

MEMORANDUM FOR MRS. CLINTON

FROM: Shirley Sagawa
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RE: White House Conference on Teenagers

DATE: March 30, 2000

We wanted to bring you up to date on the planning for our conference, now scheduled for May 2. We have tentatively entitled the event "The White House Conference on Teenagers: Raising Responsible and Resourceful Youth." In addition to the group on this memo, Sonia Chessen, director of the White House Council on Youth Violence, has been working hard on the conference. Sonia is on detail from HHS where she was a senior advisor to Peggy Hamburg responsible for the youth development portfolio.

We have held focus groups with researchers, youth-serving organizations, experts on youth development, education organizations, foundations, work and family experts, and youth. In addition, we have asked youth-serving organizations to hold their own focus groups with youth and to report back their ideas. We are finding strong support for the following messages:

- The early teen years are as important as the zero to three years in terms of healthy and meaningful development (there is even preliminary research that suggests the brain goes through an important "pruning and weeding" phase around puberty, raising the stakes for these years).
- Contrary to their own perceptions, parents do play an important role in the development of their teenage children; research and reports from teenagers themselves confirm that youth look to their parents for guidance and want more interaction with them.
- Parent and teen fears about violence and other dangers are disproportionate to actual risks; we must shatter the stereotypes people hold in regard to youth and at the same time explore why some risks/negative behaviors perpetuate, we need to acknowledge that there is a crisis of community and values in our society that must be addressed in order to be restored.
- While there is significant consensus regarding what young people need, and about what parents, adults in the community, and youth themselves can do to meet these needs, this information is not well known.

The opening session will be held in the East Room in the morning, to be followed by a lunch,

breakout sessions, and possibly a closing off-site. We expect to invite about 150 people including youth experts, foundations, corporations, federal, state and local policymakers, educators, and pairs of youth and parents. Please let us know if there is anyone in particular you want to invite. We will have a draft invitation list for you to look at next week.

We are working on several possible deliverables. They include:

- **Portrait of American Teenagers:** A "snapshot" report on teenagers and the American Family, to be prepared by the Council of Economic Advisors, will be used as a base for the conference and will provide the public with an accurate image of teens, their families, positive and negative behavior trends of young people, and why parents matter in the lives of teens. This report will include information on the diversity of teens (race, ethnicity, immigrant status), health status, life expectancy, education and will put this information in an historical perspective -- looking at teens over the past one hundred years.
- **Tools for teenagers:** A one-stop center for information pertaining to teens will be rolled out in a new www.teenagers.gov site that will link together government websites with information on everything from health care to education to programs and opportunities for teenagers. In addition, we would like to be able to announce possible plans to develop a national youth hotline like the UK's "Childline" so that America's youth could have one hotline to call that would link them to local service providers for help in crisis or times of trouble.
- **Tools for parents:** We would like to provide a number of tools for parents: (1) a joint statement/pamphlet by the Campaign for the Prevention of Teen Pregnancy, ONDCP, Tobacco Free Kids, and Youth Violence campaign on what parents can do to help their children avoid risky behavior; (2) a new parenting website being developed by OJJDP that would have information specifically for parents of teenagers (most parenting websites provide little or no information to parents of teenagers) ; and (3) steps to move forward on developing a uniformed rating system that would be easy for parents to use.
- **Challenges to the community:** to employers to make it easier for parents of teenagers to spend time with them; to youth organizations to involve parents in their programs, not just youth; to schools to involve not just elementary school parents, but middle school and high school parents as well; to the media to take responsibility in how they portray young people, how they market to young people, and what messages they send to young people, etc.
- **Challenges to youth themselves to take responsibility for their futures.** We are also considering initiating a national challenge to "make family meal time a priority" as a proxy for the overall important message of parents and teenagers spending time together. Research suggests the importance of this simple step,

but in a practical sense, it is not easy to achieve even by the best parents. In order to acknowledge how hard it is for many families to come together for meals, and to make the challenge credible, we would seek a few lead commitments by employers and others (7-11s, cereal companies, etc.) both to spread the word and take steps to help their own employees participate in family meals. Do you think this is a good idea?

To increase media attention we are looking to include a celebrity into the speaking program. So far we are considering Denzel Washington, Susan Sarandon, Sela Ward, Cal Ripkin, or Bill Cosby to take part as both child advocates and parents. As youth-oriented role models we are considering Will Smith and Grant Hill, a basketball player from the Detroit Pistons who has done PSAs for AmeriCorps, the Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, and ONDCP. Do you have any preferences or further ideas on which celebrities to invite?

Finally, we are pleased that the Annie Casey Foundation has agreed to provide funding in support of the conference; the Department of Education has agreed to organize the satellite uplink; GSA has agreed to manage the satellite uplink and downlinks; and the YMCA of the USA has agreed to do a poll and video for us, and to be our key private sector partner. The video will feature a diverse group of young people and parents talking about the issues they face. It is being produced by Sunburst (the firm that did the Philanthropy Conference video and Millennium Evening videos).

Next week, we will provide you with a draft of the agenda including proposed speakers, researchers, and model programs we hope to highlight. Over the next few days, we will be vetting ideas internally and will be brainstorming further with David Hamburg in order to further revise and hone the message. We will keep you posted as we move forward. Don't hesitate to call with any questions.

White House Conference on Teenagers: Raising Responsible & Resourceful Youth

Despite many positive developments in the last seven years – including declining rates of teen pregnancy, decreases in crimes against youth, and increases in student achievement and college access – parents of today's adolescents express significant anxiety about the well-being of their children. In many cases, teenagers themselves feel alienated from their communities and insecure about the future. And recent tragedies have made parents and teens of all backgrounds feel helpless in the face of school violence.

The White House Conference on Raising Teenagers in the 21st Century will respond to these concerns by focusing attention on ways that families and communities can teach good values, promote healthy behavior, and support positive youth development. Break through brain research suggests that the adolescent years are far more important than we had previously understood. With this in mind, and against a backdrop of broader societal changes (new technology, an increasingly diverse population, and a significant “opportunity gap” for low-income and minority youth), the Conference will bring to light research on positive youth development, stress the importance of investing in youth, and provide tools for parents and other adults – and youth themselves – to ensure that the teen years are healthy and productive ones.

What issues will be addressed through the Conference?

- Parents feel disconnected from their teenage children, lack information to respond to the challenges they and their teens face, and may not believe they have an important role to play in their own children's lives.
- Teenagers feel alienated from their families and communities, are victims of negative stereotypes, and may be overly influenced by negative role models.
- Low-income and minority teenagers face an “opportunity gap” in many areas.
- Problems of youth require comprehensive and integrated solutions, but often are addressed through programs focused on a single issue.
- There is only limited research on “what works” for adolescents, and that research is not well known.

What do we hope to accomplish?

- To engage parents and communities in a conversation about how we can do a better job working together to raise our teenagers.
- To make the case for new resources to support positive youth development.

- To challenge inaccurate views and stereotypes about teenagers, their role in the community, and the importance of parents in their lives.
- To encourage more effective, integrated services for and by youth at all levels of government and in the private sector.
- To provide parents and communities with tools and information they can use to address the needs of adolescents.
- To enable teenagers to speak out about the challenges they face and their role in addressing these problems.
- To issue a call to action to the private sector, media, etc. to take responsibility for their effect on youth, and use their resources to promote healthy development.

When will the conference occur?

Tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, May 2, from approximately 9:30 am to 4:30 pm. We anticipate that the opening session, to take place from approximately 9:30 to 11:30 am, will be available via satellite. This session may be followed by lunch, four to six different breakout sessions, and a closing event or reception.

Who will attend the conference?

Approximately 180 individuals will attend the conference. (The size is limited by the available space at the White House.) The on-site audience will include a diverse group of parents, teenagers, policymakers, youth workers, educators, faith-based organizations, media, business, and foundations. Additional individuals may participate via satellite at locations around the country.

What will be addressed in the conference program?

- Both youth and parents will be significant voices in the program
- The program may be organized thematically around “community, opportunity, and responsibility.”
- Within this framework, the following issues may be addressed during breakout sessions:

Health – exercise, nutrition, teen pregnancy, HIV, smoking, drugs and alcohol, and research on obesity, sleep, etc.

Education – afterschool programs, smaller high schools, impact of work on education, college preparation and access

Work – family friendly workplaces, youth employment, entrepreneurship programs, school-to-work

Safety – violence by youth, youth as victims of violence, gangs, sexual harassment, peer pressure, risky behaviors

Values – citizenship, service, philanthropy, character education, community strengthening, “One America”