

**REMARKS FOR MAYOR RICHARD M. DALEY
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I'm happy to have been invited by the National Press Club to speak to you today. As you probably know, for the past year, I have served as President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

And one of my top priorities in this capacity has been to sound the alarm around the nation about our public schools -- and call upon Mayors to take an active role in turning schools around.

If you hear one message this morning, it is that we have a state of emergency in our nation's public schools and chief executives have to take on that challenge.

The future of our cities is at stake. All across the nation -- families of from all racial groups and financial backgrounds are leaving cities because they have lost faith in urban public education.

It is true in many American cities, including our nation's capital.

Families are leaving cities like Washington to find a better quality of life, including safer neighborhoods -- and most importantly better schools.

It is a very difficult situation for people trying to make a difference -- and a nightmare scenario for public schools.

But it doesn't have to be this way -- and I want to offer the mayors, school board officials, businesses and parents around the country a more hopeful vision for the future of our children.

I can picture a day when families choose to stay in cities because of the quality public school systems.

I can see urban schools that have enough classroom space, modern equipment and safe hallways.

And I can imagine schools that are true training grounds for the workforce -- where local businesses take responsibility for the success of local schools.

All of this -- and more -- can happen. As Mayor of our nation's third largest city, I have to believe in the future of our public schools.

Improving schools is the only way to make a lasting change in this country. It is the only way to lift people out of poverty -- to cut down on crime -- and to create a stronger economy.

The only way for our city -- or any city -- to have a bright future is if public officials devote their full energies to improving our public schools.

In Chicago today -- we are finally moving in the right direction. Not too long ago, everyone believed that Chicago's schools would continue to get worse.

Secretary of Education William Bennett once called our schools the worst in the nation. He didn't provide any data to prove why our schools were worse than those of Washington, New York or Los Angeles and other cities.

And the Department of Education did nothing to make the situation better -- no new funds were allocated or management teams dispatched.

And, although no one denies that the Chicago Public Schools were in trouble, the description stuck.

Our system had constant money problems. In June of 1995, the projected four-year budget deficit was \$1.5 billion.

The system was plagued by failing schools and nine strikes between 1972 and 1995. The situation was made worse by an unaccountable school administration. Neither the mayor nor the school board had real authority over the school administration, its personnel or its budget.

Authority was divided between the local school councils, the School Board, and the central bureaucracy.

Because as mayor I had to name my appointments from a list submitted to me by a 16 member school board nominating commission, I had no real authority over selections to the school board.

In short, no one was directly responsible for the state of our schools. Despite extensive media coverage of crumbling buildings, overcrowding and poor academic performance, the system remained unresponsive.

School maintenance lagged. And schools became unsafe -- with hallways that were too dark -- fences that were torn -- and doors bolted shut so students wouldn't use the dangerous and decaying steps outside.

The school bureaucracy did a poor job of managing its purchasing. Financial disorder was rampant. In the spring of 1995, the situation was so dire that the Chicago Public Schools were predicting a shutdown in the fall unless new funds were provided.

Instead of bailing out the schools, the Republican State Government decided to turn over responsibility to the City of Chicago. Many people said they weren't doing this as a favor to Chicago.

But I wanted this new responsibility -- because I knew it was the only way to change society and move our city forward.

It was only with authority over the schools that I could take action and demand results, to improve performance and make our schools accountable.

We created a new management team, for the first time -- with a Chief Executive Officer, a Chief Operations Officer and a Chief Education Officer -- and a new, smaller board of trustees.

With this new team, the Chicago Public Schools could be well managed -- while keeping education decisions in the hands of educators.

I appointed some of the most talented members of my administration to assume operation of the schools. Gery Chico, my former Chief of Staff was appointed President of the School Board.

Paul Vallas, my former Budget Director, was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the schools.

Lynn St. James, a successful former high school principal, was appointed Chief Education Officer.

Most recently, I appointed Tim Martin, the Deputy Commissioner of Transportation, as Chief Operating Officer.

To help get control over the school's budget, we asked for -- and won -- the authority to cut many of the state mandated strings attached to the school budget.

The state's education budget regulations -- which still apply to every other public school system in Illinois-- are a bureaucrat's dream.

Until 1995, the Chicago Public Schools' funding stream came from 7 different local rate levies -- and state funding was provided thru 27 different grants. The school system had little flexibility in spending this money.

The new school funding process for the Chicago Public Schools consolidated the 7 local levies into one -- and the 27 state grants into 2 block grants.

Freed from these funding restraints, my new management team immediately made the money go farther.

The new management team found nearly \$1 million worth of spoiled food stored in a Chicago Public School warehouse, more than \$250,000 in furniture and other school supplies, and another \$4 million in wood, tools and supplies.

And over the summer of 1995, they worked out a 4 year budget that included a long-term labor agreement with teachers and that will make certain that our schools open on time every year.

With this new financial plan in place, the bond rating agencies -- Moody's, Standard & Poor's and Fitch -- took notice.

The Chicago Public School's received their first investment grade bond rating since 1979, and the ratings have been raised twice in the last 18 months. Moody's even gave the school system an A-minus rating.

That allowed the schools to begin the most ambitious school capital improvements plan in the nation -- entirely funded with locally-raised money. Already, \$850 million worth of bonds have been issued.

New schools are being built across our city -- a total of 29 new schools, additions and annexes.

So far, 258 new classrooms have been added to the system, serving nearly 8000 children.

Major renovation projects, including new roofs, masonry repair and window replacements have been completed at 241 schools.

Virtually every school in the city will see improvements.

And when Phase 2 of the project is complete -- 45,000 students will be learning in new classrooms, easing overcrowding.

Also in the first year, the Board adopted an education plan that emphasizes a back-to-basics approach.

Everybody talks about making schools get back to basics -- but in Chicago, we took strong, concrete action.

It started with making sure children perform at their grade level. In the past, year after year, children were promoted to the next grade after they reached a certain age -- regardless of whether they were academically capable.

We ended the policy of social promotions.

Now, third; sixth, eighth and ninth grade children -- who perform poorly and whose reading or computing skills are not at minimum levels -- are now required to go to

summer school before being promoted. And if they do not perform at summer school, they will be held back.

This week, the Chicago Public Schools announced that 42,000 students must attend summer school this year.

For many parents, this seems like a tough policy. It is tough -- but it is necessary.

We're not doing Chicago's children any favors by letting them have the summer off and looking the other way -- pretending that they can catch up in a higher grade level.

Ending social promotions is one of the most important steps the Chicago Public Schools has taken.

And next year, it will be expanded to include tenth grade students as well.

The school board also took other important steps to improve student performance. Early childhood programs, which previously were available for only 6000 children, were expanded to serve more than 22,000 children. In addition, curricula at all city high schools was streamlined and upgraded and national standardized tests were emphasized.

This school year, the board took bolder and even more important steps to improve classroom performance.

A mandatory homework rule was passed. Now every student in the Chicago Public Schools has homework every day.

The Chicago Public Schools started a citywide campaign to ensure that all parents know about this policy. Parents have been asked to sign pledges that they will work with their children on their daily homework.

And the Chicago Public Schools also took a bold and needed step by putting schools on academic probation.

Probation is the most important step we have taken so far -- and it shows our commitment to improving every school, starting with the weakest and offering them the needed assistance.

We will leave no school and no child behind.

A total of 109 schools out of 557 were put on probation for their low achievement on reading test scores. These include 38 high schools and 71 elementary schools.

In these schools, fewer than 15 percent of the students read at the national average.

In one school, less than 3 percent of the students read at the national average. Among probation high schools, drop out rates were as high as 71 percent.

For years, these schools promoted children who couldn't read, couldn't do math and couldn't perform well enough to succeed in life.

Children did not fail. We failed the children -- governments, schools and everyone who stood by and did nothing. To make sure it doesn't happen again, we have to raise expectations, help schools do better and hold people accountable.

That's what academic probation is all about. In Chicago, we're sending a clear signal to schools that results matter.

To each school on probation, we've sent a probation management team that includes high quality principals, teachers and business managers -- people who know how to make schools work.

In addition, schools have been matched up with an outside education partner -- in many cases these are universities.

The extra attention we are paying to probation schools is starting to make a real difference.

When probation was announced, some principals and teachers thought that they would be made scapegoats for poor performance.

But now that it has been done, a number of principals and teachers call it a blessing.

Probation has made schools accountable for results.

It has also given important guidance to principals, teachers and students -- letting them know exactly what they need to do to make their schools better. And probation has provided assistance to schools that they need.

Now -- because we've set higher standards and are working to uphold those standards -- signs of progress are beginning to appear.

Last month, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills results were released for Chicago's Public elementary and high schools.

Of the 71 elementary schools on academic probation, 54 showed improvement in reading and 69 in math.

On top of major gains in test scores made in 1996, the Chicago Sun-Times called the latest elementary scores the best in a decade.

The news was more encouraging this year in our high schools. This year, reading test scores went up in 52 of our 62 public high schools. And math scores went up in 61 of 62 high schools.

While there was improvement, I am not pleased with these results. Our schools have shown that they can make progress -- but we all know that we still have a long way to go. We must keep raising the bar.

For years, standards were systematically lowered -- now I want to see standards systematically raised.

We may not be able to have a majority of school children reading at national average overnight, but that doesn't mean we should be pleased with anything less. Improving test scores aren't the only sign of progress.

Since 1989, the Chicago Public Schools have had Local School Councils, which were designed to provide neighborhood, grass-roots input for all of our schools. For a number of years, unfortunately, voter turnout at these elections was poor.

But at last year's election, we had the highest voter turnout ever. More people are participating -- more candidates are running for Council seats.

And this new involvement and faith in our schools is evident with higher enrollment numbers. Enrollment in our schools is surging -- up from just under 410,000 in 1993 to about 425,000 today.

We still have a long way to go. Even with these recent signs of improvement, many of Chicago's schools continue to perform below national norms.

The progress will continue slowly at some schools, quicker at others. It will come school by school, child by child.

But the atmosphere of gloom has been replaced with hope. And in the process, Chicago is disproving many of the cliches about urban public schools.

For too long, public schools -- especially in cities -- have given excuses for their failure. One of our former board members says that society has spent too long celebrating the problems.

I accept no excuses. No child is too poor to learn. No parent is too detached to participate.

No school system is too poor to demand high standards from students.

Based on Chicago's experiences, I can say with confidence that every excuse -- and there are many of them -- hides a real solution, and that these solutions provide valuable lessons.

Excuse number one is the most dangerous one. Unfortunately, It is one given by many cities.

This excuse is: There are too many problems -- and everything's hopeless.

In Chicago, I refused to accept this -- because too much was at stake.

Everything I do as mayor would fail if we gave up on the schools.

There's no point in attracting new jobs -- because without a qualified workforce, businesses will sooner or later move away.

There's no reason to improve housing -- because without an education, more and more people will be dependent on public assistance.

And there's no reason to rebuild our neighborhoods -- because families of all races and incomes will leave the city if the schools can't serve their children.

In cities across the country, the working poor is leaving the cities to find better public schools.

Hopelessness comes from a lack of leadership. Sure, there are many steps that must be taken to turn a school around, and they can't all be done at once.

With the right leadership, families will begin to have faith in the future. And once you get everyone in the city working towards the goal of improving schools, progress is inevitable.

The second excuse blames the children. The students are too poor -- they aren't well motivated -- they can't learn.

In Chicago, some used this excuse to criticize our probation plan. They say that by singling out these schools for more help, we are saying these children aren't smart enough.

It is wrong to believe that any child cannot learn -- to do this is to condemn these children to a dismal future.

The answer isn't to lower standards, but to raise them. Children need discipline and standards.

That's why we're sending more children than ever to summer school -- so that they can earn promotions to the next grade.

That's why we're requiring homework everyday.

And that's why we've brought in dedicated professionals -- who have proven track records at public and private schools -- to help turn our lowest performing schools around.

The lesson of our success -- even the modest improvements made so far -- is that excuses do children no favors. Instead of blaming a child's background, we should use it as a reason to do more and to work harder.

The third excuse is a practical one -- school management can't improve until schools receive more money.

In some places, there are serious practical concerns about school funding. In Illinois, our state is third from the bottom in public school funding.

We did not let this excuse stand in our way. In fact, there were some in Illinois who argued that the City of Chicago would never be able to manage the Chicago Public Schools without more resources.

But I believed that we had to prove our critics wrong.

And today -- you no longer hear the excuse in our state that school reform is just throwing away money on the Chicago Public Schools.

Because of these management reforms, the Illinois House passed a bill last week to fundamentally change the way we fund education in Illinois by shifting the burdens away from property taxes.

Sadly, the leadership in the State Senate kept this bill from coming to the floor for a vote -- but the momentum for school funding reform has grown in our state.

I'm still hopeful that the state government can take action this year to remedy the funding problems.

The fourth excuse given for our failing public schools is that big city schools systems are too big to manage.

If the Chicago Public Schools can be managed -- any school system can. The Chicago Public School system has 427,000 students and more than 550 schools.

We have more students than the public school systems of Atlanta, Boston, Cleveland, Denver, Minneapolis/St. Paul and Pittsburgh combined.

The lesson for all school systems is that no problem is unmanageable. And the managing of schools themselves should be left to experienced educators. Schools need to be managed by professionals who understand their area of expertise.

The finance and administrative side of managing a large school should be left to qualified business and management experts, while the business of managing the academic problems should be left to education experts.

The fifth excuse is that unions and teachers are in control and demand too much. In Chicago, we have made teachers and unions partners in solving the problems. And we did it as one of our very first acts, by reaching a four year labor agreement.

Teachers want their schools to get better. You won't find many teachers who chose that profession because they thought it would be easy money. They do it because they love to teach children.

Other than parents, teachers are the most important persons in a child's life. If we are going to change our schools, they must be partners in that effort.

Teachers have a stake in improving their schools.

When we give teachers confidence in the future -- and let them know what their pay will be over a number of years -- teachers can then concentrate on what they do best.

The sixth and final excuse is that failing schools are someone else's problem -- or something for the Internet to solve.

Every year, there is another plan, another gimmick, another set of goals that promise to make all students learn better.

In truth, no grand plan is going to come along that makes everything better. It is just going to take hard work and leadership. Day by day, school by school, year by year.

In Chicago, part of getting the job done is reminding everyone of the roles they must play in making our schools better.

Everyone must take responsibility for our school's success and carry out the work that must be done. Every person in this city has a stake in our success.

Not just those on the front line, like principals and teachers and local school councils -
-but all of us.

Parents have a responsibility to become more involved in their children's lives.

Principals have to show responsibility with their authority and must come up with new ideas for making their schools better.

Teachers have to demand more of students, and guide their progress toward improved performance.

The people of Chicago have to get involved by mentoring students and businesses must adopt schools.

And children and students have the greatest responsibility -- to stay in school, to work hard and to graduate.

While local governments have the primary responsibility to improve public schools, the federal government has a role to play in as well.

Illinois Senator Carol Moseley Braun has proposed that the federal government invest \$5 billion a year to help rebuild our public school infrastructure.

I know times are tight these days -- but I'm sure that Congress can find the money if they look hard enough. Helping to invest in school infrastructure is the right and appropriate responsibility for the federal government in education.

One of the most important duties of a mayor is to remind people of these responsibilities. Mayors need to set the standards for the community and have the leadership to speak out on education issues.

Mayors must accept that education is the key to the future -- and that it is the only way to bring about long-term, "meaningful change.

No situation is hopeless. All of our problems are manageable -- none of our excuses are credible.

Chicago used to be called the worst school system in the nation. Chicago may not yet be the best big city school system -- and we have much more work to do -- but we have restored a sense of hope -- even to the point where President Clinton said recently that the Chicago Public Schools can now serve as a model for the nation.

It is not only a citywide commitment to education, it is a personal commitment.

I am not going to walk away from this task. The future of Chicago depends on our success.

Again, I want to thank the National Press Club for the opportunity to address this important issue. And I look forward to answering some of your questions.

Thank you.