

A Nation At
Risk (1983)

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Honorable T. H. Bell
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, D.C. 20202

April 26, 1983

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On August 26, 1981, you created the National Commission on Excellence in Education and directed it to present a report on the quality of education in America to you and to the American people by April of 1983.

It has been my privilege to chair this endeavor and on behalf of the members of the Commission it is my pleasure to transmit this report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*.

Our purpose has been to help define the problems afflicting American education and to provide solutions, not search for scapegoats. We addressed the main issues as we saw them, but have not attempted to treat the subordinate matters in any detail. We were forthright in our discussions and have been candid in our report regarding both the strengths and weaknesses of American education.


The Commission deeply believes that the problems we have discerned in American education can be both understood and corrected if the people of our country, together with those who have public responsibility in the matter, care enough and are courageous enough to do what is required.

Each member of the Commission appreciates your leadership in having asked this diverse group of persons to examine one of the central issues which will define our Nation's future. We especially welcomed your confidence throughout the course of our deliberations and your anticipation of a report free of political partisanship.

It is our collective and earnest hope that you will continue to provide leadership in this effort by assuring wide dissemination and full discussion of this report, and by encouraging appropriate action throughout the country. We believe that materials compiled by the Commission in the course of its work constitute a major resource for all persons interested in American education.

The other Commissioners and I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to have served our country as members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, and on their behalf I remain,

Respectfully,


David Pierpont Gardner
Chairman

Members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education

David P. Gardner (Chair)
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University of Utah and
President-Elect, University of
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Salt Lake City, Utah

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Introduction

Secretary of Education T. H. Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education on August 26, 1981, directing it to examine the quality of education in the United States and to make a report to the Nation and to him within 18 months of its first meeting. In accordance with the Secretary's instructions, this report contains practical recommendations for educational improvement and fulfills the Commission's responsibilities under the terms of its charter. ✓

The Commission was created as a result of the Secretary's concern about "the widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system." Soliciting the "support of all who care about our future," the Secretary noted that he was establishing the Commission based on his "responsibility to provide leadership, constructive criticism, and effective assistance to schools and universities." ✓

The Commission's charter contained several specific charges to which we have given particular attention. These included:

- assessing the quality of teaching and learning in our Nation's public and private schools, colleges, and universities;
 - comparing American schools and colleges with those of other advanced nations;
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- studying the relationship between college admissions requirements and student achievement in high school;
 - identifying educational programs which result in notable student success in college;
 - assessing the degree to which major social and educational changes in the last quarter century have affected student achievement; and
 - defining problems which must be faced and overcome if we are successfully to pursue the course of excellence in education.

The Commission's charter directed it to pay particular attention to teenage youth, and we have done so largely by focusing on high schools. Selective attention was given to the formative years spent in elementary schools, to higher education, and to vocational and technical programs. We refer those interested in the need for similar reform in higher education to the recent report of the American Council on Education, *To Strengthen the Quality of Higher Education*.

In going about its work the Commission has relied in the main upon five sources of information:

- papers commissioned from experts on a variety of educational issues;
- administrators, teachers, students, representatives of professional and public groups, parents, business leaders, public officials, and scholars who testified at eight meetings of the full Commission, six public hearings, two panel discussions, a symposium, and a series of meetings organized by the Department of Education's Regional Offices;
- existing analyses of problems in education;
- letters from concerned citizens, teachers, and administrators who volunteered extensive comments on problems and possibilities in American education; and

