit parents in their homes. As a result, reading scores are up in the eight schools participating in the program and the number of parents going to school at night has increased dramatically. The Sacramento school board has developed a new relationship with parents, a relationship that allows them to feel that they are full participants in their children's education.
- If we want to avoid a public backlash when it comes to putting high standards and new measures of accountability into place, we need to be reaching out to parents and teachers. Engaging the public does not mean lowering standards. It simply means creating a process that involves the public (including teachers) and designing strategies that respect their legitimate concerns. Teachers also must be given the time and quality professional help to develop the curriculum and the instructional tools needed, so that all students can reach the new high standards.
- It seems to me that school board members need to be going to the public right now and asking for help in recruiting a new generation of leaders. School systems simply cannot continue to raid each other for talented teachers, principals, and superintendents. We need to come together with business leaders, public officials at all levels, and foundations to create a larger talent pool of future principals and superintendents.

The essential point in all of my remarks today is that we should not fear the public. I urge school board members to trust the people. They care about education. They want to improve education, and they want to be involved. If you engage the public in what you are doing, if you develop a well-run program, and you articulate a vision of public education that is clear, inclusive, and focused on excellence for all, the public will get behind you. Trust the people.

To me, this was Jackie Danzberger's vision of school board members. She did not encourage school board members to be micro-managers. Indeed, she asked school board members to be just the opposite. She saw school board members as dynamic leaders who looked to the future, who could "smell the future," and who could fully engage the public in the great task of improving public education.

Jackie Danzberger believed deeply that school board members had a vital role to play in transforming public education. I encourage each and every school board member to follow Jackie's lead and, in so doing, rebuild relationships with the American public.

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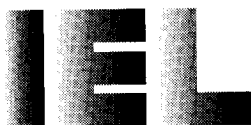
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