

Educators Open Hearts and Minds

Transcript of April 1, 2006 Address to AAUW NC
THANK YOU. I am pleased to be with you in New Bern. If I didn't know better, I would think this conference is also an Atkinson reunion – Judy Atkinson, program vice president; Karla Atkinson,



secretary; and then here I am – June Atkinson!

How many of you remember "What's My Line?" It was a program where celebrities had to guess what was unusual about a person. If that program were playing, I think I could stump the panelists.

My maiden name is St. Clair.

My mother's father was named John St. Clair. My daddy's father was named John St. Clair.

They both had the same address – Route #1, Blue Ridge, Virginia, but they didn't live in the same house. Can you imagine the confusion my mother had when she put the announcement of their wedding in the newspaper?

I grew up in rural Virginia, a place where we all knew each other, a place where all of my teachers, until the fourth grade, came from the same place or an adjoining community.

My fourth grade teacher was from a foreign country – Michigan. Mrs. Maria Anderson opened my eyes to a larger world. She opened my mind to learning. She opened my emotions to dream of what I could be.

Educators across the nation have always opened the minds and hearts of young girls and women. I am grateful for the association's long tradition of promoting and supporting the education of women and girls.

I know that today is April 1, but do you know what was celebrated during the month of March? Women's History Month.

Did you know that our current Secretary of State, Elaine Marshall, was the first woman to be elected to that position and to serve on the Council of State?

Did you know that Beverly Perdue was the first woman elected as Lt. Governor?

Did you know that Susie Sharpe was the first woman to serve on the NC State Supreme Court?

Did you know that Senator Elizabeth Dole was the first woman to be elected as a US Senator from North Carolina?

Outside my office is a picture of all elected NC State Superintendents [of Schools] – except for a few, they all have beards and all of them are men – I am pleased to have been elected the first woman to serve as State Superintendent – Isn't that ironic when you consider that 81 percent of public school teachers are women?

There are millions of females who can take leadership positions in government, education, and business – Education is the key!

Many of your young girls and women live in poverty – poverty that will stifle their opportunities unless they have quality education. As a Mississippi governor once said, "The road out of poverty runs by the school house door." The road to international competitiveness runs by the school house door and the road to success of our community colleges and universities runs by the school house door.

If all single mothers who are high school dropouts earned high school degrees, 125,000

to 292,000 fewer women would be on the welfare rolls, saving between \$1.5 billion and \$5 billion annually.

Health-related losses for dropouts in 2005 came to nearly \$100,000 per student. Their health, at age 18, is similar to a more educated person 20 years older.

These issues drive my work.

I am heartened by the strong academic performance of women. For at least 30 years, girls have led the way in performance on the National Assessment of Education Progress. In reading, girls have scored better than boys at every age tests – 9, 13, and 17. In mathematics, boys hold only a very slim advantage over girls' performance.

You are more familiar than I am with the current college experience for young women, where women are now the majority of the nation's undergraduates. As of 2001, women earned 60 percent of all associate's degrees and 57 percent of all bachelor's degrees.

Clearly, girls and young women have gotten the message that education is a gateway. And, they are lining up to walk through that gateway.

In North Carolina, approximately one-fourth of our population holds at least a bachelor's degree. In public schools, we have made tremendous gains. We have made significant gains over the past decade, particularly.

Our fourth and eighth grade students are at the national average or better on the latest NAEP results.

Our 2005 SAT results reached an all-time high.

Almost 81 percent of students in grades 3-8 were considered proficient in reading and mathematics. North Carolina is among five states with the greatest improvements in AP course participation and in AP scores. This improvement is especially demonstrated with low income students, African-American students, and Hispanic students. At the same time, we know we lose as many as 40 percent of high school students before graduation.

We know that many students and families have not gotten the message that education should be their top priority so that their young people can be successful.

The losses of dropping out of school or of low educational attainment weigh the heaviest on those who actually leave school... they weigh to some degree or other on all of us. American loses 1.6 percent of Gross Domestic Product in combined income and tax revenue losses with each cohort of 18 year olds who never complete high school.

Our schools must educate all children to work and live in a global economy. They must be problem solvers, good decision makers and creative thinkers. They must be lifelong learners.

To this end, I have a few imperatives for our state.

We are losing about 12 percent of our teachers each year. Why? Retirements, better working conditions and greater opportunities. Fifty-two percent of our principals could leave the building today and retire.

We need to make teaching more attractive and more professional. We need to bring in more strong administrators.

Technology provides great opportunities for teaching and learning, but only if it is available.

Schools need technology infrastructure to make transitions to 21st century schools.

We must raise high school graduation rates to at least 85 percent over the next three years. Efforts underway include the New Schools Project, 21st Century Skills, and SREB High Schools That Work.

Professional development is a key to improving schools. States that are making leaps in student achievement have a delivery system for professional development that is aligned to student achievement goals. Our state does not, but I am working on that.

As State Superintendent, my task is to advocate and enable a strong education foundation for all children and young adults in our state. As women

who have benefited from education and all the opportunities it offers, I believe it is our duty and responsibility to use our knowledge and positions to help offer better opportunities to all.

I hope that as educated women, as women who have walked through the gateway of education and found success, that you will join me in supporting efforts to boost North Carolina's public schools.

Thanks to the Twin Rivers and Jacksonville Branches and the program committee for a fantastic convention! The speakers, workshops and networking opportunities were excellent! Check www.aauwnc.org for links to the highlights. All are welcome to register at <http://news.aauwnc.org> (our blog) and post their impressions for the benefit of all the members who couldn't make it to New Bern. –Nancy Shoemaker

Community Colleges: An "Open Door"

Kathleen Mitchell, Jacksonville Regional Branch

Did you know the NC Community College System is the third largest in the nation, only outsized by California and Texas? Dr. Delores Parker, keynote speaker for the banquet, shared the progress and growth achieved since its establishment in 1963.

The founding "vision" pictured institutions with an "open door" policy, where all students could progress academically, in some cases a "second chance." Their purpose was to provide education for the workforce, in support of local economic development, as well as to prepare individuals to transfer to four-year institutions.

This goal has been realized as everyone from firemen to hygienists, cosmetologists to truck drivers, those in law enforcement as well as those licensed to care for our children, have found educational opportunities to prepare them for their futures. Fully two-thirds of community college-prepared students go directly into the work force, with one-third going on to higher institutions. With 58 community colleges from which to select, over 800,000 learners annually find a wide array of choices. Programs are even available to those who are incarcerated, as well as special opportunities for those 65 and older who want to attend college.

The progressive mindset is evident. Ten of our 58 community colleges are headed by female presidents. Partnerships, such as with the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation, bring millions of dollars to bankroll new educational possibilities, such as early college high school, where focused ninth graders attend seamlessly for five years, to graduate with both a high school diploma and community college degree. Huskins classes serve high schoolers in programs (such as medical or automotive technology) that may be too costly for an individual high school to support. Also, the "dual enrolled" student may earn college credit as well credits for their high school diploma. Students who dropped out from high school can return, for an opportunity to attain their high school diplomas in more adult, and sometimes, more supportive settings.

Obviously, growth and innovation has its costs. We need to become advocates for this vital system, encouraging legislators to provide needed funding, particularly in areas with economic devastation such as furniture and textile manufacturing closures. Also, one-eighth of North Carolina community college students depend upon Pell grants to fund their education. Support bond campaigns for campus growth. Individual AAUW branches are helpful in providing support in the form of scholarships to students.

Most of all, we need to convey the message when people suffer "broken dreams," their local community colleges are there for them, to help seek out other opportunities.



Dr. Delores Parker with Mary Peterson, AAUW NC 2006 convention co-chair.

Show Me the Money

Queen Thompson, AAUW NC Diversity Chair

As of May 3, 2006, AAUW convention attendees have claimed \$29,110.77 in unclaimed cash from the NC Office of State Treasurer's Office. The amount could grow in higher. Not did attendees find undue cash for themselves, they found cash for family members and friends as well. Below, Karen Thomas and Donnie Tim gave on-the-spot confirmation for those who made inquiries.



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