

**Remarks at J.E.B. Stuart High School
in Falls Church, Virginia**

January 12, 2005

Thanks for the warm welcome. Dr. Riddile, thank you for inviting me and Laura to come to your great school. He said, “We’re not very far from the White House.” I said, “Fine. I’ll just drive over.” It turns out, I didn’t see any traffic. [Laughter]

I want to thank all the students who are here today. Thank you for coming to let an old guy speak to you. Dr. Riddile said, “Make one thing—make sure you do one thing, Mr. President.” I said, “What is that?” He said, “Keep the speech short. Students can’t wait to get back into class.” [Laughter] Here we go.

I also want to thank the folks that Laura and I got to meet earlier—teachers and superintendent, parent. They explained to us why their school is so good. And we’re here because this is a great school. I’ll talk a little bit about that later on. But one thing for certain is that the philosophy of this school needs to be the philosophy of every school, and that is, you believe in the best for every student and you do what is necessary to make sure that every child—not groups of children but every child—can read and write and add and subtract and every child has got the potential to achieve his or her dreams in America.

The first thing I want to do is congratulate the leadership of this school, the principal, the teachers, and the involved parents for a job well done.

I want to thank Laura for traveling with me today. She’s been traveling with me for a long time. [Laughter] And for a public school librarian, the highway has been a little bumpier than she probably thought. But she is—she shares the same passion I do, and that is to put systems in place to encourage every child to learn to read. And so thank you for coming, looking forward to working with you on education matters during the next 4 years.

I want to thank Rod Paige, who’s joined us. Rod is the outgoing Secretary of Education. Four years ago when I was looking at the Cabinet, I decided to pick somebody who had been on the frontlines of edu-

cational excellence. Rod was the former superintendent of schools in the Houston Independent School District. That’s the frontlines, and the results of his hard work are noticeable in Houston. And I want to thank you, Rod, for not only serving in Houston but coming from the great State of Texas to serve our country for 4 years.

I don’t know whether the Senators will think this is breaking protocol, but Margaret Spellings is traveling with me today. Let’s just say she is my domestic policy adviser and, if the Senate so decides, will succeed Rod as the Secretary of Education. I don’t know where you are, Margaret. There you are. Thanks, yes. I suspect that if confirmed, the seat will improve. [Laughter]

Again, I want to thank Mel Riddile for being such a fine principal. He’s what I would call an educational entrepreneur. You can’t have a good school unless you’ve got a good leader. And the principal is the leader of the school, and I appreciate you. I appreciate your spirit. I appreciate your vision, and I appreciate the high standards.

And I want to thank the superintendent of schools for recognizing that this good man is a good principal. And I want to thank you for being here, Jack. Jack Dale—Dr. Jack Dale is with us, who is the superintendent of the Fairfax County public school district. Thanks for taking on a big job.

I was pleased to see that United States Senators from the great State—or the Commonwealth of Virginia have joined us. Senator John Warner is with us today. I’m honored you’re here, Senator. Thank you for coming. Senator George Allen is with us. Thank you for being here, George. Congressman Tom Davis, proud you’re here. A member of the Stuart PTA, I presume? At one time—after all, his daughter Shelley graduated from the high school here. I want to thank you all for coming.

I appreciate the attorney general of the great State of Virginia joining us, Jerry Kilgore. I want to thank all the State and local officials. Thanks once again to the students and parents for allowing me to come today.

This is one of the first stops in the year 2005 for me. And there’s a reason why it’s one of the first stops, is we are dedicated to doing everything we can at the Federal

level to improve public education. You can't have a hopeful America without a public school system that's working to the best of its abilities. I'm optimistic we can achieve that, and I'm optimistic we can achieve a lot of things. I'm optimistic we can spread freedom and therefore peace around the world. I'm optimistic that we can continue to protect our homeland.

I'm looking forward to working with our fellow citizens to continue to spread the great compassion of America. I want to thank those of you in this audience who have contributed to the tsunami relief effort. I appreciate so very much our fellow citizens for joining President Clinton and President Bush in lending your heart, through your money, to help those who suffer. The Federal Government will continue to remain focused on making sure the victims of that natural disaster get the best help possible.

I'm going to continue to work in 2005 to keep this economy of ours strong so people can find work. And one way to do so is to keep your taxes low and to reduce the burden of junk lawsuits and needless regulations on our Nation's employers. Looking forward to making sure that, to the best of our ability, that health care is more affordable and available.

It's hard for me to come to a high school class and look at our youngsters and say, "The Social Security system is in good shape," when I understand it's not. To the seniors of America, nothing is going to change when it comes to your Social Security check. But if this Congress doesn't join this administration in working to reform and strengthen Social Security, we will not be able to look at the high school seniors of today and say, "We have done our duty in protecting Social Security for you," for after all, the system will be bankrupt by the year 2040. And now is the time for the United States Congress to join with the administration to save and strengthen Social Security for generations to come.

To keep this country prosperous and to keep this country hopeful, we've got to make sure these public schools of ours stay strong. And we started on that road to strengthening every public school 3 years ago, when I signed the No Child Left Behind Act. The

theory of this law is straightforward—it's pretty easy to understand—that in return for Federal dollars, we are asking for results. That makes sense if you're a taxpayer. It makes sense, frankly, if you're an innovative teacher and a strong principal. We're leaving behind the old attitude that it's okay for some students just to be shuffled through the system. That's not okay. And 3 years ago, we began to change the system that too often had given up on a child, primarily those children whose mothers or dads didn't speak English as a first language or those children who may be growing up in inner-city America, whose mom or dad didn't have big income levels. This administration believes and most people in America believe that every child can learn.

And so we're raising the standards for every public school in America. If you believe every child can learn, then it makes sense to raise the bar, not lower the bar. If you believe every child can learn, then it makes sense to measure to determine whether every child is learning. That's called accountability, accountability for results. Accountability is so crucial to achieve our goal for every child learning to read, write, and add and subtract. Accountability helps to correct problems early, before it is too late. Accountability enables a good teacher to test a curriculum as to whether or not that curriculum is working. Accountability allows principals and teachers to determine whether methodology is working. Accountability also is a way to make sure parents stay involved in the educational systems across our country.

You know, for a while, in certain districts, a parent—you'd ask a parent, "How is your school doing?" And the parent's natural reaction is, "It's the best there is." In some cases, like the parents here at Stuart High, they're right. But in some cases, because there was no accountability system, they were wrong. Accountability system allows a parent or a local official or concerned citizen to compare results from one school to another within a district and from one district to another within a State. And that's important, because by putting parents in the center of the school system, it not only encourages parental responsibility; it enables parents to demand reform when there—reform needs to be done.

It enables parents, when they see excellence, to do what every parent should do, and that is thank the teacher and the principal for a job well done.

Accountability systems don't work unless there are consequences. And so in the No Child Left Behind Act, if a school fails to make progress, parents have options. They can send their child to free after-school tutoring, or they can send their child to a different public school.

For the past 3 years, thanks to Rod Paige's hard work, these reforms have been put into action. All 50 States, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, have drawn up plans to measure performance in every school. And the reporting process is beginning to work.

But more importantly than the process of putting reform in place is that we're beginning to see results. If you measure, you get to determine whether or not we're achieving things. Fourth grade math test scores across this Nation went up nine points between the years 2000 and 2003. Eighth graders improved by five points in the same period. In other words, because we measure, I can now stand up and say we're beginning to close an achievement gap in America. We've got reading scores—reading scores for fourth graders increased in the vast majority of States that tested between 1998 and 2003, including Virginia. African American and Hispanic and Native American children are beginning to learn to read. There is a significant achievement gap in America, and that is not right. And we're closing that gap. And you know how we know, is because we measure, because we're willing to devise measurement systems, not at the Federal level but at the State level.

The results in Virginia are strong. Last school year, 69 percent of the schools met their target for progress. That's up 10 percentage points from the previous year. That's great. Except I'm now focused on the other 31 percent, and I know the government here in Virginia will be as focused as well. Sixty-nine percent and an increase of 10 percent is really good news.

But one day, I hope to be able to stand here in my term—or a future President or a future Governor—and say, "We're up to 100 percent success in the great State of Vir-

ginia." That's what we want. We're not interested in mediocrity. We're interested in excellence, so not one single child is left behind in our country.

African American and Hispanic students in your State improved their scores in reading and math. Things are happening in America. Things are happening in Virginia. A lot of it has to do with good principals and hard-working teachers, and I understand that.

You know, the people of this country are probably saying, "Why did you come to Stuart High School?" And let me tell you why. It wasn't so long ago that Stuart High School was a troubled school. I can't remember what the words the principal used. I think he said that they deemed it to be a failure, if I'm not mistaken. Nobody—at least the people in this school didn't want to be called a failure. So you set out to do something about it. In 1997, the test scores were the lowest in Fairfax County and among the lowest in all of Virginia.

By focusing on results and stressing the importance of reading, by making sure that the measurement systems focuses on each individual child, by not tolerating excuses for failure, this school has been turned around. And how do we know? See, I can say that with certainty—in other words, I'm not guessing. I'm not saying, "Oh, you know, the principal looks like a pretty good guy, and the teachers sounded smart, and the students are cheering loudly." [*Laughter*] I know because you measure. The test scores in reading and math are now above the State average, and the trend lines are excellent. Dr. Riddile told me what you would expect. He said, "I am really proud of the students here." He said, "We're willing to do what it takes for the students to succeed." I like that attitude, and I hope the parents like that attitude as well. "Whatever it takes for the students to succeed." He said, "It's not magic. It takes hard work and smart work."

And that's something other schools can do. I'm here at Stuart High School because I want other schools who have got a student population as diverse as Stuart High School does to know that success and excellence is possible. And the goal for our high schools around our country is for them to achieve the same good results you've achieved here

at Stuart. Seems like a realistic goal, and yet, many of our Nation's high schools face serious challenges.

Out of 100 ninth graders in our public schools, only 68 will complete high school on time. Now, we live in a competitive world, and a 68 percent graduation rate for ninth graders is not good enough to be able to compete in this competitive world. In math and science, the problem is especially urgent. A recent study showed that American 15-year-olds ranked 27th out of 39 countries in math literacy. I don't know about you, but I want to be ranked first in the world, not 27th.

I view the results in our high school as a warning and a call to action. And I believe the Federal Government has a role to play. As you can tell, I believe the Federal Government had a role to play in primary education, and I believe the Federal Government has a role to play in secondary education. Up to now, the reforms, as I've explained to you, focused on the primary schools. Today I propose a \$1.5 billion initiative to help every high school student graduate with the skills necessary to succeed.

Before you get too nervous, please understand that I strongly believe in local control of schools. I don't believe you can have innovation at Stuart High School if the Federal Government is trying to teach you how to run your school.

The role of the Federal Government is to serve as a funding source for specific projects and an instigator for accountability systems. The accountability system is, of course, devised by local people. The State of Virginia has devised its own accountability system. I don't believe in a Federal test. I believe a Federal test leads to Federal control, and I believe Federal control of the public school systems leads to failure. And so I believe the Federal Government has an obligation to help in a way that helps local districts and local schools achieve our objectives.

Some of that money ought to be—that I've just announced will go to early intervention programs. Under this plan, high school teachers will analyze eighth grade test data for incoming ninth grade students so that when they see a student at risk of falling behind, the teachers and the parents can get together and design a program to help make

sure that child can catch up, before it's too late. I believe in programs being flexible and uniquely tailored to each student's needs, just like you do here at Stuart High School. And so this program will enable and help school districts and schools intervene early, assess and design programs that meet the needs of that particular student.

To support intervention plans, I believe we need to improve the way the Federal Government funds high schools. The Federal Government—oh, we've got a lot of programs designed to help high school students; over the years, programs have developed. The problem is they're like silos. They're prescriptions that may not meet the needs of the local high school or the local school district—you know, a program to promote vocational education or to prepare for college preparation or to encourage school restructuring. They all sound fine, and they're all important. But they may not be what is necessary for a particular school district or a high school to achieve the objective of teaching every child to read and write and add and subtract. So I believe we ought to consolidate the high school improvement programs so that States have the flexibility to choose the program that works best for their students.

See, we've got to be careful about prejudging results in Washington, DC. We ought to say, "You can achieve the results, and here's the flexibility necessary to do so." And by giving you flexibility, it means we're more likely to achieve the results that we all want.

To ensure that the intervention programs are working and graduates are prepared, we need to be certain that high school students are learning every year. So the second component of my high school initiative is to measure progress with tests in reading and math in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade. Listen, I've heard every excuse in the book not to test. My answer is, how do you know if a child is learning if you don't test? We've got money in the budget to help the States implement the tests. There should be no excuse saying, "Well, it's an unfunded mandate." Forget it. It will be funded. I've heard people say, "You're teaching the test." If you teach a child to read, they'll pass the test. Testing is important. Testing at high school

levels will help us to become more competitive as the years go by. Testing in high schools will make sure that our children are employable for the jobs of the 21st century. Testing will allow teachers to improve their classes. Testing will enable schools to track. Testing will make sure that diploma is not merely a sign of endurance but the mark of a young person ready to succeed.

The principal of this great school said we spell hope: R-E-A-D. I thought that's a pretty darn good slogan. And the reason why that's a good slogan is, to make sure every high school student has a chance to realize his or her dreams, each graduate must read—must know how to read. You can't—you cannot achieve in America if you cannot read, and yet too many of our children cannot read. And so I'm asking Congress to increase funding for my Striving Readers Initiative to \$200 million. We'll use these resources to help more than 100 school districts train teachers in research-based methods so they can provide effective interventions for middle and high school students struggling in reading.

There is such a program here at Stuart. One reason why Stuart is doing so well is because you've got an intervention program when it comes to reading. How do I know? I met with the intervener. *[Laughter]* I met with the person who designed the reading program. I met with the person whose force of personality is so huge that not only are people working on reading in reading classes, but they're doing so at P.E. and math. And that is the reading coach, Sandy Switzer, who is with us today. Thank you for your—she knows what she's talking about. And as a result, the high school students here are reading.

And it sounds odd, doesn't it, for the President to stand up and say, "We need to focus on reading in high school." But that's the state of affairs. Someday, when No Child Left Behind is fully implemented and kicked in, there are not going to need to be early intervention programs or intervention reading programs in high school. But today, we need them. And therefore, this program will help school districts make sure that at the very minimum, a high school graduate has got the capacity to read.

I met with Zenab Abu-Taleb today. She is from Syria. And three of her daughters—one has gone to this school, and two others—by the way, one of them is going to college, which is a fantastic achievement for the family. And she was talking about what it means to have her daughters in Ms. Switzer's reading program. And I'm not going to put words in her mouth, but I will describe the excitement that she had in her voice when she talked about the fact that her girls are learning to read, are becoming literate. She did something pretty smart, though, by the way, and I hope other parents around the Nation follow suit. She said to her girls, "You will be reading more than you watch TV." *[Laughter]* That's pretty hard to do.

She's excited by the fact that Ms. Switzer and the teachers here are using research-based reading programs. I'm sure some of you are aware of these reading debates that go on around the country. Endless hours of air time are spent—"This one works. This one doesn't work." The only way you can know is you measure.

And so Ms. Switzer has taken a program that achieves measurable results and is spreading it all across this school. And as a result, the students here are improving dramatically when it comes to reading. And as a result, test scores in other subjects are improving dramatically as well. Congratulations for a job well done.

To make sure that people can find work in the 21st century, high school graduates also need a firm grasp on math. I'm proposing a \$120 million initiative to improve high school math. With these funds, school districts will set up programs to train math teachers in methods proven to succeed. Every student should be prepared in math so that every graduate has the skills necessary to succeed.

I talked to Stuart Singer. He's a math teacher here. You may have heard of him. He's only been here 32 years. *[Laughter]* He recognizes what I recognize, that the best jobs are those that require math, some sense of understanding of math. And too many of our students don't understand that—understand math. And we've got to get it right. I want to thank you for teaching, Stuart. Stuart, by the way—you're not going to believe

this—falls in the incredibly-small-world category. He graduated from SMU in Dallas the same year that Laura graduated from SMU in Dallas. I asked them if they ever went to the bar together, but—[laughter]—both of them said no, they were in the library, which—[laughter]—probably distinguishes their college career from mine. [Laughter]

One of the things we must be willing to always do is raise the bar. We've got to continue to raise the bar in our high schools. And one of the best ways to do so is by promoting advanced placement and the international baccalaureate programs. At Stuart High, you've got a fantastic IB program. It really means that you're willing to challenge every student. That's what it says. It just says we're not going to be—we just simply will not accept the status quo, that we're going to try to bring innovative programs to this school to continue to raise the bar, to challenge students as best as we possibly can.

Stuart, by the way, offers an IB course—or IB courses. He talks about former students that have come back from college that have taken the IB classes, and he says the sacrifice—they say the sacrifice is worth it. It makes a big impact. And that's important.

And so for the students here wondering whether or not the American experience or the American future belongs to you—absolutely. But it's up to you to decide to continue to soar and to seek new heights. And this school, one reason Stuart succeeds is because the school continually raises standards and raises expectations.

And that's what we need to do around the country. Every student with the passion and ability to take an AP or IB class should have the opportunity to do so. That's why we've increased Federal support for AP and IB programs—a 73 percent increase over the current amount is what I'm proposing. These programs will help school districts train teachers to offer college-level courses. In other words, you can't offer a program in a high school unless the teachers are trained to do so.

And we also need to help low-income students pay for the tests. It does not make any sense that a family budget, when it comes to taking AP tests or IB tests, should stand

between a student's dreams and the ability to take the test.

Another way to encourage students to take demanding courses is through the State Scholars Program. In Virginia, you have a similar program which gives high schoolers an incentive to take advanced courses in math and science and other subjects. That makes a lot of sense. Taking high-level courses like these makes the graduates more likely to succeed. And so it makes sense for the Federal Government to work with the State government and the State government to work with the local districts to continue to provide incentives to encourage students to take tougher and tougher courses, to take a more rigorous course load. And so we're going to continue to fund State Scholars Programs around the country because they get results.

And I believe another way to encourage students to take rigorous classes is to enhance the Pell grant scholarships for low-income students who've completed the State Scholars Program. High achieving students who take rigorous course loads will receive up to an additional thousand dollars during each of their first 2 years in college.

Let me talk about our Nation's teachers. I was the Governor of Texas once, and one our great Governors was Sam Houston. And he had been a United States Senator and a Governor. He was actually the President of Texas. We were a country once. [Laughter] He had a lot of interesting jobs. He was quite a colorful character. They asked him, toward the end of his life, what was the most important thing he had ever done. He said, "Being a teacher." I want to thank the teachers who are here. You've got a tough job, but you have a vital job.

By the way, I want to thank the parents who take an interest in your child's education. A mom or a dad is the child's first teacher. And a school—I bet you've got a pretty strong PTA here, and I want to thank the parents for staying involved with the school. The teachers, I know, appreciate it. I'm sure the principal appreciates it—most of the time. [Laughter] But I appreciate your involvement. It means a lot.

Lastly, I want to thank the Congress for sending a bill called the Crayola Credit,

which reimburses teachers for up to \$250 of out-of-pocket classroom expenses. It's an important signal that we care about our teachers. It's a proper use of Federal legislation.

We also passed a good piece of legislation that expanded loan forgiveness from \$5,000 to \$17,500 for talented math, science, and special ed teachers who teach at low-income schools. I thought that was a good piece of legislation. Unfortunately, it's about to expire. So I would hope the Congress—we can work with the Congress to make loan forgiveness permanent. It sends the right signals to our teachers and helps school districts that are looking for good teachers to attract those teachers.

And finally, I believe the Federal Government can put a program together to help reward success for our teachers. I proposed a new \$500 million incentive fund to reward teachers who get results. Teachers could qualify for an award by raising student performance or closing the achievement gap or volunteering to teach in low-income schools. That will be up to the local districts, to decide how to disburse the money. But I think it makes sense to encourage excellence by providing a \$5,000 bonus to nearly 100,000 outstanding teachers across the country. The program won't be administered at the Federal level. It will be administered at the State and local level. But it's a way to help say to teachers, "Thanks for a job well done. Here's a little extra because of merit. Here's our way of saying thanks for doing what you want to do, which is provide excellence."

And so here's some practical ideas for the Congress to consider as we head into a new session, to make sure that the good folks of this country understand that we're committed to education reform at all levels. We're making great progress because of the No Child Left Behind Act. I will vigorously defend the No Child Left Behind Act. We will not accept rolling back the accountability systems in the No Child Left Behind Act, because I believe the accountability systems are beginning to make a huge difference in the lives of children from all walks of life across this country.

Here's some ideas to help ninth graders when they're coming into high school, so we can assess their problems and meet their

needs before they lose hope, so the 68 percent graduation number soars. Here's a way to help reward teachers. Here's a way to provide good incentives. Here's a way to make sure that we achieve what we all want, the best school system in the world.

Thank you for letting me come by to visit. May God bless you all. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:31 a.m. in the school's main gymnasium.

Proclamation 7861—National Mentoring Month, 2005

January 12, 2005

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

All Americans are grateful for the special people who played a positive role in their childhood. Whether a relative, teacher, coach, or community leader, a dedicated mentor can profoundly change a young person's life. During National Mentoring Month, we recognize the role models who have influenced lives, and we continue to support programs that help the young people of America.

Mentoring programs pair a child in need with a caring adult who can help that child understand the importance of making the right choices in life. It is one of the best ways to send young people the right messages. Through friendship and encouragement, mentors can help prepare young Americans for a hopeful future.

My Administration has supported mentoring programs for young people at risk. In August 2004, my Administration made available over \$45 million in grants to help provide mentors for children with parents in prison. In addition, my Administration provided \$48 million in school-based grants in 2004 to provide at-risk youth with mentors to assist them in the successful transition from elementary to secondary school.

One mentor can change a life forever. I encourage all of our citizens to dedicate their time and talents to mentoring a young person. By providing help and hope to our