



AMERICA'S YOUTH

*Together We Can
Make a Difference*

BY WANDA WASHINGTON

What will the world be like for America's youth twenty years from now? Will they live in a world class country that generates opportunities to attain the "American Dream". A home, strong families, and quality of life. Or will America deteriorate to poverty, hopelessness, and shame?

The recent dismal statistics show that America's educational system is declining at an alarming rate. For example, "Every year America's school systems graduate 702,000 young people that cannot read their diploma." (Fortune Magazine). "Every 8 seconds a child drops out of school in the U.S." (U.S. Department of Education). "80% of prisoners are high school dropouts." "40% of our children already show signs of cardiac risk factor." (President Council on Physical Fitness). "61% of teenagers say social pressure is why they become sexually active." (planned parenthood). "40% of females drop out because of pregnancy." "75% of parents have never visited their children in school." (Mary Futrell-National Education Association). "The U.S. ranks 49th among 156 nations in literacy."

"All children in America are academically disadvantaged when you compare them with children from the rest of the industrialized world." (Ron Herndon, Executive Director, The National Association for Schools of Excellence.) How can these bleak statistics change to assure a better America for our youth? Who will lead them to the next America? The answer lies in adequately equipping our children to compete on an international level. The key is education. This challenges everyone, our government, communities, schools, and homes to get involved in youth, and quality education. It is important to examine the past in order to move

forward to the future. We need to ask important questions like why do these statistics exist, and how can we change them for a better future? In an attempt to answer these questions I would like to share two elements on education that was recently discussed. First on September 8, 1992 popular comedian Sinbad hosted, "Back to School 92". Several well known entertainers acted as facilitators, talking to young people, and discussing their feelings about school. The program was intended as a wake up call to America to listen to our children, and take a real look at the declining interest young people have in education. One of the key factors that most youth expressed was that school was boring and uninteresting. Students expressed how they wanted more from their teachers, that would excite them about school. How does a teacher in today's society, excite, and motivate students to the point where they want to learn? Who is responsible for the learning process? The answer is everyone is responsible; teachers, students, parents, administrators, community leaders, churches, businesses, and government. It is unfair to blame the educational process on any one single group. A child either becomes an asset to society or a burden. This makes everyone accountable. These children are our future. This is an American problem.

The second element on education I would like to share with you is a symposium that was held in Portland, Oregon in August of 1991. Attending the symposium was five international authorities on education from: Canada, China, United Kingdom, Japan, and Germany. Along with them were seventeen top U.S. School administrators, and forty-seven of Oregon's best teachers and administrators. The goal of the symposium was to attain valuable information from these international authorities to

aid U.S. educators develop a "Blueprint for Change." Ron Herndon said it best, "We felt the best thing to do was to bring together some of the best talent from around the world-international educators who had children perform exquisitely - to learn from them and find out what they do and how they do it and ask American educators to translate that into a plan that will work in this country." (Ron Herndon, Executive Director, The National Association for Schools of Excellence.)

The international authorities shared what they have done to prepare young people for productive adulthood, and identified changes our educational system must make to become more productive. There were eight areas that were identified: (1). School Structure (2). Curriculum (3). Assessment (4). Parental Involvement (5). Businesses and School Partnerships (6). Self-Esteem (7). Teacher Training (8). Foreign Language Instruction.

SCHOOL STRUCTURE: School Structure must be organized in a way that permits teachers to teach appropriate curriculum.

CURRICULUM: School curriculum must be designed to permit students to see a clear relationship between what they do in school and what they will do in their adult life.

ASSESSMENT: Students must be assessed on a regular on going basis.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: Parents are the first, and most important teachers that their children have. Parents have the greatest influence, power to assist and mentor along with community, and school resources. If there is no parental follow-up we began losing our children. 1). Parents must drastically limit the amount of Television their children watch. Research shows children that watch more than ten hours of T.V. a week have lower school achievement, less creative, and have lower vocabularies. 2). Parents must frequently listen to their children read. 3). Schools should establish regular private consultation with parents to discuss progress, as well as techniques for incorporating supplementary home instruction. 4). Traditional parent involvement strategies, such as parent organizations,

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