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Seth Low School

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April 21, 2000

I am just thrilled to be here at Seth Low. I want to thank all of you for being here.

We have all heard about the Seth Low intermediate school for a very long time. In fact your principal Mr. Mancini has been to Washington and your school has been honored there.

I want to thank all of the teachers who are here today on behalf of education. I also want to thank the chorus. . . is that from the age of Aquarius? I like that. That was very well done. I want to thank the orchestra. I want to thank the color guard.

I have looked forward to this. Last year I was able to be a principal for a day. I think that the program that sponsors the principal for a day, which is called PENCIL, really has a great idea. The more people we can get into our schools -- whether they are elected officials, business leaders or other community activists -- the more they can see what is really going on inside of our school. If they can come to a place like Seth Low Intermediate Schools, they can see so many successful students.

I congratulate all of you because you have done very very well in all of the testing and the other things that demonstrate that you are really learning here. I was delighted to have a chance when I said I would participate again - as principal for a day -- to be invited to come to this school. It is a real opportunity and I would hope everyone who participates would have a chance to come and see what it has done in this school.

Now how many sixth graders are here? How about seventh graders? How about eighth graders? I know that when I came in and met Juliana and some of the other students, and some of the parents that this was an intermediate school and that there was a lot of enthusiasm in this school. Students come from many different backgrounds, come from different parts of the city. They are here with one goal in mind and that is to get the very best possible education.

When we look at what Seth Low has already accomplished, I am impressed because many of us have worked on helping our schools and improving our education since 1983 and even

before that. But very steadily since 1983 -- way before many of the students were born -- I learned how challenging it is to provide high standards and a rich curriculum and enough individual attention. I take what your principal said very seriously, because we have overcrowding in our schools in New York City.

We have too many students in too few schools and too few classrooms. I know that the superintendent, Mr. Webber and others are concerned about this, because it is very difficult to teach and learn if you do not have the space. In many of the schools that I went to last year in Queens that was built for a thousand students and there are two thousand students there. I just talked to the principal and they are expecting about six thousand more at the beginning of next year.

We need to do more to provide all of you with the space you need to learn. I am going to work very hard to make sure we have the funding and the resources in the city to make that happen.

I am also going to work very hard to make sure that all of our schools have access to the Internet. How many of you have computers at home? That is a very high percentage. So you are able to use your computers at home. How many of you use your computers for studying and research, writing papers, doing homework? How many use it for other things?

You know very well that today learning is tied to the Internet and the World Wide Web -- what we can learn from people not only people thousands of miles away but also thousands of years behind us. We get historical and geographic perspective.

We have a lot of schools in our city and throughout New York state that don't have access to computers and don't have as many students as I just saw hands go up who have computers at home. I want to make sure that all of our schools are wired.

That is a real challenge in a beautiful building like this. Your principal and I were talking. It was build so sturdily, which I love because they are like the schools that I went to when I was going to public schools. Very sturdy, strong buildings, but they are a lot harder to get these wires in to be able to provide the computers. We have some schools in some parts

of New York City and State where it is going to be very difficult without some added resources. So I want to do everything we can to make sure that we have computers in the classrooms.

The other thing I am concerned about is the number of teachers who are leaving our schools. That is a very big problem right here in New York City because overcrowded classrooms and inadequate resources make it hard to teach. So I want to do more to provide more support and resources for our teachers here in the city.

I would like to do something else. I would like to make it possible so that any of you who would like to be teachers would have a chance to do that. Here is what I propose: if you are willing to be a teacher, the Federal government will provide a scholarship for you to go to any college you want to go. It is something I call the National Teacher Corps - if you promise to teach for four years after you get out in a school like Seth Low Intermediate School.

How many of you would consider being teachers if knew you could afford to do that, if this scholarship would help?

That is great. We really need your help.

There isn't any more important job than teaching. And too often, our teachers do not get the pay and the respect and the resources they need to do the best job for you. I also think that we ought to do some things to try get other people into teaching, people who are in different careers. I mentioned I am a lawyer, but I don't practice law in the White House, but I did for many years. There are many lawyers I know who are tired of practicing law. And maybe are willing to consider teaching. We need to provide some incentive.

I also think that we ought to get some retired teachers back in the classroom. We have wonderful retired teachers. If we give signing bonuses to athletes, we ought to give signing bonuses to teachers, because teachers are so important. So it has been a great joy to travel around the entire state, throughout the city, in and out of schools, talking to teachers and students.

I have a few questions that I want to ask you, because I know how smart the students here are. I like to find out what you

think, because there is a lot that I can learn. How many of you think that we should provide after school programs for young kids as well as kids in intermediate schools, who have someplace safe to go, someplace to do your homework, maybe a place to do some recreational activities?

How many of you think that we should provide afterschool programs for when parents have to keep working and children don't have any place to go? How many of you know younger children, lets say kindergarten through fifth grade, who are home alone after school? I think that we need to do more for parents who are working hard who have safe places for their children to go.

Now that you all in the intermediate school, you're thinking about going on to high school. As you make that transition from Seth Low to your high school, you are going to be a different kid, in different rooms, you may not have all your friends with you. How many of you how important it is for you to help your friends to say no to drugs, alcohol, and tobacco and things like that? How many of you have ever tried to talk to a friend and say, "that is not a cool thing to do that, do not do that?" How many of you have convinced a friend not to start smoking?

We have 3,000 kids a day start smoking. I don't understand. The tobacco companies lie to kids. They get them hooked just to make money, then they die earlier than they would. So it is really important that you keep talking to your friends. And that you keep talking to yourself. It is going to cost you a lot of money. It is really going to really fix your health. So these are some of things that smart kids like the ones here at Seth Low can really be leaders in convincing other kids to do.

I am so pleased I got to come and see all of you and to hear the music, the drama and the singing and I saw some of the dancing in the gym. I hoped that maybe I could come back and spend a longer time, because one of the things that (applause) we did not have the time for it today, but I would really like to have a conversation with the students and let them ask me questions and we can continue to talk about issues. So maybe we can have a chance to do that. But in the meantime thank you for letting me come here today. (applause)