
**The
Jacqueline P. Danzberger
Memorial Lecture**

Second Annual

**SCHOOL BOARDS:
HOLDING
THE POWER
&
BEARING
THE RESPONSIBILITY
FOR EDUCATIONAL
LEADERSHIP**

Presented by

*The Honorable Rod Paige
U.S. Secretary of Education
2001-*

*April 7, 2002
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The National School Boards Association
and
The Institute for Educational Leadership**

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Dear Colleague:

"School Boards: Holding The Power & Bearing The Responsibility For Educational Leadership" is excerpted from the second annual Jacqueline P. Danzberger Memorial Lecture. Presented by current U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige at the National School Boards Conference (April 2002), the lecture encouraged school board members to step up to the leadership plate.

The Secretary's speech was given in honor and memory of Jacqueline P. Danzberger, 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 could fully engage the public in the great task of improving public education.

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.

We are indebted both to our organizations' partnership — (NSBA) and (IEL) that established the Jacqueline P. Danzberger Memorial Lecture — and to the many donors whose contributions have made it possible.

Anne Bryant

Executive Director, NSBA

Elizabeth L. Hale

President, IEL

Remarks from Secretary Rod Paige...

At this important time of challenge and change in American education, the opportunity to meet with an organization that holds such an important position in the struggle to improve America's schools is deeply appreciated. I want to thank Anne Bryant for her leadership of this great organization — the National School Boards Association (NSBA). I also want to thank the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL). I have the highest respect for its great contributions to effective public education, and I know that many school boards deeply appreciate IEL's help in providing objective data and ideas on how to do their job better. Most education reformers ignore or try to bypass school boards. But, thanks to IEL and the individual in whose honor I give today's lecture, Jacqueline P. Danzberger, school boards have their intellectual think tank.

Let me also express my thanks to each of you for your service to America's children. If serving as a member of the school board in your community is anything like it is in Houston, it is tough business. You deserve all the encouragement you can get, and I thank you for your service.

The title of this event gives me some concern, because it imposes two very definite conditions. First, the term "lecture" means that I must be scholarly, and, secondly, because the lecture is named after a school board scholar, it means that I have to be true to her memory. With more courage than wisdom, I'll give it a try.

Let's start by talking about the person we honor today. Jacqueline P. Danzberger was the director of school board governance programs at IEL from 1983 until her death in April 2000. She was loved and admired for her dedication to effective school board governance and for the quality of her research and writing. She began her involvement with school boards and governance issues when she was elected to the school board in Darien, Connecticut in 1968. The *American School Journal* referred to her as one of a handful of people composing the intellectual core driving school board governance reform.

Jackie Danzberger was a great school board reformer, and I think she would agree with me: *quality school board functioning is central to the effectiveness of schooling*. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the effectiveness of school board governance is the single most important determinant of school district success or failure. I don't say this without some justification.

I have a deserved opinion on this matter based on the fact that few people have experienced the schooling enterprise from as many perspectives as I:

- I grew up in a school environment; my parents were teachers for most of their professional careers.
- I have been a teacher at the middle school, high school, university, and college levels.
- I have been a Dean of a College of Education that prepared 23% of the teachers for one of the nation's largest public school systems -- the Houston Independent School District (HISD).

- I was elected to two 4-year terms to the HISD Board of Education; I served as the Board's President and as its first Vice President.
- I served several years as a regional representative to the executive board of the Texas Association of School Boards.
- I served 7 plus years as the Superintendent of the HISD.

When I examine these various perspectives and ask the question, "Which of these positions has the greatest influence on the quality of the school district," there is no close second answer. *Without a doubt, the entity with the greatest influence on the quality of school district effectiveness is the school board.*

Allow me to be blunt here. Where there is a good school district, there is a good school board; the reverse is also true. I understand your challenges and I understand your pressures. But I also understand that our nation needs you to be the leaders in this school improvement effort.

I call on you, as Jacqueline P. Danzberger did in her time, to take charge of the reform effort. Begin by asking the question, "Are we as a school board operating in a manner which would make Jacqueline Danzberger proud?" If your answer is "not quite," then I invite you, as a board, to look up the principles of school board effectiveness that she championed and have a board retreat around them. You evaluate your superintendent to learn about areas of strengths and weaknesses. The board, also, can benefit from a good self-assessment to identify its strengths and weaknesses. Why do I think this is important? The next few years will be very intense, and school boards must be glued together.

Present Realities

Over the last eighteen years, Americans have invested considerable energy and capital in public school improvement efforts. Although random pockets of improvement exist, in the main, the core elements of public school failure are still solidly entrenched. Almost 18 years have passed since the current generation of school reform efforts was ushered in by the publication of an alarmist call-to-action, entitled *A Nation at Risk*. These past 18 years have been brimming with well-intended school reform efforts, but an alarmingly high and growing segment of the nation's population, especially minorities who populate America's largest cities, is still at high risk due to major educational shortcomings.

Many Americans view our system of public schooling as disastrously close to insolvency. While the past 18 years are replete with gargantuan efforts by skilled and well-meaning educational theorists and practitioners, student **underachievement**, primarily that of urban school children, but rural children as well, continues unabated:

- Notwithstanding billions of dollars in local, state, and national investments, estimates of functional illiteracy in America's largest cities still run as high as 50 percent.
- Although dropout prevention programs abound, at least half of the students who enroll in big-city school districts' ninth grades drop out of school before completing grade 12.
- Alternatives to public schooling — vouchers, charter schools, etc. — once thought improbable, now seem inevitable. In Texas, home schooling has become the fastest growing K-12 public education alternative.

- The academic achievement gap between minority and non-minority students is still wide; according to some, it is getting wider.
- Cyber and Internet schools are becoming a competitive educational delivery system.
- In many large cities (Chicago, Cleveland, Boston, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., etc.), locally elected school boards have been thrown out by state legislatures, and mayors have been given more control of schools. As I speak, the Maryland legislature is stripping the 130,000-student Prince George's County school board of much of its power.

The public is losing patience with poor student performance and is beginning to take action. Through public opinion polls, newspaper editorials, and talk radio, Americans shout their eroding confidence in the very concept of public education. Evidence abounds that the public views educators' attempts to improve the nation's system of public education as well intended, but not likely to succeed. To be sure, there are some signs of progress and glimmers of hope that things are getting better. These improvements, however, can in no way be considered as systemic or widespread. They are at best "random pockets of improvement."

Our education failures are considered by many to be a national security issue. In early February 2001, the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century, co-chaired by former U.S. Senators Warren Rudman and Gary Hart, and comprised of 14 outstanding bipartisan commissioners, issued its Phase III Report entitled, "*Road Map for National Security: Imperative for Change*." Although several of the recommendations were relevant to educational organizations, one stands out:

"Second only to a weapon of mass destruction detonating in an American city, we can think of nothing more dangerous than a failure to manage properly science, technology, and education for the common good over the next quarter century."

Some argue that inadequate resources are the explanation for our failures. The facts, however, don't support this proposition. Between 1996 and 2002, federal discretionary appropriations for the Department of Education increased by 113 percent, from \$23 billion to \$48.9 billion. In the past three and a half decades, the federal government has spent more than \$200 billion on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) alone. Student performance in reading today is not substantially different from that of 1984. Spending increased sharply, yet student achievement has remained relatively flat. Why is there so little progress after so much effort?

One answer certainly must be the operations of school boards. The situation can be improved by improving school board operations, and this offers wonderful opportunities for improvement in school board leadership. Given the current realities, I offer the advice of a well-known training, consulting, and organizational development company, Main Event Management: "If things don't change, they stay the same." If our great country is to maintain its global and international leadership, public schooling must change. We must improve school board governance. This was the focus of Jacqueline Danzberger's work.

Today there are excellent examples of quality school board governance, and I offer the HISD School District as but one example. We had great success in improving student performance during my superintendency, but the credit belongs to the school board. It resisted the temptation to micromanage and allowed me to focus on educating the kids. While some school boards create a shadow administration that hassles the regular administration, the HISD board did not. It set policy; I managed the district. It debated ideas; I put the ideas into action. It set expectations for high achievement; I found the best way to make sure every child met those expectations. The results in student performance impressed most of our observers. My point is, it can be done.

Looking at the Future

Notwithstanding the current situation, educational excellence is within our reach. Our problems are difficult, but not insurmountable. On his third day in office, President Bush submitted an education reform proposal to Congress based on four “whole system” principles:

- accountability for results;
- flexibility and local control;
- expanded parental options; and
- doing what works.

The President asked the Congress to undertake a vigorous and bipartisan debate of the proposal. The Congress responded in a bipartisan way by passing a bill based on these principles — The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 — a law that represents the most important change in the federal role in Pre K-12 education since 1965.

This public law is different. It is the vision of a President who is willing to stand by it. This is not a Republican law, and this is not a Democrat law; it is an American law. It is the product of a bipartisan congressional effort, and it has teeth. Schools identified as “needing improvement” under the new law could eventually be subject to penalties. This bipartisan congressional effort offers us a basis to join hands in pursuit of a great American goal. It offers us an opportunity to work together to create in America an education system that leaves no child behind.

The President’s second principle—*flexibility* and local control—makes the participation of NSBA and local school boards’ so important. It is this principle that prompts me to call upon NSBA to join the President, the Congress of the United States and many other Americans in the pursuit of a great goal: an education system in America that leaves no child behind.

This time, like no other, offers an unusual opportunity for an organization focused on quality education leadership. The opportunities, however, are not without challenges. Bluntly put, we have had a quality problem in school board leadership that must be improved. We cannot solve long-term problems with short-term administrative leadership. Hostility between superintendents and school board members is unproductive. We must find a way for school board members and superintendents to work together. Our teachers, our students, our parents, and our citizens depend on school boards and superintendents working together. Too much depends on our work to do otherwise.

The bottom line is that school board leadership must:

- ... be of high quality, based on good relationships with individual members, the superintendent, and the public.**
- ... be focused on macro-district issues and stay away from management and administrative matters. As Jackie Danzberger said, “Boards spend too little time on major concerns and too much time dealing with administrative trivia.”**
- ... set high goals and standards for the district and for all students, not just the most privileged ones.**

This is an unprecedented time for school boards and educational leaders, and we want you to be our partners. I know you have concerns, but they can be overcome. The Republicans and Democrats in Congress decided that American education was more important than their differences; they found a way to pass the bill in a bipartisan way.

There are many things that we don't know, but there are some things that I know for sure: I know that you are just as interested in improving American education as anyone. I know that you have your own struggles with barriers to progress presented by funding shortfalls and political situations back home. I know that your constituents constantly pressure you about jobs, political favors, and fund raising. Finally, I know that many of you lack the support you need from community organizations and city and county leaders.

But we face a choice today. We can ignore the lack of confidence many have in us as educa-

tors and in current education situations, or we can live up to Jackie Danzberger's dream of effective school board governance and work together to meet the challenge of ensuring no child is left behind. What we are asking of you is difficult, but most worthwhile things are difficult. This is why we need strong leadership from organizations like NSBA.

I repeat: You hold the lever. You can make the difference. That's why I call on all of you to join me, join President Bush, join Congress, and join many other Americans in making sure every child in America gets an excellent education. I know many of you personally, and I know others by reputation. I know you want to achieve this goal. I know you have the skills to achieve this goal. Through H.R. 1, the President and Congress have given us the tools and laid out the roadmap.

Abraham Lincoln's words about the judgment of history remind me of the significance of our task:

“Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation.... We—even we here—hold the power, and bear the responsibility... We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth.”

We cannot recover the years that were wasted on an education system that has failed so many children, but we can recast its future.

The No Child Left Behind law shows us the way. If we earnestly enact its reforms and vigorously pursue its goals, we will create schools worthy of the next generation of Americans. It is our charge. It is our responsibility. If we set our minds and our hearts to it, we shall nobly save the last best hope of earth—our children.



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The following persons have delivered the lecture:

2001 Richard W. Riley, U.S. Secretary of Education, 1992-2000

2002 Rod Paige, U.S. Secretary of Education, 2001-

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