

# Bush says to 'challenge' schools

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — President Bush urged governors at an education summit Wednesday to forge fundamental changes to rescue the nation's troubled schools, but was told in return the federal government must spend more if that goal is to be reached.

"We've got to challenge the education system if we're to meet the challenge of educational excellence," Bush told the governors in a pep talk that opened the nation's first educational conference between a president and the states' executives.

All agreed that help is needed for a national school system wracked by drugs, high dropout rates and mediocrity. But behind closed doors Bush and members of his Cabinet heard what they did not want to hear: that the federal government's commitment has to grow.

In particular, governors said more needs to be done for early childhood education, to prepare youngsters from poor families for elementary school.

The summit scene was the historic campus of the University of Virginia, whose establishment was the proudest accomplishment of Thomas Jefferson — America's first "education president." The university is still called "Mr. Jefferson's school" and Bush referred to it that way, too.

Governors circulated a memo outlining their own goals. Their plan called for eliminating illiteracy, curtailing the dropout rate and making American students the equal of their counterparts anywhere in the world, especially in mathematics and science.

After the first round of meetings, there was sharp and sar-

castic criticism of some of the governors from William Bennett, Bush's drug policy coordinator who served as secretary of education in the Reagan Administration.

Bennett told reporters that in addition to "a couple of feisty exchanges about education and defense spending ... there was pap — standard Democratic pap. There was standard Republican pap. ..."

Added Bennett: "Much of the discussion took place in total absence of any knowledge of what works or what's effective in the actual experience of school. ... Some people were saying things that other people had written for them, and they were reading them out of books and reading them off cards."

One governor trying to make a point by comparing military and education spending was Democrat Mario Cuomo of New York.

"You spent over \$300 billion on missiles that you'll never fire," he said in an interview on the Cable News Network, addressing his remarks to the Republicans. "Now the American people are saying, 'OK, a few less missiles because we don't need them as much anymore. A little more money on education.' I think the people will understand that."

A Republican governor, Garrey E. Carruthers of New Mexico, was one of several who raised the point about early childhood programs.

"If they would give us a 5-year-old that is healthy and alert, the system would be much more productive," Carruthers said.

Bennett, discussing that session, said there was "lots of talk about early childhood. Ev-

everyone agreed they like little children."

But he said that unless educators concerned themselves about poor schools in later grades, more money for early childhood programs would be a waste.

One plan pushed by the administration and welcomed by a number of governors would allow parents to shop around for schools, sending youngsters to the ones they think will educate best.

"This is a mechanism that's very, very important," Education Secretary Lauro Cavazos said in an interview. "I've called it the cornerstone for restructuring."

He said he would begin a whirlwind tour in mid-October to sell the idea to educators in states including North Carolina, Colorado and California, conducting hearings during the day and meeting with working parents at night.

Before leaving Washington, Bush told reporters that he was looking for commitment from the governors "to make those fundamental changes that are needed if we are going to improve educational performance."

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