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AUTHOR Gardner, David P.; And Others  
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## ABSTRACT

This report: (1) investigates the declining state of the educational system in America, as measured by high school student performance in the United States and other countries; (2) identifies specific problem areas; and (3) offers multiple recommendations for improvement. The five major recommendations arrived at appear, respectively, under the headings: content, standards and expectations, time, teaching, leadership and fiscal support. Recommendations pertaining to content include the strengthening of high school graduation requirements by establishing minimum requirements for each student of: (a) 4 years of English; (b) 3 years of mathematics; (c) 3 years of science; (d) 3 years of social studies; and (e) one-half year of computer science. With regard to standards and expectations, schools, colleges, and universities are encouraged to adopt more rigorous and measurable standards and higher expectations for academic performance and student conduct. Four-year colleges and universities, in particular, are advised to raise their admission requirements. In order to improve time usage, the report advises that more time should be devoted to students learning the "New Basics," which may, in turn, require a longer school day, or a lengthened school year. Seven ways to improve teacher preparation and to make teaching a more rewarding and respected profession are listed. Six implementation guidelines are suggested for improving educational leadership and fiscal support. Appendices contain: (a) charter of the National Commission on Excellence in Education; (b) schedule of the Commission's public events; (c) list of commissioned papers; (d) list of individuals who testified at Commission hearings; (e) list of other presentations to the Commission; and (f) notable programs. (JM)

# A Nation At Risk:

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# Letter of Transmittal

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Honorable T. H. Bell  
Secretary of Education  
U.S. Department of Education  
Washington, D.C. 20202

April 26, 1983

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On August 26, 1981, you created the National Commission on Excellence in Education and directed it to present a report on the quality of education in America to you and to the American people by April of 1983.

It has been my privilege to chair this endeavor and on behalf of the members of the Commission it is my pleasure to transmit this report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*.

Our purpose has been to help define the problems afflicting American education and to provide solutions, not search for scapegoats. We addressed the main issues as we saw them, but have not attempted to treat the subordinate matters in any detail. We were forthright in our discussions and have been candid in our report regarding both the strengths and weaknesses of American education.

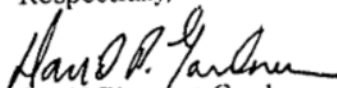
The Commission deeply believes that the problems we have discerned in American education can be both understood and corrected if the people of our country, together with those who have public responsibility in the matter, care enough and are courageous enough to do what is required.

Each member of the Commission appreciates your leadership in having asked this diverse group of persons to examine one of the central issues which will define our Nation's future. We especially welcomed your confidence throughout the course of our deliberations and your anticipation of a report free of political partisanship.

It is our collective and earnest hope that you will continue to provide leadership in this effort by assuring wide dissemination and full discussion of this report, and by encouraging appropriate action throughout the country. We believe that materials compiled by the Commission in the course of its work constitute a major resource for all persons interested in American education.

The other Commissioners and I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to have served our country as members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, and on their behalf I remain,

Respectfully,

  
David Pierpont Gardner  
Chairman

# Members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education

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David P. Gardner (Chair)  
President  
University of Utah and  
President-Elect, University of  
California  
Salt Lake City, Utah

Yvonne W. Larsen (Vice-Chair)  
Immediate Past-President  
San Diego City School Board  
San Diego, California

William O. Baker  
Chairman of the Board (Retired)  
Bell Telephone Laboratories  
Murray Hill, New Jersey

Anne Campbell  
Former Commissioner of Education  
State of Nebraska  
Lincoln, Nebraska

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Emeral A. Crosby  
Principal  
Northern High School  
Detroit, Michigan

Charles A. Foster, Jr.  
Immediate Past-President  
Foundation for Teaching Economics  
San Francisco, California

Norman C. Francis  
President  
Xavier University of Louisiana  
New Orleans, Louisiana

A. Bartlett Giamatti  
President  
Yale University  
New Haven, Connecticut

Shirley Gordon  
President  
Highline Community College  
Midway, Washington

Robert V. Haderlein  
Immediate Past-President  
National School Boards Association  
Girard, Kansas

Gerald Holton  
Mallinckrodt Professor of Physics and  
Professor of the History of Science  
Harvard University  
Cambridge, Massachusetts - - -

Annette Y. Kirk  
Kirk Associates  
Mecosta, Michigan

Margaret S. Marston  
Member  
Virginia State Board of Education  
Arlington, Virginia

Albert H. Quie  
Former Governor  
State of Minnesota  
St. Paul, Minnesota

Francisco D. Sanchez, Jr.  
Superintendent of Schools  
Albuquerque Public Schools  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Glenn T. Seaborg  
University Professor of Chemistry  
and Nobel Laureate  
University of California  
Berkeley, California

Jay Sommer  
National Teacher of the Year, 1981-82  
Foreign Language Department  
New Rochelle High School  
New Rochelle, New York

Richard Wallace  
Principal  
Lutheran High School East  
Cleveland Heights, Ohio



# Introduction

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Secretary of Education T. H. Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education on August 26, 1981, directing it to examine the quality of education in the United States and to make a report to the Nation and to him within 18 months of its first meeting. In accordance with the Secretary's instructions, this report contains practical recommendations for educational improvement and fulfills the Commission's responsibilities under the terms of its charter.

The Commission was created as a result of the Secretary's concern about "the widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system." Soliciting the "support of all who care about our future," the Secretary noted that he was establishing the Commission based on his "responsibility to provide leadership, constructive criticism, and effective assistance to schools and universities."

The Commission's charter contained several specific charges to which we have given particular attention. These included:

- assessing the quality of teaching and learning in our Nation's public and private schools, colleges, and universities;
- comparing American schools and colleges with those of other advanced nations;

- ☐ studying the relationship between college admissions requirements and student achievement in high school;
- ☐ identifying educational programs which result in notable student success in college;
- ☒ assessing the degree to which major social and educational changes in the last quarter century have affected student achievement; and
- ☐ defining problems which must be faced and overcome if we are successfully to pursue the course of excellence in education.

The Commission's charter directed it to pay particular attention to teenage youth, and we have done so largely by focusing on high schools. Selective attention was given to the formative years spent in elementary schools, to higher education, and to vocational and technical programs. We refer those interested in the need for similar reform in higher education to the recent report of the American Council on Education, *To Strengthen the Quality of Higher Education*.

In going about its work the Commission has relied in the main upon five sources of information:

- papers commissioned from experts on a variety of educational issues;
- administrators, teachers, students, representatives of professional and public groups, parents, business leaders, public officials, and scholars who testified at eight meetings of the full Commission, six public hearings, two panel discussions, a symposium, and a series of meetings organized by the Department of Education's Regional Offices;
- existing analyses of problems in education;
- letters from concerned citizens, teachers, and administrators who volunteered extensive comments on problems and possibilities in American education; and

- o descriptions of notable programs and promising approaches in education.

To these public-minded citizens who took the trouble to share their concerns with us—frequently at their own expense in time, money, and effort—we extend our thanks. In all cases, we have benefited from their advice and taken their views into account; how we have treated their suggestions is, of course, our responsibility alone. In addition, we are grateful to the individuals in schools, universities, foundations, business, government, and communities throughout the United States who provided the facilities and staff so necessary to the success of our many public functions.

The Commission was impressed during the course of its activities by the diversity of opinion it received regarding the condition of American education and by conflicting views about what should be done. In many ways, the membership of the Commission itself reflected that diversity and difference of opinion during the course of its work. This report, nevertheless, gives evidence that men and women of good will can agree on common goals and on ways to pursue them.

The Commission's charter, the authors and topics of commissioned papers, a list of the public events, and a roster of the Commission's staff are included in the appendices which complete this volume.