

Advice for ailing schools given

By Sharon Dargay
staff writer

State government must assume more responsibility in financing public education.

Local school districts must attract better teachers through bigger paychecks and more recognition.

Parents must strive to achieve more than minimal class requirements.

That's Terrell Bell's prescription for an ailing American educational system.

The former Secretary of Education and father of the "A Nation at Risk" report on education offered those and other suggestions during a symposium on Excellence in Education in Troy.

The event, the first of several symposiums planned by the district, was designed to spur public discussion of trends in education, giving parents, teachers, students and administrators an opportunity to grill panelists about the state of American education.

Bell, who assumed the cabinet post in 1981, gave the keynote address and participated in the question-and-answer session with panelists Douglas Fraser, former UAW president and currently a Wayne State University professor, Robert Stevenson, vice president of government and relations for the president of Cranbrook Academy of Art.

"We need to rejuvenate and renew American education and strengthen

and renew our commitment to universities," Bell told an audience of 400 residents and educators.

"We need more lighthouse school systems. We need the exemplary programs you're providing. You should be grateful for the fine educational system you have. In a community like this where you're so blessed with fine schools, you still need to be concerned about our nation and what will happen to us."

BELL BLAMED education's shortcomings on low teaching salaries, an inadequate and inequitable funding system, lowered graduation standards and poorly skilled student teachers.

He pointed out that school districts are "dredging the bottom of the academic barrel" for the prospective teachers, many of whom score within the bottom 25 percent of college entrance exams.

Meanwhile, 28 percent of ninth graders nationwide are likely to drop out of school. And at the time the "A Nation at Risk" report was released two years ago, 23 million American adults were termed "functionally illiterate."

Although students in 1984 were the first in 19 years to improve their college entrance test scores, Bell noted "we still have a long way to go."

He ranked American universities above institutions of higher education in Europe and the Far East, but cited deficiencies in elementary and secondary schools.

He also rated the United States high

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— Terrell Bell,
former U.S. Secretary
of Education

on its ability to meet the needs of all students.

"You can be a late bloomer and goof-off in school... and still make it in America," he said, citing adult education programs and community college opportunities.

Bell favors a "career ladder" for teachers in public schools, enabling exemplary educators to attain "master teacher" status through a peer review system. The process would be similar to a promotion review board on the university level.

NOTING THAT tuition tax credits have been soundly defeated in Congress, he also suggested that the federal government become "more flexible" in its financial commitment to private schools. He pointed out that private college students are eligible for federal student aid.

Volunteer awards set

President Reagan has announced the fifth annual President's Volunteer Action Awards to honor outstanding volunteer achievement by individual citizens and organizations.

The awards are co-sponsored for the fifth year in a cooperative effort between the private sector and government by ACTION, the national volunteer agency and by VOLUNTEER - The National Center, a private, nonprofit volunteer support organization.

The president will present the awards at a White House ceremony in April. Award nomination forms are available at all ACTION state and regional offices.

Funding for the awards program is provided by corporations and foundations.

Nomination forms are available from ACTION, Office of Public Affairs, Washington D.C. 20525. Deadline for submitting nominations for 1986 awards is Jan. 25, 1986.

"If you're a wealthy person in this country and are unhappy with the public schools, you can take your money and buy your services," he said. "If you're low income all you have to do is be unhappy."

"If I don't see the neighborhood grocery store, I can go across the street with my business. I think school systems could provide more choice among public schools. I know it's difficult because of busing schedules, but I believe school districts have been too rigid in the past."

Bell emphasized that state government must take more responsibility for funding education, allowing local districts to set the lion's share of educational standards.

"I'm convinced that education is to state government what national defense is to federal government. I'd like to see governors fight as hard for state education budgets as Ronald Reagan does for the defense budget."

"The state needs to provide a tax base for education. We're relying too much on property taxes."

In terms of curriculum improvements, Yares said public education must resurrect humanities programs and encourage students to study the arts, languages and humanities.

Fraser agreed. "There's too much emphasis on career avenues and how they can earn the most money. It's too materialistic," Fraser said, suggesting that students spend more time learning how to serve the community.

Tale of Michigan's war told

Did you know that time proved Michigan a winner in a war that was never fought, in which Michigan was declared a loser?

It was the infamous Toledo War with Ohio that took place in 1835 when Michigan, still a territory, sent troops to prevent the governor of Ohio from holding court and establishing jurisdiction over the "Toledo Strip," claimed by Michigan.

Spilling for a fight, Michigan volunteers stormed into the Toledo area of Ohio only to find local militia had fled. Local residents told the

Michigan troops they could occupy the city as long as there was no "disturbance."

After four days occupation, Michigan troops were ordered back by Michigan's boy governor, Stevens Mason, who had been removed from office by the president of the United States, Andrew Jackson, four days after he ordered the volunteers to Ohio. Mason continued

to lead Michigan in the absence of an appointed successor.

Michigan was declared the loser because Ohio got the Port of Toledo and the war delayed Michigan's entrance into the Union until 1837. The story of the Toledo war is recounted in the September/October issue of Michigan History, the state's official publication.

Published by the Bureau of History of the Department of State, Michigan History is available in single copies for \$2 each or subscriptions for \$9.95 a year and is available on newsstands.

Checks should be made payable to the State of Michigan and mailed to the Bureau of History, Michigan Department of State, 208 North Capitol, Lansing 48918.

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