

# Voices

## The Superintendent

WILLIAM J. LEARY

### The Applause Is for the Booming

As a superintendent, I'm concerned about the future of the teaching profession in the public schools. Until the flurry of national reports criticizing public education, I thought we had been doing a pretty good job.

Oh, I was familiar with many of the problems. After all, I had participated in the desegregation of a major urban school district. I had also experienced the difficulty of closing a school in an affluent suburb. Now I work with teachers and parents to recognize and act upon the student dropout prob-

lem. I am aware of the problems of social class structure and racism in our society. And I listen to evidence about lack of basic skills and declining SAT scores and to different views about bilingualism.

I believed then, and still do believe, that this profession of public education that I chose actively pursues the positive resolution of these problems. For example, collaborative efforts of educators, parents, and citizens to improve schools, such as the Boston Compact and the Broward Company in Florida, are flourishing.

Reading the national reports and keeping up with the critics who ap-

plauded them reminded me of an old story.

Backstage, at the end of the performance of a new play, an actor turned to the playwright and said, "Listen to all that booming from the audience. This play is terrible."

The optimistic playwright responded, "Oh, but I hear some applause."

"Don't fool yourself," said the actor. "That's for the booming!"

Of course, justifiable criticism must always be heard, whether of plays or of schools. But criticism of the education profession, particularly of public education, by national political and business figures, has been gratuitous and condemnatory. And this booming in

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education has reached the ears of too many young potential teachers who hear how "terrible" teaching is.

Professor Terry Deal of Vanderbilt University describes how in his journeys he meets people who work for IBM. When he asks what it would take to get them to leave IBM, they look at him in amazement. Leave IBM? No way. But try asking that question of public school teachers.

We in public education must create a more positive atmosphere in order to make the downbeat upbeat ... to restore the sublime excitement of teaching kids and improving society. ... to hear the applause rather than the booing.

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