

*Draft Remarks for Governor Ronnie Musgrove
SREB Legislative Work Conference
Opening Session
Francis Marion Hotel
Charleston, South Carolina
November 13, 2003*

- Our states can lead the nation in progress in education.
- States that compose the Southern Regional Education Board can lead the nation in progress in education.
- Many persons here know--and I hope all will soon know--that this is the first sentence from SREB's *Challenge to Lead* Goals. It is more than the lead sentence from a report. I hope you will conclude that it will be a guiding principle of your state's education efforts.

- Ladies and gentlemen, this is a great day. I know, and you do too the challenge and problems we have in education, but today we know something about education that we have never known in the history of America.
- Today we know about reading and mathematics achievement for students in every state--for 4th and 8th grade students in every state. Students in every state have used the same test, so the results are comparable. We have today-- November 13-- a state-by-state look at education in America that we have never had before.
- Yes, this new report shows that the scores for our students need to be higher. Yes, most of our states trail the national average. Yes, the gaps in

achievement among different groups of students are too large. Yes, overall, we need to do much better.

- All of these are true. There is something else that is true, however, and it is very important. Our states--the states represented here today--led the nation in educational progress in virtually any way you can analyze today's results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress.
- You heard me correctly. The SREB states led the nation in educational progress virtually any way you can measure it by the first ever 50-state report released today by the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

- We have less than one-third of the states in the nation. We had more than one-half of the states in America that made significant improvement in reading for 4th graders. (We had 8 of 13 states in U.S.)
- In mathematics we had almost one-half of the states in America that made significant improvements in mathematics (12 of the 28 states in U.S.)
- Later in this Legislative Work Conference you will be receiving the full reports that were released today in Washington. We have made special arrangements to get copies for you at this meeting.

- Mark Musick will be helping you take these reports and get quickly to the important results for each of your states. And there are lessons to be learned for each state.
- Our states can lead the nation in educational progress. The results from the National Assessment show that this is no idle boast. It is also not easy and not assured.
- SREB's *Challenge to Lead* goals assert that our states can hold aspirations beyond "national averages" and can assume national leadership in educational improvement.

- The 12 SREB *Challenge to Lead* goals stress three themes.

1. Students at every level will be prepared for learning at the next level, particularly as they move from elementary to middle grades, from middle grades to high school, and from high school to college.

2. Gaps in achievement that make certain groups of students will be closed. This includes ethnic and genera groups, as well as geographically defined groups such as rural youngsters. This means improved achievement for all students.

3. Schools and colleges will operate as one system of education. The standard will be policies for schools and colleges that are aligned: links and

not barriers for students; accountability at all levels; funding adequate to ensure quality and efficiency; and responsiveness to state needs.

- Each of the 12 *Challenge to Lead* goals is supported by indicators that will help answer the question, "How will we know if the goal is met?" In the first year of *Challenge to Lead*, SREB staff have updated and expanded the data to track these indicators, and the emerging picture shows both the progress and challenge that our states face.
- Let me mention just a few of the *Challenge to Lead* goals, because while student achievement results are the bottom line--and today's National Assessment results are about that bottom line--

there are other fundamentally important goals.

- Few are more important than this goal:
- **ALL CHILDREN ARE READY FOR FIRST GRADE**
- How will we know that children are ready, especially until we have a good measure for entering 1st graders? Until then, one of the best ways is to measure whether all children at risk of not being ready for school are served by quality, coordinated programs from education, health and social service agencies.
- The good news here is that the number of 4-year-olds served by state pre-kindergarten

programs or Head Start programs exceeds the number of 4-year-olds living in poverty in 12 of our states--Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. These programs serve more than 360,000 at-risk 4-year-olds.

- The state pre-kindergarten programs in Texas and Georgia are the first- and fourth-largest programs in the United States in total number of children served.
- Oklahoma serves 60 percent of all 4-year-old children in the state, the second highest percentage in the United States.

- Arkansas includes in its state pre-kindergarten programs 3- and 4-year olds in districts where a high percentage of students score below the proficient level on state benchmark exams.
- SREB states *are* leading the nation in early childhood education. The challenge for many SREB states will be to continue their commitment to these programs.
- Following right on the heels of our readiness for 1st grade goal is our Goal: **ACHIEVEMENT IN THE EARLY GRADES FOR ALL GROUPS OF STUDENTS WILL EXCEED NATIONAL AVERAGES AND PERFORMANCE GAPS WILL BE CLOSED.**

- Today's just-released results from the National Assessment shows that this goal is far from met, but our progress toward it leads the nation. You will get a full report on all of the reading and mathematics results for your state at this meeting.
- SREB's *Challenge to Lead* goals include our high schools also.
- Goal: ALL RECENT HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES WILL HAVE SOLID ACADEMIC PREPARATION AND BE READY FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND A CAREER.

- All 16 SREB states showed improvements in college admission testing. Thirteen states posted higher scores in 2002 than in 1992 on the dominant test (ACT or SAT) used in the state; three others showed significant increases in the number of high school seniors who took the ACT or SAT, which may show that more students are considering--and planning for--college.
- Our host state for the Legislative Work Conference, South Carolina, stands out with huge back-to-back gains in SAT scores over two decades, posting a gain of 43 points from 1992 to 2002, following a 40-point increase between 1983 and 1992. South Carolina also has nearly one-third of the high school seniors taking the

ACT.

- Disappointingly, between 1992 and 2002 the achievement gaps between black and white students widened in *all* 16 states, and gaps between Hispanic and white students widened in 12 states.
- You will get information on this tomorrow from Gene Bottoms and Joan Lord. You may get some information you don't normally see, and it may raise some questions you haven't thought about before. This often happens at an SREB meeting.

- And yes, there is a goal about teachers. Some might say, in fact, that this is the most important goal of all.
- Goal: EVERY STUDENT IS TAUGHT BY QUALIFIED TEACHERS
- This important SREB goal of qualified teachers is your first topic tomorrow. There is much importance and much confusion currently attached to this goal.
- Recently 40 of the 50 states reported on the percentage of their teachers who met their state standards for being high qualified according to the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

- The percentages of teachers who met these standards ranged widely from 16 to 99 percent. Eight of the 13 SREB states reporting their percentages indicated that 85 percent or more of their teachers met their standards.
- These first results must be interpreted with caution: States defined "highly qualified teacher" differently and many states had problems in collecting data. The widely varying definitions of "highly qualified" from the first 40 states to report show that it is not clear how, or if, states will use *No Child Left Behind* regulations to change state, district and school practices.

- To meet the intent of the law, they must find ways to assign teachers with proven competence in both content and teaching skills to every classroom.
- You will be hearing about other *Challenge to Lead* goals tomorrow and Saturday . . . and I hope for years to come.
- In fact, one of the things I am proud of and confident of as Chairman of SREB is that the *Challenge to Lead* goals are firmly in place to help you and your colleagues in legislatures, your governors, and your education leaders for the decade ahead.
- We have planned:

- **Comprehensive reports for each of the 12 goals**, scheduled every two years: Reports on early- and middle-grades achievement, school leadership, college readiness, and teacher quality will be published in early 2004.
- SREB is also planning special topic reports on dropout rates and high school completion, college admission testing, GED completion, and teacher salaries.
- **Annual reports specific to each state.** These reports will document each state's progress in achieving SREB goals, with particular focus on comparisons with SREB states and the nation, and will be published in June.

- And you will get specific reports for your state each year on where your state stands in achieving these goals.
- Thank you for your service to your state, to education in your state, and to your service that benefits an entire region of the United States.
- My years as a legislator and as governor have been ones I would not trade for any experience that I know. You are in great positions to do good for your states, and you have challenges today that appear greater than those many may have faced when you were elected.

- Take advantage of all of the information you can from the Southern Regional Education Board . . . and do all the good you can.