Parents Speak Out for America's Children

Report of the Surgeon General's Conference

Healthy Children
Ready to Learn
The Critical Role of Parents
If you would like more information on the "Healthy Children Ready to Learn" Initiative, the Conference on "Healthy Children Ready to Learn: The Critical Role of Parents," or the six National Education Goals, please contact one of the following agencies:

**Department of Health and Human Services**
200 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20201
(202) 245-6445

**Department of Education**
400 Maryland Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20202
(202) 401-3600

**National Governors' Association**
444 N. Capitol St., N.W.
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Washington, DC 20001
(202) 624-5300

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Washington, DC 20201
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**Department of Agriculture**
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Washington, DC 20250
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Parents Speak Out for America’s Children

Report of the Surgeon General’s Conference

--- Ready to Learn ---

The Critical Role of Parents

February 9-12, 1992
FEDERAL COSPONSORS

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Association of State and Territorial Health Officials

Child Welfare League of America, Inc.

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National Mental Health Association

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National Parent-Teachers Association

National SAFE KIDS Campaign

National Urban League

Parent Action

Parents as Teachers National Center

Society for Nutrition Education

United Way of America
There are 64 million children in this country. When I was appointed to be Surgeon General, I vowed to speak for all of them—whether rich or poor, healthy or sick, whatever their race or ethnic background. To this end, nearly 2 years ago, I established the Healthy Children Ready to Learn Initiative. This Initiative, which focuses on the health aspects of school readiness, was born out of the President's first National Education Goal, that "By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn."

As part of this Initiative, the Conference on Healthy Children Ready to Learn: The Critical Role of Parents was held here in Washington, DC, in February 1992. More than 700 people attended—health professionals and administrators, teachers, Government officials, and others involved in the health and well-being of our Nation's young people—but our guests of honor for this Conference were the approximately 225 parents who attended from each of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territories.

Over the course of those 3 days, our time was spent listening to and learning from one another. We learned what worked; we were told what didn't. The Conference was unique in that the parents spoke from their hearts. They raised a collective voice that said, in effect, "As parents, we must stand up for our children and our families and see that our needs are met. We must do so with dignity, and we must demand respect when others try to rob us of our dignity." Parents who never knew that they could speak for others eloquently articulated the needs of children and families. Although these parents came to our Conference from all parts of the country and from all walks of life, they came with the same mission: to improve the lives of the children and the families of this country.

This proceedings document is dedicated to those parents who attended our Conference. We are proud of them and inspired by them. It is our sincere hope that what we learned in those 3 days is reflected honestly in these pages. This document will serve as a "guide" for the rest of us and as an inspiration to do what was asked. As I stated at the close of our Conference, "This Conference may be ending, but what we have accomplished is the beginning of a way of acting and thinking with families in mind."
We must care for our children. That responsibility does not belong to only one individual or entity or Government agency. What we learned at this Conference is that we are all responsible for all of the children. We must become advocates for one another and share our strengths. When President Bush outlined his six National Education Goals, he envisioned an America where our children can compete on an international level. He knew that the children of today are the explorers, the writers, the teachers, and the inventors of tomorrow. If we invest in their future today, we can ensure their growth and advancement for tomorrow.

As Surgeon General, I will speak for you, the families of America. My voice and my office are at your service. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your thoughts, your energies, and your heartfelt spirit.

Antonia C. Novello, M.D., M.P.H.
Surgeon General
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George H. Bush, President of the United States

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Edward Madigan, Secretary of Agriculture

Lamar Alexander, Secretary of Education

Roger R. Porter, Ph.D., Assistant to the President for Economic and Domestic Policy

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Panel 1B: Helping Families Get Services: Some New Approaches

Panel 2A: Healthy Children Ready to Learn: What Are the Roles of Parents, Educators, Health Professionals, and the Community?

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