PHIL C. ROBINSON

Reason To Be Proud

Last March 13, the day I took office as President of ASCD, I asked the Executive Council to declare 1985 "The Year of the Teacher." I felt—and other Council members enthusiastically agreed—that it was time for Americans to publicly recognize the value of teachers.

During the late 1960s and early '70s, the notion that schools made little difference somehow gained widespread acceptance. This pessimistic view contributed to teachers' beginning to think of themselves as unworthy. They were being given the message that their efforts had little positive impact on students and on society as a whole.

Those of us who spend our days in schools know what teaching is like. I don't have to tell ASCD members of the overwhelming demands and frustrating expectations that teachers face. And we know from personal experience that most teachers respond heroically to the challenge, despite their paltry salaries and the condescension shown them by some with prestigious and lucrative occupations.

None of this is new. Educators have always been the 'poor relations' of our society, but somehow we have gotten along. What is new is that more and more teachers have decided that they've simply had enough. They know in their hearts that they've been doing vital work, and they would like to continue doing it—but not without support. As well intended and potentially beneficial as the recent national reports may have been, they have added to the feeling of many teachers that all they get is criticism—not only from the public at large, but from within the education community as well. Who wants to be identified with an image of mediocrity?

Especially disturbing is the fact that fewer of the young people who are academically high achievers are entering the teaching profession. They may like the idea of serving humanity, but even the most self-sacrificing need to hear periodically that their efforts are respected and appreciated.

Some ASCD members have asked me how The Year of the Teacher will change all this. It won't happen overnight, of course, but because I am convinced that teaching is an especially worthy profession—and that our country is truly at risk if it doesn't soon recognize that—I want ASCD to lead the way in calling for a change.

What we do at the national level may not matter as much as what individual ASCD members do in their own communities. There should be ceremonies, conferences, debates, campaigns, and other activities that focus on the positive contributions of teachers. No American should be able to ignore the significant role of teachers and schools in their own development and the general welfare of this country.

The first step is for each of us to reassert our satisfaction in belonging to a profession that has only one aim: the wholesome development of others. We are principals, professors, supervisors, superintendents—but we are teachers, too. We have reason to be proud!