

## Gergen: Teachers doing 'Lord's work'

By Mike Bush / Journal Staff Writer

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David Gergen, an aide to five presidents, Harvard professor and political analyst, got off to a good start with the 1,000 educators at a lunchtime gathering in Albuquerque on Friday when he told them, "You're doing the Lord's work."



Gergen was the keynote speaker at the Council of the Great City Schools' 57th annual conference. He noted that during the 20th century, the education uniqueness that made America great began to wane and other nations began overtaking the United States.

"Other nations learned from us the secret of success," he said, and the United States was slow to respond. Hence, today, the country ranks comparatively low on the educational roster. Moreover, the problems facing educators are manifold: political, social, economic.

"We've got to change," Gergen said. "It's not fair to our kids to be complacent."

But there are bright lights on the horizon, he said, and he is optimistic.

One reason for hope is the adoption by nearly all states of the Common Core National Standards that focus on teaching math, science, English and technology. Calling himself an "enthusiastic supporter of the Common Core," Gergen said while it will take awhile to get proficiency levels up to where they were under old standards, the change will eventually be worth the effort.

A fixture on the Sunday morning TV shows, Gergen worked as a speechwriter for President Richard Nixon, and later counseled Presidents Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush – all Republicans – and Bill Clinton, a Democrat. Today, he is a senior political analyst for CNN.

In 2000, he published the best-seller, "Eyewitness to Power: The Essence of Leadership, Nixon to Clinton."

One problem facing the nation is the problem of the achievement gap, in which wealthier students, usually Anglo, fare far better than their black or Latino counterparts, he said. But Anglo working-class families are becoming as fractured as families of color traditionally have been, and one result is that the gap is becoming even more economic than it was.

"Some poor kids are getting better," Gergen said, "but the rich kids are getting better quicker."

Still, he said, he is encouraged by the optimism he has found in Albuquerque and in other cities around the country – except Washington, D.C., where political infighting has resulted in "a mess."

Nationally, things are looking up, he said. For one, "progress in education has come near the top of our national agenda," which has to be seen as good. Moreover, high school graduation rates are up, and with the notable exception of Detroit, cities are rebounding as dynamic centers of commerce, art and education.

"That is something fundamentally different from what we heard a couple of years ago," he said.

Today, in the 21st century, the computer age in education has arrived. Combine that with the Common Core, and "we finally have the means to be more productive in education," he said.

