The Goals 2000 Battle Won't Be Over Till It's Over

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President Clinton made a speech on January 22 to a group identified by the White House as "the students, parents and teachers of the Northbrook Area Schools Consortium." His audience was so friendly that it interrupted him with applause 29 times.

One line in his speech, however, was greeted by stony silence. That's when he said, "We can no longer hide behind our love of local control of the schools and use that as an excuse not to hold ourselves to high standards."

That was a telltale admission that the real goal of the Clinton Administration's education plan is to eliminate local control of public schools. One of the vehicles of this elimination is the new entity he was addressing that day called a "consortium."

Twenty suburban Chicago school districts have been surreptitiously combined to form what Clinton praised as the First in the World Consortium. This Consortium has already received $450,000 of federal Goals 2000 financing, and the contract gives total authority over future financing and personnel decisions to the 20 superintendents who have constituted themselves as the board of directors.

Completely excluded from the governing process are the 20 elected school boards. One school board member, Eva Sorock of Wilmette, had to file a Freedom of Information request even to see the grant application for the $450,000 already received.

She discovered that the superintendents had promised to implement a shopping list of so-called progressive methods that parents have opposed for years. These include student-centered instruction, experiential learning, group projects, integrated curricula, and assessments rather than grades or tests.

Since Virginia Governor George Allen caved in, the Department of Education is now bragging that all 50

states have accepted Goals 2000 funds and that there is "no problem." But there is a big problem as people discover that Goals 2000 is part of a coordinated national plan to impose federal mandates, bypass local control, and eliminate accountability.

Once a state accepts Goals 2000 funding, it must implement Goals 2000's national goals and objectives. Section 318 pretends to prohibit federal control of curriculum, but that's just a placebo, because the statute includes dozens of specific mandates about curriculum, instructional materials, standards, content, and assessments.

Section 306 repeatedly uses the mandatory word "shall," and it's obvious that the verb means must. Section 306 mandates that the state shall establish a "state improvement plan," shall establish a strategy "for meeting the National Education Goals," shall adopt "state content standards and state student performance standards for all students," shall implement state assessments "consistent with relevant, nationally recognized professional and technical standards," shall provide "coherent information about student attainments relative to state content standards," and shall align "state and local curricula, instructional materials, and state assessments with state content standards."

Last year, Congress passed some amendments to the Goals 2000 Act, but they did not affect these mandates. Michael Cohen, adviser to Education Secretary Richard W. Riley, said, "There isn't anything that undermines or in any way alters the fundamental goals of the program."

Even if a state spends its Goals 2000 money on computers, it still must comply with this federal law that uses the following words scores of times: "shall," "will," "require," or "must."

The Goals 2000 statute codifies the eight national education goals. But the goals themselves are defective, particularly the first goal, "By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn."

Many schools are using this language to bring health clinics and a wide array of social services into the public schools, financed in devious ways through Medicaid. This is one cause of the tremendous increase in Medicaid costs, and it's part of the Administration's plan to bring the rejected Clinton proposal for socialized medicine in through the schoolhouse door.

On the other hand, teaching children to read is NOT one of the eight national education goals. When Clinton talks about holding schools to "high standards," elementary school literacy is NOT one of those standards.

Missouri Governor Mel Carnahan, who has been enthusiastically implementing federal education plans, capsuled this new approach when he said in his State of the State address, "Books are no longer the key to success. The keyboard is." This means that giving children the skill to read the great books of Western literature, history, politics, and science are NOT part of school "reform."

Goals 2000 is also locked in a statutory embrace (using that word "shall" again) with the other law passed in 1994 to impose federal mandates, the School-to-Work Act. School-to-Work changes the purpose of public schools to training workers for the global economy under the governance of appointed (not elected) labor market boards.

The interlocking of Goals 2000, School-to-Work and Medicaid reconfirms that the federal plan is to bypass elected school boards and state legislatures and put all authority in the hands of those who control the stream of federal funding. It has nothing to do with education's biggest problem, the need to teach children how to read.