

Remarks of Hayes Mizell on August 27, 2004, at a benefit for The Swann Fellowship. The Fellowship is named for missionaries Darius and Vera Swann, the plaintiffs in the historic federal court case, Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education. The Fellowship is a non-profit organization formed in 1997 out of several Charlotte congregations to be a witness to the value of diversity of public education and to educate the public on school issues as they related to this and allied subjects. Among the organization's activities is the publication of Educate! (www.educateclt.org), a journal on public education focusing on Charlotte-Mecklenburg and North Carolina. About 80 people attended the benefit held at Hope Haven conference center in Charlotte, NC. Mizell is the Distinguished Senior Fellow of the National Staff Development Council.

A “Superintendent” Speaks

In my experience advocating, supporting, and observing school reform, I have concluded that lack of imagination is often a major impediment to change. Many people do not believe reform is possible because they cannot imagine that public schools can ever be different than they currently are. This is especially true of people working in schools because each day they fight to keep their heads above water. They are often dispirited, if not exhausted. While it is not possible to imagine a school system or school into becoming more productive, firing up one's imagination can generate energy and even enthusiasm for taking on the hard work of school reform. Tonight, I invite you to open the doors to your imaginations, and think about the roles you might play as leaders of school reform in this community. Here is how I imagine one way of moving towards a different reality for almost any urban school system in the South, but lest anyone react as some citizens did to the 1938 radio broadcast of *War of the Worlds*, let me assure you that what follows is not real:

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Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for responding to my invitation to attend tonight's meeting. As you know, I am one of the candidates for superintendent of your public schools. Two months ago, the school board's search committee contacted me to explore my interest in this position. Subsequently, representatives of the committee visited my community and we had an extensive discussion. The committee then invited me to visit your community and participate in an interview with the full school board. During the past several days, the board interviewed me, along with other candidates, and during the next week the school board will name finalists it will consider further for superintendent.

I have taken the unusual step of organizing this meeting, open to all citizens, to introduce myself to your community. I thank the news media and community organizations for publicizing this meeting on just several days notice. My invitation to you is not to promote my candidacy, but rather to share my philosophy and beliefs that will guide my actions if your school board selects me to be superintendent. Unlike other candidates for this position, I am nearing the end of my career. If I do *not* become the superintendent of your public schools, my future, my independence, and my ego will remain secure. Therefore, perhaps I can speak and act more freely than other candidates the school board is considering. In any case, you deserve to know as much as possible

about my perspectives and values *before* rather than *after* the board selects me as superintendent, if that occurs. Again, I am not “running” for the position of superintendent. The sole purpose of my remarks tonight is to inform the expectations your community will inevitably develop if I am ultimately the school board’s choice.

Let me begin at the beginning. Your public schools are the institutional manifestation of your community’s belief that all children should develop the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for them to become productive, independent adults, capable of sustaining and strengthening the democratic civic life of this community. As your superintendent, I will proceed on the assumption and with the expectation that your community is seeking that result. If my assumption is not correct, please let me know as soon as possible so I can withdraw my name from the list of candidates for superintendent. This is important, so I want to repeat my assumption and expectation:

Your public schools are the institutional manifestation of your belief that all children should develop the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to become productive, independent adults, capable of sustaining and strengthening the democratic civic life of this community.

Now I want to use the remainder of my time to deconstruct that sentence by probing more deeply its key phrases. Because this is the most important speech of my life, it is also the longest, so I ask in advance for your tolerance.

“Your public schools..”

Strictly speaking, your school system exists because the legislature of your state created it many years ago when it organized a statewide system of public education. The legislature can alter or abolish your school system at any time. When the legislature created the state system of public schools, it was an innovation. Many people did not believe that education should be a responsibility of the state or that the state should help finance public schools. Thankfully, over many decades, most people came to recognize the value of public education so that today if the state legislature abruptly decided to no longer finance public schools, there would be a political revolt or individual communities, including this one, would take radical steps to maintain, in some form, their current systems of public education. In other words, most people in this community believe so deeply in public education, and value it so greatly, that they would take whatever steps necessary to retain it, if it seemed on the brink of going out of existence.

Therefore, the public schools of this community are yours. You may be disappointed in them, you may complain about them, and you may even seek to escape them, but they are yours. They are this community’s gift to the futures of individual children and to the future of the community as a whole. It is, in fact, impossible to calculate your community’s total investment in your public schools, not just its financial investment, but also the investments of time, effort, worry, anger, and hope by thousands of people over many decades. There is no doubt that the public schools in this community are *your* schools.

I make this point explicit because there may be some people in your community who argue that the public schools are *not* theirs. They either say, in effect, that they have divorced themselves from the public school system, or they have outlived their need for

it. They may send their children to non-public schools, educate them at home, send them to schools in the adjoining school district, or they no longer have children of school age. They contend this absolves them of responsibility for the community's public schools. Some people believe that if, for whatever reason, they do not use the public schools, their tax dollars should not support them. Some people even believe that a portion of public revenue from *other* people's taxes should support their personal decision not to use public schools.

This is an argument that has dangerous implications for this community far more profound than its potential consequences for public schools. Imagine a community where only the patrons of the public library support the library, and where people who choose to buy books instead of using the library expect taxpayers to support their private choice. Imagine a community where only people who live in public residential areas support the police department, but people who choose to live in gated residential developments protected by private security companies expect taxpayers to support their private choice. Imagine a community where only families that use public parks and recreational facilities support those facilities, while families that join tennis and swim clubs, or even have their own tennis courts or swimming pools, expect taxpayers to support their private choice. Imagine a community where only people who ride buses and trains support the public transportation system, while families that choose to buy one, or two, or three cars expect taxpayers to support their private purchases. These scenarios are not fantasy because we see them occurring, if somewhat less dramatically, in communities where support for public institutions is on the decline. I hope this community is not taking the same direction.

Do not misunderstand me. Choice is a fundamental right in our great country. Ironically, it is *because* of the success of public education that more and more people are exercising their right to choose. They have benefited from public education that enables them to obtain the jobs and salaries that empowers them to have and make choices. Their public education has helped them develop the abilities and critical thinking necessary to discern, understand, and assess choices. I do not disparage the right of any person or any group to have and make choices they believe are in their best interests, so long as those choices are within ethical and legal parameters. Indeed, a goal of public education should be to educate all children to levels of performance that will enable them, as adults, to access the choices available to them, or create new ones, and choose wisely among them.

The choice not to use publicly financed services, such as the school system, is a right citizens can exercise, and I respect that right. However, particularly in the case of public education, I expect those citizens, as taxpayers, to participate fully in supporting your public schools and to refrain from actions that have the effect of eroding that support. In practical terms, this means that I will expect the political, business, civic, and moral leaders of this community to be vocal and persistent advocates for broad and effective public support of your public schools, and I will expect their actions to be consistent with their advocacy. I know some of these leaders will choose not to use the public schools to educate their own children and it is their right to make that choice. What I will not accept is for their personal choices to influence negatively their responsibilities as community leaders to support your public schools. I know some leaders work with, socialize with, and go to church with other people who choose not to

use the public schools; nevertheless, I will expect these leaders to take public policy positions that strongly support public education.

As for others, I will expect senior citizens, families who home school their children, and leaders of non-public schools to also put the community's interest above their personal self-interest and strongly support public education. These are *your* public schools and I expect this community, from top to bottom, to provide the support necessary to educate *all* public school students to perform at significantly higher levels.

I will go further. It is in this community's interest to have high expectations for the education performance of all children, in all education settings. If education is as important to the future of this community as everyone says it is, then governmental, economic, and civic leaders should be concerned with the education performance of all students, no matter the venue where their schooling occurs. Therefore, I challenge the mayor and the chair of the county commission to convene meetings of leaders of public schools, independent schools, parochial schools, charter schools, home schools, and all other means of education in this community to discuss establishing *community standards of student performance* that will apply to *all* providers of education, pre-school through the twelfth grade. I encourage this dialogue and welcome the opportunity to participate in it. For many different reasons, families choose different types of education for their children, but citizens of this community have a right to expect that regardless of the type of schooling children experience, their education will enable them to perform at levels necessary to become independent, productive citizens.

“..the institutional manifestation..”

As mandated by the state legislature, your public school system is the organized means by which this community educates its children. Your legislature has decided, and most citizens agree, that this system is the most efficient way to educate the tens of thousands of children in this school district. Most people are not qualified and do not want to teach their own children and they cannot afford for someone else to educate them. The public school system is not the only means of educating the community's children, but in general, it has proven to be the best way to educate the most children. One can cite evidence that in some cases, independent schools or home schools are more effective than the public school system, but no one seriously suggests that it is possible or desirable to use such approaches for educating the entire school-age population of this community.

Most cities' public school systems are large and complex organizations, with thousands of employees and children for which they are responsible. In communities with accelerated residential growth beyond the school system's control, external forces impinging on the school system can become almost overwhelming. A school system's focus, therefore, can become fragmented, more concerned with policies, regulations, and procedures to guide practices and provide services than with the primary task of educating children. Reversing this paradigm is difficult, but it is important to try. Until I learn more about your school system, I cannot know all the ways in which it should or could change for the better, but the following are my current thoughts:

- The purpose of this school system is to educate every child, in every school, to perform at significantly higher levels. Employment in the school system is a

sacred trust, focused on providing the best possible education for children and the greatest possible support for teachers. The school system does not exist to provide jobs for this community or any group in this community. The school system does not exist for its employees. We are not here to create bureaucratic sinecures or perpetuate activities that do not directly improve teaching and learning. We are not here to please each family or each school board member; we are here to educate the children who attend our public schools.

- As more and more families choose to live in this school district, residential development is occurring at a rapid rate. The school system does not have the authority to either control or influence it. Enterprising developers build almost at will, leaving it to the public school system to catch up. Families purchase homes in and move to new residential developments, assuming public schools will follow. They even assume the new schools will be in locations convenient to their developments. Though these trends have serious educational, economic and social consequences for this entire community, new homes spring up without abate and the school system scrambles to respond. This has to change. It is time for everyone to be concerned with the development of this *community* and *all its institutions*, not just its housing. Therefore, when the school system has not participated in the planning for new residential developments, I will recommend to the school board that it declare a moratorium on new school construction in those areas. The school system will serve all families who choose to use it, but we have an obligation to all, not just some, of this community's taxpayers.
- Providing competent, caring, stable leadership at the school and classroom levels must be the school system's priority. As superintendent, I will be more concerned with high quality teaching and high quality school leadership than with "highly qualified" teachers and principals. Teacher certification alone is a weak foundation upon which to build a career of educating children with diverse needs. I will place greater value on educators who are learners, and the results they produce, than on the certificates they hold. To the extent that laws require it, we will honor educators' credentials, but we will devote greater attention to the *school and student effects* of educators' performance. I will work with representative teachers and administrators to draft a salary and incentive system that emphasizes *performance* as the primary factor in the recruitment, retention, promotion and assessment of the school system's professional staff.
- Teachers and principals are marvelous people who each day willingly endure, even embrace, what most people in this community seek to avoid. They are people of good will and good intent, but they would like to be more successful in positively affecting the academic performance of students. To achieve that goal, they need to know more, they need to analyze and reflect more on their own practice, and they need to collaborate more with their colleagues to identify and test potential solutions to difficult issues of pedagogy and learning. I will expect every teacher and every principal in every school to engage in such a process of high-quality professional learning. To make this possible, we will relieve them of current professional development obligations that yield few, if any, significant improvements in student performance. In place of these unproductive activities, we will require and support high-quality professional learning experiences that

- occur at the school level and, for the most part, occur as part of educators' daily work. These professional learning experiences must be and will be focused on raising levels of student performance. We will make it clear to persons seeking employment in the school system that if they are not committed to their own intellectual development and to continuous learning to improve their practice and its results, they need not apply.
- During the past several decades, the growth of your school system, its increasing complexity, and a host of state and federal education programs, laws and regulations have led the system to develop a central office bureaucracy. Much of it is necessary, but one negative effect is that the central office generates a torrent of communications and directives that distract schools from improving student achievement, rather than enhances their efforts to do so. My basic operating principle will be that functions of the central office should be limited, and focused to the greatest extent possible on supporting schools and classroom teachers. I will closely review the central office organization, staffing, and communications to determine if there are functions we can eliminate and utilize the savings to meet pressing school needs. The primary criterion I will use to assess these functions will be the results they produce and their value to children's efforts to learn and teachers' efforts to teach. My goal will be to reduce significantly the links in the chain of administrative actions between the central office and achievement in the classroom.
 - The school system must be accountable for its academic results. However, nearly all school systems fail to hold *themselves* accountable for what students know and are able to do. It is not surprising, therefore, that in recent years state and federal governments have enacted more laws seeking to hold schools more accountable. School systems have responded to these mandates by providing educational experiences that are increasingly narrow and superficial. It will be difficult to shift from educators expecting others to hold them accountable to educators holding themselves accountable, but we have to begin. I will require each school to create an academic oversight committee responsible for developing a deep understanding of what students actually know and can do. One aspect of this process will be for the committees to become thoroughly familiar with test results, but the greater challenge will be to discover or develop, and pilot, types of performance-based assessment that are more revealing and instructive than current tests. No school currently has the capacity to carry out this task effectively, so for the first two years the oversight committees' work will be devoted to intensive professional learning; in subsequent years the learning will become less intensive but no less intentional. Each school's goal will be to become more knowledgeable, honest, and public—internally and externally—about *authentic* student performance, and to become more responsive to the self-imposed imperative to improve it. To ensure that schools take this goal seriously, I will make it one criterion in my personal annual performance reviews of principals.
 - I will work to create a professional culture where teachers and administrators take greater responsibility for developing and applying solutions to the problems they face. Because they are models for their students, teachers and administrators

must demonstrate that their own education empowers them to solve problems. One use of education, after all, is the identification of resources, critical thinking, and learning from and adapting the experiences of others. There is a wealth of talent and experience in this school system. There are educators who produce wonderful results in their schools and classrooms. We must make greater use of the intellectual and experiential resources we have to solve our own problems, rather than blaming others or waiting for them to provide “solutions” we then resent. I will create incentives for and publicly recognize teachers and administrators who generate solutions that demonstrably improve the performance of our schools and our students.

- The citizens of this community must trust their public school system. To earn that trust, as well as to obtain expert, thoughtful analyses about the school system’s performance, I will take these actions. First, I will contract with an external qualitative evaluation firm experienced in observing and analyzing school system reforms. Representatives of this firm will periodically visit the school system, interview selected educators at both the central office and building levels, observe classes and subsequently provide us with narrative reports assessing the school system’s progress in creating conditions that raise levels of educator and student performance. I will make these reports public. In addition, I will ask selected business leaders of this community to serve on a financial and business operations oversight committee. Their role will be to become intimately knowledgeable about the school system’s finances and business operations, and to issue an annual report that includes their findings and recommendations. These reports will supplement, not replace, the current annual financial review conducted by the school system’s external auditors. I will make the committee’s reports public. I will expect this committee to be the public stewards for the efficiency and effectiveness of the school system’s finances and business operations. When we need to improve, I will expect them to tell us, and when our funding agencies need to provide greater support for your public schools, I will expect the committee members to be your school system’s most vocal advocates.

As the institutional manifestation of this community’s intent to educate its children, your public school system is not perfect, though it is better than many others, and I cannot make it perfect. I do believe, however, that we must organize and operate the system to focus its considerable financial and human resources on increasing students’ academic performance.

“..all children should develop the knowledge, skills, and values necessary..”

The central issue for this community, as it is for every community, is: Do you really mean it? Do you seriously intend for your public schools to help “all children” develop essential knowledge, skills, and values? This is not a facetious question. For many, many years, this community, like most other communities in the South, did not aspire to educate all its children. When I use the word “educate,” I do not mean just any educational experience to alleviate ignorance; I mean educate well, educate equitably, and educate to complete high school, prepared to seek more education at the next level. Let us recall, indeed, let us memorialize, the generations of children that your

community, like most other communities, did not intend to educate: women, African-Americans, children with disabilities, those who did not speak English, and children from low-income families. In fact, your community, like other communities, never took seriously the need to educate these children until a series of federal laws and court decisions forced it to do so. People now celebrate the inclusiveness and diversity of the public schools, but in years past your community never of its own volition sought to make the school system inclusive and diverse.

All this is within memory for many of us who came of age in the South. I, for example, attended an all-white, all-male public high school in South Carolina. No disabled student was in sight. All students were native-born. The school system consigned students from low-income families to the textiles or general education track. Only a small proportion of the students benefited from the college preparatory curriculum. It was a good place for me, just as my public school experiences in Alabama and Mississippi were good for me, but that was because I was of the race and social class that the communities intended to educate. Let me correct that. I should say “intended to *partially* educate,” because the communities only cared about preparing me to understand and function in a very small part of the community where I lived, not to mention an even smaller part of the state, nation, or world where I lived.

Now, thankfully, it is a new day. Because of pressures by the federal government, initiatives by advocacy organizations representing various public school constituencies, and the migration of increasingly diverse immigrant groups into the South, public schools have become much more inclusive during the past thirty years. Your public schools are educating many more students, and more students representing a wider array of ethnicities and languages, more effectively, than thirty years ago. However, some phenomena are constant. Students who only attend school regularly, consistently demonstrate reasonably good behavior, and meet their teachers’ minimum expectations for academic performance, will obtain what one state describes as “minimally adequate education.” On the other hand, students whose prior educational experiences have been effective, who are motivated, and who have vigilant and aggressive parents and educational experiences beyond those provided by the school, will get the best the school system has to offer.

Your public schools cannot control the incomes, educational levels, family constructs, behaviors, choices, or ethics of the homes from which students come. These factors, and others, have greater or lesser effects on students’ academic achievement, depending on whose research you believe and the values you hold. My view is that the dominant culture in this country makes it very difficult for us to shake off stereotypes about people’s motivation and abilities. All of us in public education have to be constantly on guard against “profiling” students based on our assumptions that factors we really know little about determine what students will achieve or who they will become. The greatest success stories in public education—across all time, races, and classes—have only two characters: the skillful, caring teacher with high expectations who does whatever it takes to help a student learn, and the student who ultimately responds, marveling that the teacher considers him worthy of so much effort. We all know such teachers because many of us were their students. Our task, in this time, in this school system, is to translate those idiosyncratic experiences into institutional practice.

Your public schools can be powerful forces for the academic and personal development of all students, but your community, like most communities, limits what the schools can accomplish. Educators know, for example, that when students of diverse backgrounds, abilities and interests are in the same school and the same class, and when they benefit from high quality teaching, there can be positive academic results. However, families' personal choices, and the political dimension of those choices, deny public schools the opportunity to use diversity as one means to advance academic achievement. Schools and students no longer suffer from racial segregation mandated by law, as they did for most of the past century, but families' individual decisions rooted in social class and fear limit actions your school system can take. Some families live in certain areas of your community because those are the only places they can afford to live. Other families with greater resources choose from a wide variety of residential locations and base their decisions on such factors as convenience, age or quality of the housing stock, age or social class of the neighborhood residents, and proximity to amenities they perceive to be desirable, such as shopping, recreational, and educational facilities. In the main, the result is that families tend to live in areas populated by people like themselves, those who fit a similar demographic profile. The student composition of your public schools tends to reflect these decisions. This is not absolute, of course; your school system works hard and spends enormous sums of money to create educational settings that will attract students from different backgrounds. It continues to be true that in spite of everything, public schools are still the most diverse institutions in this community.

When the school system had to dismantle its race-based method of student assignment, it had the legal and political leverage to reassign students to create diverse schools and classrooms. Subsequent research demonstrated that over the years the resulting schools and classrooms produced positive academic effects, as well as social and economic benefits. Now, however, there is a new school system, not segregated by law as the old one was, but partially segregated by virtue of families' residential and education choices, and by economic and cultural forces that influence those choices. The large majority of white and African-American families neither wants nor will support student assignment plans that impose significant transportation burdens on their children, particularly in the absence of a judicial decision requiring it. Some families accept such burdens to provide their children greater opportunities, but few do so primarily to put their children in educational and social contexts that are more diverse.

Four forces have converged to work against greater diversity: (1) There are more families in which all the adults are working, and trying to cope with the complexities of modern life, (2) More families feel they are losing control over their children's lives, (3) Residential developments are expanding into areas previously not considered for development, and (4) More families have the ability and inclination to purchase private educational and recreational opportunities for their children. These forces, not to mention the heightened anxiety of the post-9/11 era, spur families to seek greater security, more control, and less complexity in their lives. That translates, in turn, into choices shaped by a desire for predictable results, or by the quest to minimize variables that might produce unfavorable results. Just as was the case under the *de jure* segregated system of public education, the public schools reflect, rather than cause, families' fears.

I assume that as is true in other cities, your community has not had serious discussions about how the forces I have just described are impacting the educational

opportunities of children who attend public schools, whether you care, how much you care, and what you are prepared to do about it if you do care. As your superintendent, I will seek the support of community leaders throughout the school district to create venues for fostering and facilitating such discussions. This will also be difficult, but we have to face the fact that this is a fragmented community and, if we do not address this issue, over time it will seriously impede your public schools in providing a high quality education for *all* children.

“..to become productive, independent adults..”

It is my view that your public schools should hold themselves to a high standard in terms of the results they are seeking. I do not consider the goal of high school graduation to be a high standard. Everything we know from our personal experiences, everything we read about the findings of researchers and economists, and everything we hear from business leaders, tells us that the value of a high school diploma dramatically depreciates immediately after I hand it to a young person who walks across the stage. High school graduation is only an interim goal, just as regular school attendance and completing homework and performing at standard are interim goals. If this community wants its public school students to become independent, productive adults, they must seek and satisfactorily complete some level of education beyond high school. That may be an apprentice program with a union, or some other training program lasting from six to eighteen months that results in a certified skill. It may be two years of technical school or community college. It may be four years of college or university education.

If I am superintendent, the school system will organize itself to send a strong and consistent message to all students, beginning in the first grade, that we are setting them on a path to pursue and complete some level of education beyond high school. That will be the expectation we create and communicate. Schools will pull themselves out of the muck of short-term focus on the next state test, and instead prepare their students to demonstrate the proficiencies necessary for admission to post-secondary educational experiences. If short-term test results falter, so be it. I will take the heat. I will also insist, however, the school-based academic oversight committees produce credible evidence that students in their schools are performing at or above performance standards necessary to gain admission, without the need for remediation, to at least a two-year post-secondary education institution. We will aim for higher standards of performance and more rigorous, more meaningful accountability than currently prevails in this school system. The school system’s greatest test will be whether *all* students who graduate from our high schools enroll in post-secondary education experiences that prepare them to be productive, independent adults.

“..capable of sustaining and strengthening the democratic civic life of this community..”

I do not have to tell this audience that it is important for high school graduates to have the knowledge and inclination to participate over time in the civic life of this community. To do that, they need to understand what the public, political, civic, and cultural institutions of this community are, the opportunities they provide, how their

decisions and services affect individuals and families, how these institutions function, and how citizens' relate to them. Many adults do not understand these things because no one taught them. We will aim to prepare future generations differently. "Civics" will be an important part of our curriculum at every level of schooling, in some grades as a separate course and in other grades as units within courses of study. We will develop partnerships with the other major institutions of this community to provide field experiences in which students discover how these institutions function, and learn how they can contribute to and influence their activities.

This approach will have profound implications for the school system as well. We cannot conscientiously espouse the virtues of democratic civic life if the system itself does not encourage examination of its own operations, foster transparency, and ensure that schools and classrooms are safe for people to express their opinions. I know many educators believe there is already too much democracy in public education, and that schools could operate more effectively if people would keep their dissenting opinions to themselves. However, democracy is not the problem. The problem is that people do not know how to function in a democratic framework. They do not know how to listen to and analyze views other than their own. They do not know how to communicate effectively and with respect. They presume that because they have strong opinions, those opinions should prevail. They do not know how to balance their personal interests with actions that advance the common good. This is why it is necessary for us to prepare young people to sustain and strengthen democratic civic life. We can only do that if adults show the way, from the school board to the classroom.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope my statement provides you with a better understanding of the perspectives that will shape my actions if I become the superintendent of your public schools. I have described my positions briefly and simply, but I know they will be difficult to bring to fruition. You should not expect them to materialize in the first month or the first year I am your superintendent. Nevertheless, this community has little time to waste in addressing these issues, and I will push it to do so as quickly, deliberately, and effectively.

I have one last comment. I am not a white knight. I cannot *make* the school system more effectively serve all the children of this community. These are *your* public schools. It is up to *you* to determine the results you want from the school system, and it is up to *you* to provide the support that will enable public schools to achieve those results.

Everyone in this audience tonight has experiences and skills this school system needs. If I am your superintendent, I will ask you, as citizens of this community, to put your shoulders to the wheel to strengthen your public schools. There is no limit to what you can do. There is no limit to what the schools can become. I need your help, not just your money and your labor, but your intellect, your imagination, your will, your faith, your caring, and your political support. I need your help, whether you agitate in the community or listen to a child read in the classroom. I need your help, whether you serve on a school's academic oversight committee or become an expert on one sliver of the school system's operations and then become the pest who is not satisfied until that piece of the system improves.

Beyond that, I want to be your partner, not your savior or your lackey or your punching bag. I believe that together we can create the school system you want and the educational experiences your children deserve. The way will be hard. I will make

mistakes, just as you will. I will try to be patient, as I hope you will. We will not always agree. We may even disagree sharply. That is fine, so long as we struggle together, and *keep struggling together*, to find the best ways for *your* public schools to educate *all* the children who choose to attend them.

Thank you.