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M E M O R A N D U M

CARL E. VAN HORN  
DIRECTOR OF POLICY

TO: Governor Florio  
Joe Salema

FROM: Carl Van Horn *CEV*  
Tom Corcoran

DATE: October 16, 1991

RE: **Vision 2020, the QEC, and our K-12 Education Policy Agenda**

On October 18th you will be meeting with Commissioner Ellis to discuss a report, Vision 2020, he has prepared which lays out a four-point policy agenda for the administration. It is based on the discussions held at last spring's State Board of Education retreat. We have not yet had the opportunity to review a draft of the document but it organized around four major goals that are consistent with the administration's previous policy statements. However, for reasons set forth below, we do not believe that this report should be published at this time, but should be delayed until after the QEC reports and until you have had the opportunity to engage in extensive public dialogue about the future course for education policy, including discussions with the State Board of Education and the education groups. We believe that this is the wrong time for the administration to release a major policy statement. At best we appear disorganized and at worst appear to be at cross purposes with our own commission. More importantly, issuing a report at this time makes it more difficult for you to take advantage of the opportunity created by the QEC report to re-position yourself and reclaim a positive leadership role on education issues.

**The QEC and the Opportunity to Take Leadership**

With the new phase of the Abbott case, the completion of the QEC report, and the legislative elections, we are approaching a watershed in state education policy and an opportunity to alter public perceptions of the administration. The QEC report in particular provides you with an opportunity to lead a public

discussion of the education issues facing the state, demonstrate your willingness to listen and your concern for excellence, define the policy agenda for the state for the next decade, and most importantly demonstrate to the public that you have a vision that includes their children. The process being used effectively by Gov. Romer of Colorado provides us with a model.

Since the passing of the QEA, we have been on the defensive and most of our activities have been reactive. The result is that our actions seem disconnected and chaotic. The policy agenda set forth last spring has not been disseminated and even employees of the Department of Education and members of the State Board of Education are unaware of your positions on basic issues. The apparent lack of a coherent policy agenda has given some the impression we are incompetent. Others view our agenda as serving only black children and believe we have no interest in the middle class.

Consider the current situation. At this point important components of our program - the 3 R's bill, the ethics code, the IG, the new 4th grade test - have not been approved by the legislature and other aspects - new standards for schools, waivers of regulations, the expansion of preschool, and reforms in teacher education have either not been acted on or have received little public attention.

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The Department of Education is widely viewed as politicized, corrupt, and incompetent. The media have given the public the impression that the Governor's staff are corrupting the agency. Every problem in the Department leads to allegations of interference by the Governor's Office. There also is a serious rift between the Commissioner and State Board of Education who feel that they have been ignored. Morale in the Department is low. There has been little progress in the special needs districts and the current activities of the DOE may take years to produce results. Clearly it is time to re-assess the situation, set a more deliberate and focused course for the next 2 years, redefine your role, and give your total agenda greater visibility. This would provide a shared framework within the administration for determining policy, and might turn around the negative public perceptions arising from the past 18 months.

A paper should be developed to lay out the administration's policy agenda and its short and long range objectives for K-12 education. This paper could provide a framework for discussion with education groups and the public, and be used to launch New Jersey 2000. However such a policy paper ought to build on the QEC report and the public reactions to it and it should be broader than just DOE - demonstrating by its structure the commitment to integrate services and serve all of the state's children. It is premature to issue a policy paper at this point.

The public must see our agenda as inclusive and the administration as being hard-headed and competent. Tom has found audiences respond more positively when he discusses the QEA as part of a broader ten-point policy agenda. This is the agenda that was set forth last spring but it does not include our higher education initiatives which appeal to the middle class. The ten points he uses are:

1. adoption of a fair school formula to reduce resource disparities among districts (the QEA).
2. expansion of access to pre-school education (the QEA and GoodStarts).
3. fostering coordination of social services at both the state and local level (FamilyNet)
4. raising academic standards by expanding and reforming the state testing program and changing the standards for school certification from procedural standards to outcomes (the Monitoring bill).
5. increasing access to advanced academic work through incentives to expand AP courses, summer enrichment programs, and other measures (the Talent Development bill).
6. encouraging local innovation and restructuring through grants, waivers of regulations, and demonstration sites ( the RJR Nabisco grants, the Math-Science schools, and Bill Pascrell's LEAP bill which moves training functions to local districts).
7. transformation of vocational schools into applied science and technical institutes through 2 + 2 and 2+ 4 programs and magnet programs (objectives of the SETC).
8. strengthening accountability through an ethics code, eliminating administrative tenure, and strengthening the state school monitoring process.
9. addressing the state school facilities problem with a \$600 - million dollar construction and renovation initiative that includes incentives for regionalization, expansion of preschool, and coordination of services.
10. bringing spending under control through budget caps, regionalization, service sharing, and limits on growth in state aid (the QEA and incentives for regionalization).

Looked at in this light, the administration has had a coherent program that would serve the middle class as well as urban areas and promises to raise school performance. Moreover, some of this agenda has been initiated. However, we have gotten little credit for it. It has not been promoted effectively by the administration or the Department of Education and is not understood by the media or the public.

However, there is an even more fundamental problem with this ten point program. It assumes the public shares our view that the schools need reform and that student performance must be raised across the board. This may not be the case according some poll data. It also makes it appear that the administration has all of the answers. This reinforces the view that we are arrogant. This is why we should go through a process of dialogue with the public before issuing a policy agenda.

You can use the QEC report and the President's initiative to take a leadership role that emphasizes dialogue and public involvement. You could meet with a series of town meetings across the state, with the State Board of Education, and use TV hook-ups to talk to teachers and students about the critical issues. You could also raise some of them at the national level through NGA and ECS. 

Your role would shift from offering policy solutions to raising important issues that citizens must consider. The emphasis would shift from marketing particular policies to raising public awareness of the issues that we must address. By raising critical questions you can help frame the debate over education policy while remaining open to a variety of policy responses. We believe that this dialogue with the public would be best organized around a set of questions that you repeatedly raise and to which over time the administration frames convincing answers. Some of these questions might be: 

- What should our children learn?
- How do we raise their achievement?
- What must be done to prepare our children for school?
- What should parents be responsible for?
- How can we encourage excellence in our schools?
- How can we improve the efficiency of public education?

Other questions might be added and the character of the questions raised might be varied depending on the audience.

Obviously we and the Commissioner have ideas about how to answer these questions. We are already addressing some of them. And we can certainly provide you with a variety of options to suggest in public discussions. You can seed these ideas and those from other sources into the public discussion, but the emphasis should be on the dialogue, on building a consensus. The State of the State might be used to say that the QEC offers an opportunity for public discussion at the local level and the state level and that you want to be part of it, that it is time to stop fighting about money, to try to resolve our differences and discuss our children's futures.

In order to formulate policy that responds to the QEC and to the political and fiscal situation and permit you time to engage in the public dialogue described above, we advise that the Commissioner's proposed agenda, New Jersey 2020, not be published at this time. If it must be published, it should be treated as the State Board's statement to be delivered to you rather than the administration's statement to the Board. The priorities of Vision 2020 are likely to be consistent with the recommendations of the QEC and could be easily integrated into the administration's response after January. 