

Evaluating New York's Salary Law for Teachers

EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 1947, New York established new minimum state salary schedules for teachers. This law contains several features that were new to state-wide minimum salary schedules.

In April, 1948, the Commissioner of Education directed his research staff to study the operation of the law and its effect on the schools. A preliminary report entitled "The First Year of Operation," was presented to the Regents in December, 1948. On the basis of this preliminary report the Regents directed the Commissioner to "conduct a continuing review of the operation of the minimum salary law and to recommend to the legislature at such times as may be appropriate and in any case at the legislative session of 1954, such amendments to the law as may be required to achieve proper balance between the supply of teachers and the needs of the schools."

The Regents' directive defines the problem precisely—what changes, if any, are needed in the salary law of 1947 to achieve a proper balance between the needs of the schools and an adequate supply of competent teachers. The answer to this must be not in terms of a year but in terms of a generation, a cycle of fifty years perhaps. The research must consider the ebb and flow of the economic tide, the aftermath of the ever-changing birthrate.

If we can obtain understanding of the elements of salary legislation that produce a reasonable balance between the needs of the schools and an adequate supply of increasingly competent teachers, we shall have answered most of the questions involved in making teachers' salary schedules, whether state or local.

Happily, the New York State Teachers' Salary Law establishes minimum schedules. The more than 800 local boards of education affected are privileged to revise the state minimum schedules upward. They may do this by providing "higher minimum salaries, more frequent increments, larger increments, additional automatic increments, or promotional increments based on standards which will lead to the promotion of larger proportions of the teachers eligible for such promotion through length of service."

As of July 1, 1949, each of the foregoing provisions for upward revision of the state minimum schedules had been adopted by some boards of education.

The merit or promotional increment provision of the law has been the chief target of criticism. But the law mandates that each board of education shall provide for the participation of teachers in the formulation, application, and review of standards by which their work shall be evaluated. Thus, by a state-wide mandate, teachers have obtained the legal right to achieve the democracy in school administration which they have long sought. As of September 1, 1949, 350 school districts had submitted to the Education Department the recommendations of their advisory committees on standards and procedures to be used in granting promotional increments. In the large majority of these districts the board had accepted the standards as recommended by the advisory committee and had adopted bylaws to carry the recommendations into effect. In other districts the advisory committees are still at work or the board of education has adopted a schedule providing automatic increments to or above the pro-

motional maximum of the state schedule.

In the reports of the 350 advisory committees we find an increasingly high degree of agreement as to standards of exceptional teaching service and, at the same time, a great deal of variation in the procedures for applying the standards.

The action of local boards of education in extending the provisions of the state minimum schedules upward and the originality of local advisory committees in formulating standards and procedures for applying them has resulted in a variation of practice scarcely conceived by those who drafted the law or by those who first opposed it. The result is to make New York a great laboratory for testing the effects of different factors in teachers' salary schedules.

Thus far the resources of the State Education Department's research staff have been almost completely absorbed in keeping abreast of what is happening in the schools—What salaries are being paid? To what extent and in what respect are salary schedules being revised upward? What standards are teachers recommending for evaluation work? What procedures are they recommending for applying the standards?

But the research is concerned also with evaluating the salary law. How does the beginning salary paid to teachers compare with the beginning salary paid to young people of like ability and education by industry and by the state in other professions. What percentage of young people entering the teaching profession are likely

to remain more than eight or ten years? What salaries are needed to give a professional reward to those who elect to make teaching a life career? Do the schools that make the schedule automatic throughout obtain better service than those that apply the merit provision of the law or vice versa? To what extent should granting of the promotional increment be a reward for exceptional service? What is the effect of withholding the increment?

These and many other questions confront those who would find the facts and so organize them that all can agree on those features of the law which should be retained and those which should be revised or repealed.—*J. Cayce Morrison, State Department of Education, Albany, N. Y., chairman, ASCD Research Board.*

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- For further information, see:
- New York State Education Law, Article 33B, Section 3102.
 - Handbook of Suggestions for Administering the New York State Teachers' Salary Law of 1947.
 - Salaries and Salary Schedules of Superintendents, Principals, and Other Supervisory Officials in the Public Schools of New York State, by Max Guber and Dwight E. Beecher, 1949.
 - The New York State Teachers' Salary Law of 1947—First Year of Operation, by Dwight E. Beecher, 1949.
 - Teachers' Salaries and Salary Schedules in New York State's Public Schools, 1948-49, by Wayne W. Soper. (In press)

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