

Education Week

TRANSITION 2001

The End of an Education Presidency

Clinton Put Schools at the Top of the Nation's Agenda

By Joetta L. Sack

Washington

The winter of 1995-96 brought frigid temperatures to the nation's capital and a sizzling budget battle that marked a turning point in President Clinton's political fortunes.

Congressional Republicans were determined to cut spending and retool federal entitlements as part of a plan to balance the budget. Mr. Clinton was just as determined to hold the line on major social programs.

The balance might have tipped either way during the early stages of the impasse, which ultimately resulted in two partial government shutdowns, if not for a debate over education. Republicans wanted to cut the Department of Education's budget; the president seized on that issue in his attacks on the GOP's plan.

"Cutting education now would be like cutting the defense budget at the height of the Cold War," he declared.

Republicans disputed charges that their proposals would hurt schools and other domestic priorities. But Mr. Clinton won the fight for public opinion—

and with it, an overwhelming victory in the budget showdown has been called the pivotal moment of his eight-year administration. It's an assess-

ment that rings particularly true for his legacy in education.

As the events of that winter showed,

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J. Scott Applewhite/AP

As a group of Arlington, Va., 6th graders watches, President Clinton vetoes two spending bills during the federal budget crisis in December 1995. The impasse with congressional Republicans marked a turning point in his presidency.

Speedy Confirmation Expected for Paige

By Erik W. Robelen

Washington

Houston schools Superintendent Rod Paige, President-elect Bush's pick for education secretary, is on track to be confirmed by the Senate on Inauguration Day, a leading Senate Democrat said last week at the conclusion of a cordial

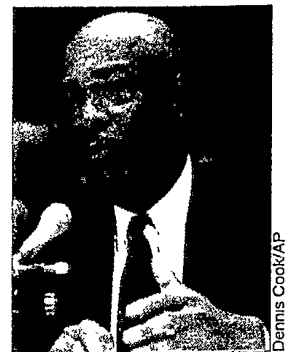
hearing on the choice.

The Senate is expected to vote Jan. 20 on a handful of Cabinet members, said Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., who is temporarily serving as the chairman of the Senate education committee in place of Sen. James M. Jeffords, R-Vt. "Senator Jeffords and I will make sure that your

name is included at that time for approval," Mr. Kennedy told the secretary-designate.

Mr. Paige received a warm welcome from committee members of both parties during the Jan. 10 hearing. Still, questioning from Democrats made clear that certain aspects of the schools agenda he

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Dennis Cook/AP

Rod Paige testifies before a Senate panel.

The Clinton Legacy: Bigger Budgets, Higher Standards

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Mr. Clinton was remarkably adept at raising federal spending levels for schools. When he leaves office at the end of this week, the Education Department's budget will be almost 50 percent higher than when he entered the White House—an increase that covers everything from after-school programs to student loans to school repairs and technology.

Perhaps more important, the battle five years ago also demonstrated Mr. Clinton's extraordinary

ability to focus the nation's attention on education from the bully pulpit of the White House. That skill was particularly apparent in his support for higher academic standards and greater accountability.



But for all Mr. Clinton's success during that historic budget impasse, the outcome also hinted at what would become the most frequent complaint about his education agenda: his tendency, according to critics, to put quantity ahead of quality, to go for the quick victory on a particular spending program rather than a more lasting solution to a problem.

"If I ever could have gotten him not to put the cart before the horse—not look for flashy things that capture Americans' imagination temporarily—then we could have done a lot more," said former Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pa., who chaired the House Education and the Workforce Committee from 1995 until his retirement this month.

Many observers also suggest that Mr. Clinton missed opportunities to improve schools because of another fateful event that took place in the winter of 1995-96: Although few people knew it at the time, he began an affair with White House intern Monica S. Lewinsky. Mr. Clinton would survive the impeachment proceedings that eventually resulted, but the scandal that broke in January 1998 would hinder his domestic agenda for the rest of his presidency.

"We haven't seen the kind of energy behind improvement in academic performance that we need to see," said Hugh B. Price, the president of the National Urban League. "No doubt the distractions took their toll."

Still, as they look back on Mr. Clinton's two terms, many educators are impressed with what he did manage to accomplish.

"There could have been more that was done for urban schools, but in general, he came in preparing to be the education president and went out proving that he was," said Michael Casserly, the executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools.

Great Expectations

When the "Man From Hope" swept into Washington in January 1993, educators' expectations couldn't have been higher. More than any other president before him, Mr. Clinton had built his national reputation on the basis of his efforts to improve schools.

"He was going to be the best leader in education that we'd ever had," recalled Mike Mumma, the principal of Apple Glen Elementary School in Bentonville, Ark.

During his 12 years as governor of Arkansas, Mr. Clinton dramatically increased state spending for education and instituted such reforms as mandatory kindergarten and statewide open enrollment. He also embraced the goals of standards and accountability by instituting a basic-skills test for teachers, setting a minimum standard for the courses that schools had to offer, and requiring all students to pass an 8th grade test before entering high school.

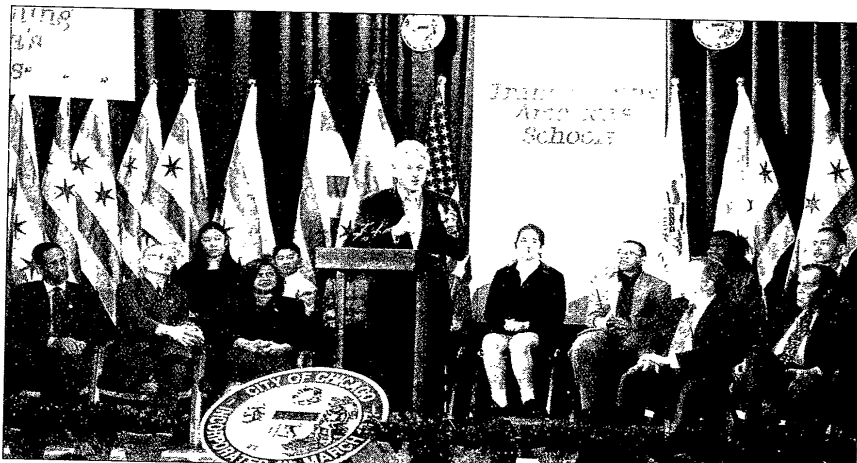
"Clearly, Bill Clinton was one of the first governors to see the importance of the standards-based-reform movement," said Don Ernst, the government-relations director for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, who worked with Mr. Clinton in Arkansas in the early 1980s.

Mr. Clinton also played an active role in the national education summit convened by President George Bush in 1989, a meeting that led to the drafting of six national education goals and gave impetus to federal efforts to promote academic standards.

As president, Mr. Clinton would continue his push for higher standards by following up the "America 2000" plan proposed by his predecessor with a law known as the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the first major education achievement of his administration. Under that law, passed while the Democrats still controlled both houses of Congress, the Education Department began giving grants to states to help set and implement standards—the first time the federal government had waded into such a role.

President Clinton "really gave a big push to the standards movement, and an important push," said Bruce Hunter, the chief lobbyist for the American Association of School Administrators.

"Now, all 50 states are engaged in the standards movement, and I think Goals 2000 helped a great deal," added Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley, the former South Carolina governor who has been a steady presence at the helm of the Education Department throughout the ups and downs of Mr. Clinton's tenure.



President Clinton touts his accomplishments in education during a visit last week to James Ward Elementary School in Chicago. One reason he ran for president was to improve schools, he said.

Another of Mr. Clinton's contributions to standards-based reform came with the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Hoping to revamp the law's beleaguered Title I, the flagship federal program for disadvantaged students, the Clinton administration pushed through a plan to tie federal aid to student achievement, based on state standards developed under Goals 2000.

Not all of the president's efforts on the standards front would win such approval, however.

"Clinton was, indeed, very much the education president if you look at his expenditures in education."

Jane Hannaway
Education Policy Analyst
The Urban Institute

In 1997, Mr. Clinton declared that the next step in the standards and accountability movement was to create voluntary national tests in 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics. While the plan seemed to have broad public support in polls, it turned out to be one of the biggest failures of the president's agenda.

By then, the GOP held majorities in the House and the Senate. And Mr. Clinton's proposal hit a wave of resistance not only from Republicans, who considered the plan an unwanted federal intrusion, but also from some liberal Democrats, who feared that the tests would stigmatize disadvantaged students. The opposition caught the administration off guard, recalled Marshall S.

Smith, the undersecretary of education at the time. "This wasn't something that had been developed in a back room—it had been talked about in Washington for quite a while," he said.

Led by Chairman Goodling, the opponents won passage of legislation prohibiting the national tests from being given without the explicit authorization of Congress.

"A new federal test would do nothing to help our children," Mr. Goodling said during the debates. "If more testing were the answer to the problems in our schools, testing would have solved them a long time ago."

After spending months heavily promoting the plan at school visits and defending it on Capitol Hill, Mr. Clinton reluctantly abandoned the effort.

"To this day, if you asked him, he'd tell you it's a good idea," said Michael Cohen, the Education Department's current assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education and a White House aide to Mr. Clinton at the time.

The Bully Pulpit

President Clinton's other education initiatives were influenced largely by the health of the economy.

During the early years of his administration, when federal budget surpluses were nothing but a pipe dream, the president had little opportunity to propose big funding increases for schools. As a result, Mr. Clinton fought for initiatives and policy changes that in most cases carried relatively modest price tags.

In addition to Goals 2000 and the ESEA accountability initiatives, his administration pushed through a charter schools program, a direct-lending program for college students, a school-to-work program designed to help students learn work skills as well as academics, and the AmeriCorps national-service program, a pared-down version of a much larger proposal for college aid tied to service that Mr. Clinton had made

one of the centerpieces of his 1992 campaign platform.

The GOP takeover of Congress in 1994 further complicated the political picture: Far from wanting to expand the scope of federal involvement in schools, many Republicans at the time were aiming to eliminate the Department of Education.

But by the mid-1990s, the economy was beginning to boom, and the president used the opportunity to propose a new round of expensive federal education programs. One of the largest was the E-rate, a \$2.25 billion-a-year program that has helped thousands of schools and libraries gain access to the Internet.

Mr. Clinton trotted out a raft of proposals in the 1997 State of the Union Address: new programs to coordinate 1 million reading tutors, hire 100,000 new teachers and reduce class sizes, help districts pay interest on school construction bonds, and provide tax credits to help students pay for their first two years of higher education.

For the most part, congressional Republicans' first response was to ignore or sharply criticize such plans. But eventually, all were approved in one form or another.

"Clinton was, indeed, very much the education president if you look at his expenditures in education," said Jane Hannaway, the education policy analyst with the Urban Institute, a Washington think tank.

While the economy certainly helped, Mr. Clinton's successes were due in no small part to his communication skills.

"I don't think there's been a president who has the intent or the degree of understanding, and I don't think there was anyone who was better about talking about education," said Diane Ravitch, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who served as an assistant secretary of education under former President Bush.

"He used the bully pulpit really well to help persuade states and localities to keep public educa-

Tom S. Warren/AP

tion at the forefront," added Bob Chase, the president of the National Education Association. "As he became more grounded in his position, the issues he felt were of great importance became bedrock issues."

And to the frustration of many Republicans, he succeeded in putting them on the defensive.

"People believed if you were opposed to the Department of Education, you were opposed to kids," said Rep. Peter Hoekstra, R-Mich., a longtime critic of the agency.

By the late 1990s, congressional Republicans had lost so many public relations battles on education—a political fiasco over a 1995 House plan to overhaul the school lunch program was emblematic—that they began approving funding increases beyond what Mr. Clinton had requested.

No Substance

But Republicans also frequently complained that Mr. Clinton's programs were too prescriptive and bureaucratic, and that he was too quick to propose a federal solution for every problem.

"The big expansion has been a redefinition—there's nothing the federal government can't get into," Ms. Ravitch said.

A Senate Democrat who was a main sponsor of the president's class-size-reduction plan disagreed.

"The way he speaks about public education is more than, 'Oh, we need more money for schools.' He talks specifically about lowering class size, adding technology to classrooms, modernizing school facilities," Sen. Patty Murray of Washington said. "Because he was more specific, he gave people a better flavor for what their tax dollars are going for."

Other critics say the president based his programs on what sounded good to voters, rather than research. They also point to his class-size-reduction plan, which was passed amid national concerns about teacher quality and a growing teacher shortage in some subjects and regions.

"It was a gimmick," said Mr. Goodling, the former House education committee chairman. "The trap they fell into was, they didn't have a qualified teacher to put into the classroom."

The program has been popular with local administrators, though. Arkansas' Apple Glen Elementary School hired a new 1st grade teacher and has seen test scores increase for the past two years, Mr. Mumma reported. Nationwide, 29,000 teachers have been hired through the program so far, a number expected to rise to 37,000 this year, according to the Education Department.

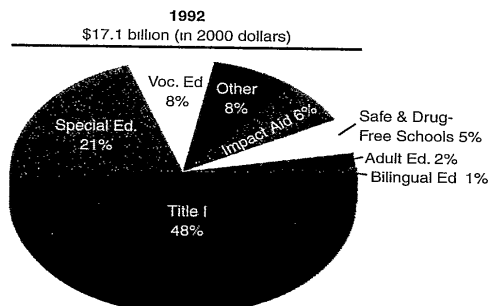
Some Republicans also cite the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, which focuses on after-school and community learning. The program started with a \$750,000 appropriation in 1996, but is now up to \$846 million.

Its original sponsor, former Rep. Steve Gunderson, R-Wis., worries that the program has lost its original intent.

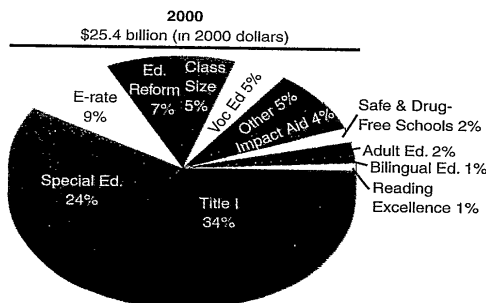
"I really like the increase—but

More Money for Schools

Federal spending for K-12 education has increased almost 50 percent during President Clinton's tenure, according to an analysis by the Urban Institute, a Washington think tank. The share of funds devoted to Title I dropped as the federal government added new initiatives to wire classrooms to the Internet and reduce class sizes, among other priorities.



Less than 1%: Magnet schools assistance, American Indian education, education reform



Less than 1%: Magnet schools assistance, American Indian education, charter schools, parent-information centers, technical-assistance grants

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Appropriations History Table

they've broadened the program's mission so much that they risk losing it all," Mr. Gunderson said.

At the same time, President Clinton has shown relatively little interest in providing more money for special education, a top priority for Republicans.

Perhaps most troubling to many critics, student achievement still lags, and the gap between disadvantaged youths and their better-off peers has not been significantly reduced.

"This was someone who was going to put a major emphasis on education, and there's been no improvement," Mr. Hoekstra contended. "There is no substance to show."

Big Shoes To Fill

While historians will issue the final grades on the Clinton presidency, there is no disputing Mr. Clinton's immediate impact on the politicians who will grapple with education policy after he leaves office.

"It's a bipartisan issue now—it's both parties arguing about increasing the federal role in education," said Gordon M. Ambach, the executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers.

"We'd heard lots of politicians talk about education, then do nothing about it," added Benjamin O. Canada, the superintendent of the 56,000-student Portland, Ore., schools. "[Mr. Clinton] set a stan-

dard for politicians not just to talk about it, but to do something. Now, I'm looking for that standard to be taken to a higher level with the new administration."

This past year, in fact, President-elect George W. Bush ran his campaign with what many believe to be the largest, most detailed education agenda ever for a GOP presidential candidate—a sign, many say, that Mr. Clinton influenced the Republican platform as well as that of his would-be successor, Vice President Al Gore.

"[Mr. Clinton] totally changed the debate," said Sandra Feldman, the president of the American Federation of Teachers. "Republicans never mentioned the word vouchers. They talked about improving America's schools. He set the agenda for the campaign."

Whether Mr. Clinton's initiatives will survive remains to be seen. Rep. Hoekstra said he expects Republicans to keep some of the programs, including the teacher-hiring initiative, but to amend them to allow states and districts more flexibility in using the federal money.

Ms. Ravitch, meanwhile, believes the new Bush administration will have an easier time in getting its accountability proposals passed because of the ground-work laid by Mr. Clinton.

"Now, it's nothing new for [President-elect] Bush to come in and have a strong accountability program," she said.

A Full Agenda

President Clinton has addressed a wide array of education issues during his eight years in office. Here is a roundup of some of his major initiatives:

STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY: Building on earlier work by the National Governors' Association and former President George Bush, the Clinton administration proposed the Goals 2000: Educate America Act to provide grants to states to draw up and implement higher academic standards. The measure passed in 1994. Also that year, the administration succeeded in requiring states to set high standards for students in Title I programs in mathematics and reading or language arts, as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization. In 1997, Mr. Clinton proposed a new system of voluntary national tests in reading and math; that proposal died after an outpouring of criticism from Republicans and liberal Democrats in Congress.

TECHNOLOGY: In 1998, the Federal Communications Commission began awarding E-rate, or "education rate," discounts on Internet access and other telecommunications services to schools and libraries nationwide. While this program is identified more closely with Vice President Al Gore than with President Clinton, it stands as one of the administration's greatest successes. The administration also proposed a host of smaller programs, including the Technology Literacy Challenge Fund, to help schools embrace new technology.

SCHOOL CHOICE: President Clinton vigorously opposed private school vouchers, but he was one of the first prominent Democrats to promote the charter school movement. He supported a provision of the 1994 ESEA reauthorization that set up a new program to help start charter schools; slightly more than 2,000 of these publicly financed but largely independent schools were operating as of late last year.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION: Passed in 1994, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act provided seed money to states and communities for programs designed to help ease the transition from school to work, especially for students who don't plan to attend college. The effort was generally deemed to be only moderately successful, and the future of this legislation, which sunsets this year, appears doubtful.

READING AND LITERACY. Mr. Clinton proposed a new program in 1997, called America Reads, that aimed to recruit 1 million volunteers to help elementary school students learn to read. Republicans countered with their own proposal, the Reading Excellence Act, which focused on teacher training and use of research-backed methods of teaching reading; that program passed in 1998. America Reads continues to tap AmeriCorps and work-study students to tutor elementary school students and is widely credited with spurring volunteer tutoring.

SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION: Also in 1997, Mr. Clinton addressed the issue of rundown school buildings, proposing a \$5 billion, five-year program to help districts pay interest on bonds for school construction and renovation. The plan was vehemently opposed by Republican leaders in Congress, but Mr. Clinton kept pressing the issue for the next three years. Congressional appropriators agreed to a \$1.2 billion program for emergency repairs and renovations in the fiscal 2001 budget.

MORE TEACHERS, SMALLER CLASSES: One of Mr. Clinton's top priorities in his second term was federal aid for hiring 100,000 new teachers to reduce class sizes in the early grades. Critics said the plan would usurp state and local authority, and they questioned whether schools could find enough qualified teacher-candidates. But the plan passed as part of last-minute budget negotiations in 1998. Republicans have since amended it to allow some money to be used for training and other purposes. To date, districts have hired 29,000 new teachers under the program.

HIGHER EDUCATION: Beginning in 1993, the Department of Education began its highly touted direct-lending program, in which students received college loans directly through their institutions instead of a loan agency or guarantor. Other initiatives that the administration succeeded in getting passed include the HOPE scholarship program, which offers federal income-tax breaks for college tuition, and the Gear Up program, which provides mentoring and scholarships to disadvantaged youths.

NATIONAL SERVICE: President Clinton came into office promising to create a "domestic Peace Corps" in which young people would receive money to attend college in exchange for performing community service. The AmeriCorps program that resulted in 1993 was smaller than Mr. Clinton had hoped, and for several years it faced stiff opposition from some Republicans in Congress. But it currently enjoys bipartisan support.

Last week, President Clinton stopped by an elementary school in Chicago, where he reflected on his education legacy as one that focused on "simple ideas: higher standards, more accountability, greater investment, equal opportunity."

"One of the primary reasons I ran for president [was] to do what I could in the White House to

make a positive difference in the schools of America," Mr. Clinton told the cheering crowd of supporters.

"As I leave office, I don't want America to let its concern for education reform and improvement abate; I want it to increase," he added. "I want more people to believe that every child can learn."