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Introduction for Dr. Bemis, delivered at LV Eberhard Center on January 9, 1989

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"Public instruction should be the first objective of government." That statement was made early in the 19th century by a leader who was perceived early in his career as a liberator from tyranny and a liberator of the mind as well. His subsequent actions call his sincerity about education as a first priority into question, though his intentions toward education were always positive. The statement was made by Napoleon, and is not dissimilar to what we hear today from those entrusted with governmental leadership. Their sincerity, too, will be measured by their actions and the degree of their support.

We who are involved in the formal instruction of the nation's citizens watch expectantly for signs that the government leaders really believe what they say. The leaders and the public watch us closely too. They want us to deliver what they perceive to be their money's worth because they seriously believe, along with Diogenes, who said more than 2400 years ago, "The foundation of every state is the education of its youth." We are heartened, therefore, when the State Department of Education proposes, in their words, to Deliver the Dream as their goal for the beginning of the 21st century. We want to do what is right for our children, our adults, and our future. We want the foundation to be solid.

Our premier public educator, Horace Mann said, "Jails and prisons are the complement of schools; so many less as you have of the latter, so many more must you have of the former." Those words were uttered in an earlier and different day from our own, but they carry a certain poignancy for us. We may not need more schools, but we have the uneasy feeling that the prisons our state is building would be unnecessary if the minds and spirits of more of our young citizens could be enveloped and driven by the knowledge and understanding that we in our profession are dedicated to provide. We are not hiding from the fact that we must do
better. If doing better requires compromise, let's compromise; if it demands confrontation and change, let's confront and make changes; if it cries for cooperation, let's cooperate; and if it takes even more resources, let's make our case and persuade.

Our State Superintendent has recently come to his new task. With vigor he has attacked the problems of the day and with determination he has set out to solve them. We applaud his efforts to reach out to all of us interested in education, and we appreciate being included in the Board of Education's planning for the 21st century. In our area we have a veteran member of the Board. She is known to us for her knowledge of the field and for her graciousness. From PTA President to School Board member, to State Department, she has moved, gaining experience and using experience gained in the last position to enhance the next.

I am pleased to welcome Mrs. Sheri Jacobus, member of the State Board, Superintendent Bemis, and all of you to the L.V. Eberhard Center of Grand Valley State University, a very intelligent building that tends to outsmart us occasionally. Mrs. Jacobus will comment on Goals 2000: Deliver the Dream, and tell you more about Superintendent Bemis who is on his first official visit to West Michigan.