

## **President George H.W. Bush's remarks to students**

Here is a transcript of then-President George H.W. Bush's speech to students at Alice Deal Junior High School in Washington, D.C., on October 1, 1991. In his remarks, the president refers to Cynthia Mostoller, an eight-grade humanities teacher; Rachel Rusch, a student; Arnold Schwarezenegger, who was then chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness; Reginald R. Moss, the school's principal; and George Francis, a custodian.

*Source: George Bush Presidential Library and Museum*

Thank you, Ms. Mostoller, and thanks for allowing me to visit your classroom to talk to you and all these students, and millions more in classrooms all across the country.

You know, long before I became President I was a parent. I remember the times that my kids came up with a really tough question or a difficult decision. I tried my best never to shut them down with a quick "no." I would simply say those three magic words that made that problem disappear: "Ask your Mother." [Laughter]

Let me tell you why I've made the trip up from the White House to Alice Deal Junior High. I'm not here to teach a lesson. You already have a very good teacher. I'm not here to tell you what to do or what to think. Maybe you're accustomed to adults talking about you and at you; well, today, I'm here to talk to you and challenge you. Education matters, and what you do today, and what you don't do can change your future.

Every day, we hear more bad news about our schools. Maybe you saw today's headline, I don't know if you had a chance to look at it, about the release of the new National Goals Report. Get the camera to come in and take a look at this for a moment. In math, for instance, this national report card shows that, nationwide, five of six eighth graders don't know the math they need to move up to the ninth grade.

In spite of troubling statistics like this one, I don't see this report, however, as just bad news, and I'll tell you why. This report tells us a lot about what you know and what you don't know. It gives us something to build on. It shows us our strengths and the weaknesses that we've got to correct. It sets forth a challenge to all of us: Work harder, learn more, revolutionize American education.

I know you've heard about stanines and percentiles, surveys and statistics, but here's what all that fancy talk really means: Education means the difference between a good future and a lousy one. Reports don't give us the right to make excuses. Our scores will tell us where we are and where we need to go.

I mentioned earlier the bad news we hear about schools today. But what we don't hear enough about are the success stories. You know, all over America, thousands of schools do succeed, even against tough odds, even against all odds. Kids from all over the District of Columbia petition to get into Alice Deal School here because parents know this school works. It works because of teachers like the one standing over here, Ms. Mostoller, who

decided at the age of 25 -- maybe you all know this, but a lot of people around the country don't -- she decided at the age of 25 that she wanted to teach. She was standing in a supermarket checkout line when she saw a magazine ad about college. She went back to school, worked her way through in 7 years, waiting tables to pay tuition. She made it, and so can you.

This school here works because of students like the ones with me today, students like Rachel Rusch -- where's Rachel? Right there, okay -- a member of Alice Deal's award-winning ``Math Counts" team. Rachel, you tell me if I'm wrong, but you and six other students in this class alone have taken part in the Johns Hopkins Talent Search. They took the college entrance exams on an experimental basis last year as seventh graders. Even in junior high, some of them scored well enough to get into college right now. So, let's just put it on the line. You've got the brains. Now, put them to work -- certainly, not for me, but for you.

Progress starts when we ask more of ourselves, our schools and, yes, you, our students. We made a start nationally now by setting six National Education Goals to meet the challenges of the 21st century. By the year 2000, at least 9 in every 10 students should graduate from high school. We should be first in the world in math and science. We need to regularly test student's abilities. Every American child should start school ready to learn; every American adult should be literate; and every American school should be safe and drug-free. Reaching those goals is the aim of a strategy that we call America 2000, a crusade for excellence in American education, school by school, community by community.

But what does all this mean, you might say, what is he doing, what does this all mean for the students right here in this room? Fast-forward -- 5 years from now. Unless things change, between now and 1996 as many as one in four of today's eighth graders will not graduate with their class. In some cities, the dropout rate is twice that high or higher. Imagine: Out of a total of nearly 3 million of your fellow classmates nationwide, an army of more than half a million dropouts.

I ask every student watching today: Look around you. Count four students. Start with yourself. No one dreams of becoming a dropout, but far too many do. Which one of you won't make it through school?

The fact is, every one of you can. Let's make a pact then right here. Let's work to see that 5 years from now, you and your friends will be more than sad statistics. Give yourself a decent shot at your dreams. Stay in school. Get that diploma.

Let's go back to the future. In the fall of 1996, 5 years from now, nearly half of today's eighth graders who get their diplomas will enter the working world. More than half the graduates will stay in school and become the college class of the year 2000.

The question each student watching today should ask is: Where will I be, where will I be 5 years from now? Will I be holding down a good job and maybe working toward a better

one, or will I be out of school and out of work? Will I be on a college campus, or out running the streets?

Think about that tonight when you're at a kitchen table doing some homework; while your parents are meeting your teachers like so many millions do this year at back-to-school nights all across our great country.

I'm asking you to put two and two together: Make the connection between the homework you do tonight, the test you take tomorrow, and where you'll be 5, 15, even 50 years from now. You see, the real world doesn't begin somewhere else, some time way down there in the distant future. The real world starts right here. What you do here will have consequences for your whole lives.

Let me tell you something, many of you may find very hard to believe this. You're in control. You're thinking: How can the President say that about kids like us when we don't even have our driver's license? But think about it, and you'll see what I mean.

Think about drugs. You see films. You hear police experts and tough speakers from the outside. You get stern lectures from everyone: movie stars, athletes, teachers, parents, friends. But you know and I know that all the drug prevention programs, all the pledges, all the preaching in the world won't pull you through that critical moment when someone offers drugs. At that moment, everything comes down to you. Yes or no, you've got to choose, and the answer will change your life. Your parents won't make the decision. Your teachers won't make the decision. Your friends won't make the decision. It's up to you. It takes guts to take control.

A sound body and a sound mind, they go together, as my friend, and he is a friend, Arnold Schwarzenegger says. He's crossing the Nation talking with students about the importance of fitness. And real fitness means no drugs.

Studies show a decline in drug use, and that's good, that's encouraging, I think. And every student who draws the line against drugs really deserves credit for that. But drugs and violence continue to threaten every school, every small town and suburb in America. And as students, you have a right to be physically safe at school. You should never have to worry that a quarrel in the hallway will lead to gunfire in the playground. Fear should never follow you into the classroom.

If you have to take the long way home after school so you don't cross paths with the gang hanging on the corner, if outsiders roam the halls of your school hassling kids, hassling students, you must take control. Go to your teacher, or go to your principal, or go to your parents, as difficult as it may be, go to the school board if you have to. Demand discipline. If good people chicken out, bad people take control. Together, we can -- I really believe this -- we can drive the drugs and guns and senseless violence out of our schools.

When it comes to your own education, what I'm saying is take control. Don't say school is boring and blame it on your teachers. Make your teachers work hard. Tell them you want a first-class education. Tell them that you're here to learn.

Block out the kids who think it's not cool to be smart. I can't understand for the life of me what's so great about being stupid. If someone goofs off today, are they cool? Are they still cool years from now when they're stuck in a dead-end job? Don't let peer pressure stand between you and your dreams.

Take control -- challenge yourself. Only you know how hard you work. Maybe you can fake, maybe, just maybe you can fake your way into a job, but you won't keep it for long if you don't have the know-how to get the job done. Maybe you can cram the week before that marking period ends, and turn that C into a B. But you can't con your way past the SAT and into college. If you don't work hard, who gets hurt? If you cheat, who pays the price? If you cut corners, if you hunt for the easy A, who comes up short? Easy answer to that one: You do.

You're in control, but you are not alone. People want you to succeed. They want to help you succeed. Here at Deal, teachers like your outstanding teacher standing here with us today, Ms. Mostoller, from your principal, Mr. Moss, to your custodian, Mr. Francis. Right now in classrooms across this country, in the communities you call home, when things get tough, when answers are hard to come by, there's a teacher, a parent, a friend or family member ready to help you. They want to see you make it.

If you take school seriously, you won't have to settle for a job, just any job. You'll have a career. If you make it your business to learn, one day you'll be a better parent. You may not think about it now, but one day your children will want to look up at you and say, "I've got the smartest Mom and Dad in the world." Don't disappoint them.

Let me leave you with a simple message: Every time you walk through that classroom door, make it your mission to get a good education. Don't do it just because your parents, or even the President, tells you. Do it for yourselves. Do it for your future. And while you're at it, help a little brother or sister to learn, or maybe even Mom or Dad. Let me know how you're doing. Write me a letter -- and I'm serious about this one -- write me a letter about ways you can help us achieve our goals. I think you know the address.

Now we're going to walk over to the school auditorium to say hello to the rest of the student body. To all the students across the country who watched us here in this great classroom today, may I simply say thank you and good luck to you this school year.

And now, Ms. Mostoller, if you'll kindly lead the way. Thank you all very much. Nice to be with you.