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CAMBRIDGE, MASS.
March 1984

Dear Friend:

Last year you received my special newsletter on education. It included a questionnaire that some 47,000 Massachusetts residents filled out and mailed back to my Senate office. I was very gratified by the response and wanted to share the principal results of the survey with all of you.

Among the highlights:

- A overwhelming 93.1 percent agree that the quality of American education is on the decline, but 98.3 percent are convinced that it can be improved.
- 92.9 percent believe they have a personal stake in the quality of education.
- 66.1 percent think that teachers' pay is not commensurate with professional experience and responsibility.
- 80 percent suggested that business should play a role in improving the local schools.
- 54.2 percent are opposed to tuition tax credits for those who send their children to private school.
- 96 percent favor competency examinations for students, and 84.8 percent support periodic examinations for teachers in their area of expertise.

Through this survey, I have gained a better understanding of the views of Massachusetts residents regarding education issues. In addition, I have been holding meetings with school administrators, teachers, parents, and other citizens and soliciting their ideas for educational reform.

These efforts are part of a top-priority initiative I have undertaken to help promote educational excellence in Massachusetts schools. I believe that education must be the engine for economic growth in our state. We already have impressive educational resources. Used wisely, they can be the key to our future well-being.

Of course, the goal of educational excellence is more easily stated than achieved. In the flurry of recent reports by varying groups on American education, remedies differ -- and blame is sometimes loosely consigned. How accountable are teachers, for example, if parents and students opt for a general-course curriculum that does not challenge or fully educate? And who is at fault if lax requirements permit students to graduate even though they lack adequate preparation for work or college?

All too often the teaching profession has been denigrated, and bright and talented students have been discouraged from pursuing a career in education. Some of the most gifted and dedicated educators have been forced to change careers for a variety of reasons: layoffs resulting from educational cutbacks; lack of opportunity for professional advancement; limited salary potential; and the absence in some systems of exciting educational innovations, and the intellectually stimulating atmosphere that such new ideas might foster. Yet in an age of economic competitiveness when we must strengthen the programs that will make America the leader of new technologies, I can think of no group of professionals on which we have a greater reliance than our teachers.

The push for better schools is a cooperative effort in which we must all have a part. My own involvement has focused on testing of some innovative programs in Massachusetts communities. In Cambridge, for example, I helped initiate a pilot project that may serve as model for the future use of computers in our schools. There the local Chamber of Commerce, state and city officials, universities, teachers and parents have all participated in establishing a magnet school that offers students in kindergarten through fourth grade a

curriculum that combines imaginative computer instruction with the teaching of basic skills.

In my hometown of Lowell, parents, teachers and administrators have joined with me in launching a far-reaching view of the city's school system. We hope that when the Lowell study is completed, it will have an impact far beyond the city's borders.

Last November I convened a statewide conference, sponsored by the Massachusetts Business Roundtable and the New England Council, to encourage partnerships between businesses and schools throughout the Commonwealth for improving local education. One of the areas that we addressed is a strategy to overcome the economic disparity that places some of our school districts at a disadvantage in attracting business support.

Since the days of Horace Mann, Massachusetts has been a pioneer in education. This is a tradition that we dare not allow to lapse. Maintaining it will require our diligence no less than our imagination.

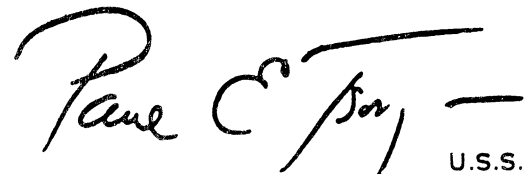
Your participation in this effort is important. I hope you will work with me to achieve excellence in our schools. Nothing less than our future is at stake.

Sincerely,



Paul E. Tsongas
United States Senate

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Comm. from Sen. Paul E. Tsongas Re: responses
to his special newsletter on education in
America sent to Mass. residents last year.

In City Council,

March 19, 1984

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