



**Transcript of Governor David A. Paterson's Remarks on Education at the  
Governor's Summit on School Engagement and Dropout Prevention  
Nazareth College, Rochester  
Friday, October 10, 2008**

Good morning. I would assume that your applause was for Maria and not for myself. [Laughter]

This is the part where you tell the person who introduced you what a wonderful speech they gave. But since you can clearly see that I wasn't in the room at the time, I will take your word for it after that wonderful, wonderful applause you gave Maria. Congratulations on that wonderful introduction. [Applause]

And I would like to thank Daan Braveman and all the faculty here at Nazareth College for having us here this morning. It's a wonderful way you have extended yourselves, and believe me, we all appreciate it. [Applause]

I'd also like to thank Mayor Bob Duffy for having this conference on the vital issue of the dropout rate here in Rochester, New York. [Applause]

I'd like to recognize some of my colleagues in government: the State Senator from this area who had a little injury earlier in the year, but is back doing the right thing and always does a great job, James Alesi. [Applause]

The Assemblyman from this area who is stalking me; at every event I go to in Rochester today, I seem to see him, none other than Joe Morelle. [Applause]

And joining us this morning—at least he's expected this morning—all the way from Brooklyn, New York, Assemblyman Felix Ortiz. [Applause]

I'd like to thank the Chair, Robert Bennett, and the Vice Chair, Meryl Tisch, of the New York State Board of Regents, and all the members of the Board of Regents who have contributed to this effort. [Applause]

And I would like to thank some of the members of my Administration who have been part of it: Commissioner of Probation Robert Maccarone, Commissioner of OASAS Karen Carpenter-Palumbo, and also, from the Office of Mental Health, Commissioner Mike Hogan. [Applause]

I would like to thank all of you for being here this morning, and all of you who are watching on public television around the state. We'd like to thank PBS and all of the affiliates for telecasting this very important and vital event.

Almost 30 years ago, in 1979, I heard and read about a situation that occurred in the New York City public school system.

There was a report from the New York City Board of Education that the dropout rate had decreased from 46 percent to 42 percent. Later on that year, it was discovered that the way this decrease was achieved was simply by dropping the names of the students who dropped out in junior high school from the list of students who had not graduated high school.

So, in other words, this was a statistical anomaly that was made to appear that there had been a decrease in the dropout rate, when all that had happened was that they eliminated junior high school students from the issue. Those students had still dropped out, but I guess this was a way to win the public's favor, as if there was a significant change.

There wasn't. And so, over the past score of years and ten more, we have tried—working at times effectively and at times not so effectively—to address this issue. Today, I am happy to join 500 of you for a conversation about the way we can make education more effective right here in New York State.

Because too often, that discussion has been limited and has been incomplete. Our vision for what effective education should be has often been confined only to teachers and public policymakers. Our understanding of how devastating it is when education fails students has been thought to have only been appreciated by those students themselves and their parents.

The fact is that we have been unable to stem the dropout rate statewide because we have not really looked at this situation and found workable, sensible and achievable ways to ameliorate it. What we're here to do today is to expand the conversation about ways we can make the educational experience vital and also helpful to the young people who appreciate it. [Applause] Thank you.

Too often, we have failed to bring forth the type of services that would provide for the skills and training that our young people need to go out and become part of the workforce. And we've made the mistake of thinking that these issues are only confined to them, their schools and their families.

The fact is that we are all affected by a high dropout rate. We are all part of the seamless web that exists when a young person is not able to achieve the ability and talent that was given to them from their birth.

And so, we can all take responsibility to try to ameliorate these problems. We can all take responsibility to try to restore opportunity to young people across New York State.

This conference's credo is derived from the principles of the America's Promise Alliance. Those five principles are that what is vital to the education of our young people are caring adults; safe places; a healthy start; effective education; and opportunities to help others. If we are able to redeem these promises, if we are able to commit to these precepts, then we can turn this situation around.

These issues have been studied by policymakers, but often separate from each other. Analysis in a silo is not helping young people. There must be a holistic approach to the renovation of the minds of young people who have gone without these services for too long.

What happens to young people outside the school environment directly affects performance inside the school environment. Issues such as length of the school day—we are still using the agrarian calendar from the 1880s. When young people leave school early in the day and both parents are

working, too often they're not leaving to harvest the fields. [Laughter] Whether they live in rural, suburban or urban areas, they are often leaving for a lot of antisocial activities that affect their opportunity to learn and grow.

Issues such as teenage pregnancy, child abuse, alcoholism, violence and crime, distraction and depression, often teenage suicide—these are the places where young people too often go, when we could build an environment to keep them busy for the entire day until a parent meets them on the other end. [Applause]

When we look at the issue of volunteerism, the ability to serve others, we find that 3 million New Yorkers volunteer every year, spending 367 million hours on the health, the welfare and the safety of others. When young people are involved in these programs, they inherently improve their performance in school and register better academic achievement. We can use those as ways to motivate our young people.

What we will bring to the tables are the public and private partnerships of education. We will bring people together who have never talked before. Doctors and community activists will debate with policymakers and teachers. We will have business leaders speaking to school administrators. We will have policymakers talking to parents.

And by the way, when policymakers talk to the parents, I may be Governor, but I'm still a parent, and I still have an interest in what goes on for my child in the public school system.

I was asked by my son, about two and a half years ago, when he was in the seventh grade, to help him solve a math problem. Here is the problem. On a digital clock, how many palindromes occur in a full day? [Laughter] My response was, "Why do you ask?" [Laughter]

The fact is, too often, there isn't a registered understanding of what young people are actually able to achieve. Now, it's fine to teach to the top 15 percent of the class. It's fine to ask people to reach over their heads. But when they don't have a parent they can go to, they are at an extreme disadvantage. These are some of the things that start to decrease the morale of young people, which is a prelude to leaving school, either on the junior high or high school level. And so, what we are coming here today to do is to re-establish a new culture in the education of young people.

The statistics are staggering. There were 90,000 dropouts in New York State just in 2007. Nearly half the population of Rochester dropped out of school all over this state.

When you look at the ramifications—only 47 percent of Hispanic students graduated from high school, only 51 percent of African-American students graduated from high school—you see how manifestly this problem is developing.

What are developing are the ghettos of intellect. What we are doing is robbing the imagination and making it impoverished. And we are succeeding, unfortunately, in creating a situation where hope has no currency.

We can turn that around. Because even though Directions for Our Youth estimates that the dropout rate is skyrocketing to such an extent that it is increasing in the tenth percentile each year, we can turn that around.

On the other end of this, we find that 2.2 percent of college graduates experience unemployment. 4.4 percent of high school graduates do. If someone doesn't finish high school, that number jumps to 7.1 percent.

Manpower Inc. estimates that 22 percent of the companies in the United States have jobs available but can't find people to fill them. That's because, especially for jobs in engineering and science, we haven't developed the young people in this country who are able to take those positions.

But we can do this. Thomas Jefferson, one of the Founders and the author of the Bill of Rights, said: "The most important bill in this code is the one that allows for the diffusion of knowledge all across the country. There is no firmer foundation for freedom or equality." But unfortunately, a survey of 17-year-olds found that only one-third of them knew that, in the Bill of Rights, there was a provision for freedom of speech and freedom of religion. How are we going to maintain liberty in this country if so few people even know what liberties are extended to us in our founding Constitution and our own Bill of Rights? [Applause]

For the second time this year, I'm going to have to call the Legislature back to Albany because, by law, our current budget must be balanced. Our budget, which was balanced when we passed it on April 9, came out of balance by \$630 million only three months later. Next year's budget increased by 28 percent in 90 days.

In August, I called the Legislature back, not just to close that budget, but to create a \$427 million foundation that we hoped would hold us until the end of the year even if our projections failed. It could not. We now have a budget that is \$1.2 billion in arrears from where we were just in August. And we are going to suggest that we close this budget gap and add another \$800 million to keep this budget sovereign for the rest of the year.

Since Wall Street bonuses and capital gains are realized in the fourth quarter of the year, we may be headed for the most unprecedented budget deficit in our history, multiplied by two. And in that situation, there are often favorite areas we start cutting. What I will promise you is that I will make decisions that you don't like. We will make decisions that we don't like. We will have to take actions that we never believed we could have taken because of the spiraling way this economy is plummeting as we speak.

But we have to understand one thing our foreparents knew, even in their own difficult budget woes: that you cannot limit the development of human beings, and that you cannot contain human misery. And if we don't find ways to continue to educate our young people, we will pay for it three, four and five-fold on the back end. [Applause]

So as we approach this issue, we can borrow from a Governor who served 70 years ago and eventually became the President of the United States. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt took office amid the Great Depression, he said, "We're going to be aggressively creative. We're going to try things, and if they don't work, we're going to try other things." And that steadfast discipline, criticism and honesty that Franklin Delano Roosevelt brought to our government is what we can bring to fighting the dropout rate. [Applause]

Lyndon Baines Johnson, President of the United States from 1963 to 1969, once remarked that we are the only society that was founded with a purpose. Therefore, we will continue purpose in our educational system. We will meet today and establish some formulas and some ideas. We will test

them around the state over the next year at regional conferences. And then we will bring them back for re-evaluation and for the replication of best practices at another conference next year. Those are our goals; those are our principles; and I pray that we will never stray from them.

I can't think you enough for participating in this endeavor, and I can't promise enough the cooperation of my Administration in this effort. [Applause]

We can solve problems not only by consulting education analyses, but we can solve problems in the most interesting ways.

I was once asked to run the Marathon in New York City. And because, at the time, it seemed gracious to say "Yes, I'll do it," it sure didn't seem like a good idea in the middle of the sun when I was trying to run—how long is a marathon?

26 miles, 385 yards? That's wrong. That assumes that you're standing in the front when they begin the race. [Laughter]

I was running for about five minutes with a guide, and I said, "Who are all those people?" And they said, "Well, they're the people at the starting line." I said, "Well, I'm already tired." [Laughter]

So the way you complete a marathon is literally one mile at a time. And the way you solve a problem is one step at a time. And the way you get well is the way you got sick: one moment at a time.

So let's get back to the digital clock. How many palindromes exist on a digital clock in a full day?

Well, first you have to know what a palindrome is. A palindrome is any set of words, letters or numbers that say the same thing backward that they say forward. The number 383, if you read it backwards, it's 383. Or if you've ever read the book "Holes," Stanley Yelnats. [Laughter]

Or, if you are an astute observer of history, after being held in St. Helena and allowed to leave the island of Elba, Napoleon once wrote, "Able was I ere I saw Elba." [Laughter]

Those are palindromes. So the question is, what numbers on the clock repeat themselves backwards and forwards? Let's start with 1:00. There's 1:01, 1:11, 1:21, 1:31, 1:41 and 1:51. So you would think that all you have to do now is multiply the 12 hours by six—because there are six palindromes in an hour—and multiply by two and you have the answer.

But it's not the answer. [Laughter] Because only nine of the hours start with one number. When you get to 10, 11 and 12:00, you now have two numbers. You realize that, once two numbers appear, the same two numbers in reverse are the only two numbers that can appear after that.

So there's only one palindrome at 10:00, 10:01. Only one at 11:00, 11:11. Only one at 12:00, 12:21. So now you multiply six times nine. Nine hours and six palindromes, you get 54. You add the other three, you get 57. You multiply by two, because there are 24 hours in a day—and there are 114 palindromes in a digital clock. [Applause] And my son's junior high school teacher was very impressed. [Laughter]

But the message in all of that is that, slowly but surely, we can provide young people who are leaving our educational system with the minimum skills and training they need to go out and be productive workers in the workforce. Why should the cure for cancer be stuck in the brain of a little Hispanic girl in the South Bronx, when she could get that training and go out and save the world?

Thank you very much. [Applause]

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