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The task force was headed by Associate Deputy Secretary Michael P. Huerta and consisted of representatives of four DOT administrations: the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

## RILEY DEFENDS, CHALLENGES PUBLIC SCHOOLS

From U.S. Dept. of Education

■(WASHINGTON) U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley this week strongly defended public education as "the very cornerstone of our nation's economic and democratic future" and called on all Americans to "come together for the common good of all our children."

"There is a growing debate about how we educate our children," he said. "On one side, are those who believe you can prepare for the future by cutting education today, who see little value in public education, who seek quite literally to abolish it as an institution. This view is, to my mind, too narrow, too divisive, too fond of bashing teachers, too quick to tear down, rather than build up. I disagree with that vision. The politics of blame and exploiting people's legitimate anxieties has never served America well, and it is so wrong when it comes to the education of our children." Eighty-nine percent of American children attend public schools.

Riley conceded that public education has problems, but said, "More than a debate, we need action — a lot more of that old fashioned American 'can do' spirit that brings out the best in all of us."

To address what he called "the most urgent task," he announced a new national partnership "dedicated to the single goal of improving reading and writing in America."

Citing projections that school enrollments will reach an all-time high this fall, Riley also raised several other challenges: to empower parents, to make schools safer, to expand effective innovation and access to technology, to raise academic standards, to prepare young people for jobs, and to assure opportunities for higher education.

Noting that "strong families make for strong schools," Riley said we must "give parents the power and time to help their children learn more." He cited efforts in the St. Louis area to involve businesses and churches with schools and said parents should "slow down your lives. Volunteer in school. Above all, stay connected to your children."

He also stressed the importance of safe, orderly and disciplined schools. Following President Clinton's lead, Riley said school uniforms may be a way to "create a better atmosphere."

Riley defended the Goals 2000 school improvement initiative and called for a bipartisan effort to raise academic standards, noting that, "We will only win the battle for excellence if we have excellent teachers. Our schools need to get and hold the best teachers and be willing to weed out bad teachers, to help inexperienced but talented teachers get better, and to reward schools that get results."

Riley said bringing libraries and classrooms on-line is "a national mission, as important as sending men to the Moon," but he said that must be "just one step in a growing effort to move American education into the future."

Education needs to "open up," he said, citing public school choice, schools-within-schools, and the charter school movement as examples. He said that, as part of his next budget, President Clinton will ask Congress for "venture capital" to create additional charter schools. Operating under a public charter, these schools are encouraged to innovate and seek new ways of increasing student achievement. The Education Department currently funds a \$6 million charter school demonstration project.

Riley said he opposes taking taxpayers' dollars out of public schools for private school vouchers, but said he favors removing restrictions on the use of federal Title I funds placed on private

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