

EDITORIAL

America's unparalleled social experiment in providing education for all is in danger of failing. It is in danger because it is losing that which every institution must have in a democratic society—the confidence of the people.

It is frustrating and ironic that education should be subjected to ridicule and scorn, even as the record clearly shows that our schools are doing the best job in history. U.S. adults are the most highly educated in the world. A higher per-

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centage of students are attending school regularly than ever before. More U.S. students finish secondary school than in any other country.

But despite this record, only 28.4 percent of the public express "a great deal of confidence" in the people running education according to the latest figures from the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. This is hard to understand, but we can do something about it!

The "secret" to building public confidence in education is *fulfilling public expectations*. Clearly, education's performance and/or public perception of that performance is out of adjustment with public expectations.

• *We must:* Determine what the public now expects of its schools, community by community. Determine how public expectations and those of

educational leaders differ. Exercise leadership to develop appropriate, realistic public expectations.

• *We must:* Exercise educational leadership individually and collectively to improve educational performance. Schools earn confidence by their actions, not by their words. We have the best educational system in the world, *but we know it is still not good enough*. We could do better in virtually every area, and we had better work at it. Hard.

• *We must:* Provide the public with adequate information about its schools. A well organized, competently managed public information program is a basic obligation for every educational institution no matter how large or small. The public will no longer tolerate *even any hints* that public officials are hiding behind one excuse or another (including lack of money) in order to avoid providing them with reasonable information about their schools.

• *We must:* Recognize the active role that every school employee, professional or support staff, plays in providing attitude-forming information to the community. And we must provide some training for this responsibility.

There is no mystery about building public confidence. And there is plenty *each one of us* can do about it. Right now!



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