

THE LISTENING POST

How to Achieve Adequate State Financial Support for Schools

THE PROBLEM of achieving a more adequate level of state support for schools is the No. 1 problem in American education. Without adequate funds it is impossible to provide educational services of acceptable quality. Everything associated with good education is directly related to the level of financial support. This includes decent salaries, welfare provisions, reasonable class size, adequate instructional supplies and equipment, and even enlightened and democratic administration. Many teachers, supervisors, and curriculum workers do not accept or fully appreciate this fact, and so continue in their vain efforts to make bricks without straw.

The principle of state responsibility for education is well established as a theory, and is embodied in the constitutions of the forty-eight states. Experience with local responsibility for financial support of schools has been disappointing, indeed. The resulting inequalities of educational opportunities, unequal tax burdens, and the general low level of education are to be observed in every state.

On the basis of obvious facts concerning the unequal distribution of taxable wealth and the numbers of children to be educated, it should be evident that even an acceptable minimum standard of education cannot be generally achieved so long as financial support depends upon local tax resources.

These conclusions have long ago become generally accepted in some states. However, in many others, only meager beginnings have been made in bringing the theory of state responsibility for education into actual practice. Variations in the amounts of state support for education range from about \$220.00 per pupil in Delaware to virtually nothing in Nebraska. The average amount of state financial support for education among the states equals thirty-five percent of the total budgets.

And so it is that millions of children are continuously robbed of their American

birthright of an equal educational opportunity. In nearly every state some school districts may be found where the tax resources, the basic factor in determining educational opportunities, are ten times as great as those in other school districts of the same state.

The ASCD Legislative Committee has become concerned with the question: "Why have some states been relatively successful in achieving more adequate state support, while others have gained so little?"

In order to determine what the formula is, if there is one, an inquiry was sent to the executive secretaries of the forty-eight state educational associations. A few pertinent points of general agreement from their responses are as follows:

1. Improvements in structure and support are built upon general understanding. Such movements are accelerated if they can begin with understanding by teachers and other professional groups who can intelligently interpret needs and plans to interested laymen.

2. Securing favorable legislation is essentially a matter of education, not a fight or a battle.

3. The state education associations have provided the leadership and have served as a rallying point around which the campaigns for state support have formed. The gains have been greatest in those states which have strong and well-supported professional organizations.

4. A coordinated plan for utilizing lay support is essential. In those more successful states, active citizens committees have worked shoulder to shoulder with the professional organizations.

5. The specific proposals need to be formulated well in advance (six months to a year) of a legislative session so that general agreement and understanding can be achieved.

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teachers in 1951, and a special committee has been assigned the task of drafting a course which will be in line with the best modern educational practices. Specialist courses for teachers of infants and handicapped children, and for teachers of speech, art, crafts, home science, and physical education are under review.

The training of secondary teachers of general subjects has virtually been in abeyance for fifteen years but, beginning in 1950, secondary studentships will be offered to highly qualified pupils from secondary schools to take up courses at the University of Melbourne. They will be assisted to study for one of the following degrees: Arts, Science, Commerce, Music, Agricultural Science, or Engineering. They will be required to follow the degree course (three or four years) with a one-year course of professional training, with the first year of the course for the degree of Bachelor of Education.

Holders of secondary studentships will enjoy privileges available to all other students in training as teachers; they will receive free tuition and be granted allowances ranging from 169 pounds the first year to 195 pounds in the fourth or fifth year. Students who have to live away from home (fifty-five percent of all students) receive an additional twenty-six pounds. These secondary studentships in particular will be awards of outstanding value, and it is anticipated that there will be no dearth of well-qualified applicants for the 265 places which will be offered

in 1950 to young people who qualify for matriculation in 1949 or who are already at the University.

The plans for 1950 envisage some 1,450 young people in training as teachers for the service of the Education Department of Victoria, an increase of nearly fifty percent on the figure for 1949. This expanding plan of training poses an embarrassing accommodation problem. Plans are being prepared for three new provincial teachers colleges, each of which will cost over 250,000 pounds; but in view of the housing shortage and the scarcity of labor and materials, these colleges will not be available for several years. So training must be carried on in temporary quarters and under unfavorable conditions. Former army huts, imported prefabricated, aluminum, or steel classrooms, and sections of existing schools are being pressed into service. And large old mansion houses are being purchased to provide residential facilities for students whose homes are in rural areas.

Teacher education in Victoria is entering on a five- or six-year program of expansion and reform with high hopes and few advantages, except the backing of an efficient administrative system, the enthusiasm of its planners, the financial support of the government, and the example of much splendid work by the teachers of the past, most of whom gave outstanding service in the remote but important rural areas of the State.

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6. Political activity is one of the noblest expressions of democratic citizenship. School people should become participants in those appropriate activities incident to resolving public issues and choosing public officials. Helping to elect and to in-

form competent legislators is the most effective way of securing favorable consideration for necessary school legislation. —James Pelley, Associate Superintendent of Schools, Lincoln, Nebraska (written for the ASCD Legislative Committee).

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