

Lieutenant Governor Swift

AICUM Service Conference

Tuesday, November 21, 2000

Thank you and good morning.

I'm pleased to be here today to talk about community service and the wonderful things schools, community groups, businesses and other organizations are doing to help improve public education in this state.

Much of my focus in recent months has been on education reform and the effort to help students improve their scores on the MCAS tests. The latest MCAS results released last week show significant progress, but clearly we have a lot of work to do to achieve the high standards we have set for our students and schools.

Many terrific programs have already been established around the state to help improve student performance on the MCAS tests. A lot of the programs have been funded by the state, but a growing number have been developed by volunteers in the community and at colleges and universities.

For example, faculty members at the Francis College of Engineering at UMass-Lowell have been working with local schools and businesses to develop a number of programs designed to enhance math and science teaching and stimulate student interest in these subjects. The partnership, known as the Engineering in Mass Collaborative, is striving to "plant" the seeds for a future high-tech workforce.

Boston Partners in Education, which has more than 22-hundred volunteers working in Boston public schools, has implemented several successful programs. One of these is Power Lunch, which brings business professionals into schools during lunch hours to serve as mentors and tutors.

These are exciting examples of how community service and volunteerism can play an important role in education reform.

The Governor and I have put a high premium on community participation in this reform effort. We have set a goal of finding volunteer tutors for every 10th grade student who doesn't pass the MCAS test this spring. The state is doing its part by pumping billions of additional dollars into public schools, but we need community support if we hope to succeed.

To help generate this support, the Department of Education has convened a Tutor Task Force to identify existing volunteer programs and develop similar programs in school districts around the state. The initial goal is to establish 10 pilot projects by this spring. About 20 school districts have already expressed an interest, including Boston, Cambridge, Springfield, and Nashoba Valley Regional.

A lot has been written about this tutoring initiative. Let me make the goals of this initiative very clear. First, it is not designed or intended to take the place of teachers in the classroom. Most students who fall into the Level 1 category on the MCAS will need special intensive remediation to improve their skills. This remediation will in most cases need to be provided by teachers or other highly trained individuals during the school day or in after-school and summer-school programs. The \$40 million in MCAS remediation money we included in the budget this year will help to fund many of these programs.

For other students, however, the assistance of a caring individual may be the only thing they need. When I visited Putnam Vocational School in Springfield recently a student there said something that has stuck with me. Ann Southworth, the principal at Putnam Vocational, has

instituted a "prep school" program, which provides intensive remediation for new students who are not at the 7th grade level. I asked one student, who had been in the prep school and who was about to graduate, what helped her the most. She said a mentor, which the school had found for her, made the greatest difference by telling her that she had to be at school everyday, on time to succeed. Surely, the student's teachers and probably even her parents had told her the same thing. But the mentor, a person she respected and whose job she admired, carried the necessary influence to encourage her to get to school and to succeed.

This is the kind of difference that volunteers in schools can make.

Over the past several months I have been introduced to programs all over the state that are using volunteers. There are many ways that volunteers can be helpful to students. As mentioned above, they can be tutors or mentors, or they can do other important tasks, such as lunch duty or recess so that teachers can spend more time with students and prepare for class.

Our goal is not to recreate the wheel. We don't want to eliminate or replace programs. We want to add to what we already have, and we're looking to colleges and universities to help us in this endeavor.

Institutions of higher learner have become increasingly involved with community service in recent years. Clark University in Worcester and Trinity College in Hartford, for example, have played significant roles in redevelopment efforts in their host communities. Northeastern University has teamed up with state agencies, the city of Boston, and private investors to develop new housing in Boston. And Bay State College has volunteered faculty time to help with our tutoring initiative.

This type of involvement by colleges and universities should be commended. It is part of a growing national trend, which, hopefully, will continue and increase. By encouraging college students and faculty members to participate in volunteer activities, I believe we are setting a tone and a standard for good citizenship that will have benefits for years to come.

Thank you.