

NLWJC - Kagan

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Education - Math Directive

March 4, 1997 DRAFT

MEMORANDUM FOR THE:

ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT FOR DOMESTIC POLICY
ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY
SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

SUBJECT: Preparing Students to Meet National Standards of Excellence in Eighth Grade Math
and Improving Math and Science Education

Since the early 1980's, U.S. elementary and secondary school students have begun taking tougher courses, and we are starting to see the results. National Assessment of Educational Progress scores have improved in math and science, with gains in mathematics equal to at least one grade level. On the SAT, average math scores are at their highest in 25 years, even as the number and diversity of test-takers have increased. However, the eighth-grade results of the 41-Nation Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS), released this fall, show that the U.S. is just slightly above average in science and below average in math. That isn't acceptable; in this information era, our students need to perform much better in order to succeed economically.

Last month, to help parents and teachers learn who needs help, what changes in teaching to make, and which schools need to improve, I asked the Secretary of Education to develop a voluntary national test for individual eighth-grade students based on widely-accepted, challenging national standards in mathematics. This test will be available to states and local school districts to give to their students in the spring of 1999, and will measure whether students have reached the level of mathematics proficiency necessary to enable them to move forward and excel at the higher level math and science courses that are the gateway to college.

The primary responsibility for achieving high standards rests with teachers, parents, and schools in local communities across America. However, it is imperative that we work to ensure that federal resources support student success as well. For example, in reading, I have already announced my America Reads initiative, that will enlist over one million well-trained tutors to help first-, second-, and third-grade students across the U.S. learn to read independently and well. In the same spirit, we also need to take a more careful look at how federal programs, research, and human resources can help improve teaching and learning in mathematics, as well as science.

Therefore, I direct the Department of Education and the National Science Foundation to create and lead an inter-agency group, to include other agencies identified in cooperation with the Office of Science and Technology Policy and the Domestic Policy Council, such as the Department of Defense, the Department of Energy, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The group will be charged with preparing an action strategy for using key federal resources to assist states and local school systems prepare students to succeed on the 8th grade math test and go on to higher achievement in math and science.

The action strategy should contain recommendations for the use of federal resources to help districts and schools improve teaching, upgrade curriculum, integrate technology and high-quality instructional materials into the classroom, as well as motivate students and help them understand how math concepts are applied in the real world. The strategy should identify significant federal programs, activities, and partnerships available to improve teaching and learning, ensure that these resources are appropriately focused on helping students excel on the 8th grade math test and reach challenging math and science standards, and determine how these resources can best support state and local reforms. In developing this strategy, the inter-agency group should review the current status of improvements in math and science education, and identify and address critical areas of need, drawing on input from educators and professional organizations.

The working group should make its recommendations and submit its action strategy to me within 90 days.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON