

The Economic Opportunity Act— and the Schools

An assessment of the schools' role

WHAT are the educational components of the Economic Opportunity Act (the Anti-Poverty Bill)? Of the seven titles of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Public Law 88-452, passed by Congress on August 20, 1964, Titles I and II have particular relevance to education.

Title I-A: A Job Corps, providing residential centers for young men and women, 16 thru 21, in a coordinated program of basic education, skill training and constructive work experience.

Title I-B: A Work-Training Program, providing full- or part-time work, work experience and training for youth, 16 thru 21, enabling them to stay in or return to school, or increase employability.

Title I-C: A Work-Study Program, providing part-time employment of college, university students from low-income families.

Title II-A: Community Action Programs, providing financial support for local anti-poverty campaigns in urban and rural areas.

Title II-B: An Adult Basic Education Program, providing assistance to States for special programs literacy instruction.¹

¹ *The War on Poverty—A Home Town Fight*. Office of Economic Opportunity, Public Affairs. Washington, D.C., 20506, 382-5216. p. 1.

While the educational components of the Title I (Youth Programs) and Title II-B (Adult Basic Education) sections are made quite clear in the Act, the greatest confusion and misunderstanding surround the educational potential in Title II-A (Community Action Programs). This is indeed unfortunate because the most significant programmatic impact for in-school youth (preschool thru 12th grade) is inherent in this title. Most of the confusion results from the minimal references to education and the ambiguity of the language used. The only references to education are as follows:

Sec. 205. (a) . . . and special remedial and other noncurricular educational assistance for the benefit of low-income individuals and families.

Sec. 205. (b) No grant or contract authorized under this part may provide for general aid to elementary or secondary education in any school or school system.²

Sec. 205. (b) is the standard restriction against general aid in all educational legislation prior to President Johnson's newly proposed "Elementary and Sec-

² Public Law 88-452, 88th Congress, S.2642, August 20, 1964. p. 11.

ondary Education Act of 1965," which circumvents this language. Thus, funds could *not* be provided under this limitation for general reduction in class size, school construction, general teachers salaries, textbook acquisition, religious instruction or augmenting the established curriculum.

"Special remedial and other noncurricular," however, is interpreted in the legislative history of the Act as:

Providing special and remedial education, with particular emphasis on reading, writing, and mathematics,

Providing academic counseling and guidance services and school social work services,

Providing after-school study centers, tutoring, and summer, weekend and after-school classes,

Establishing programs for the benefit of preschool children,

Reducing adult illiteracy,

Developing and carrying out special education for other programs for migrant or transient families,

Arranging for or providing health examinations and health education for school children,

Rehabilitating and retraining of physically or mentally handicapped persons,

Providing health, rehabilitation, employment, educational and related services to young men not qualified for military services,

Providing community child-care centers and youth activity centers,

Providing recreation and physical fitness services and facilities.³

In addition, the use of back-up personnel such as attendance officers, speech and hearing specialists, and school social

workers, as well as enrichment activities, are allowable educational programs under the Act. Some pre- and in-service training of staff can also be considered as necessary ingredients in any program.

A school system could therefore provide any or all of the specific programs suggested above and could vary them in accordance with the unique needs of the school system. One school district might plan a comprehensive early childhood education project which might include day-care centers, preschools, school entry programs in the summer, and remedial and enrichment activities for children in the early elementary grades.

Another school system might place its emphasis on secondary school students with intensive remedial—summer, after-school and in-school programs—and intensive efforts for involving the parents in the efforts of the schools.

Community Action

In order for schools to participate in a community action program, there must be a determination on the part of the community to:

1. Mobilize its own public and private resources for this attack
2. Develop programs of sufficient scope and size that give promise of eliminating causes of poverty
3. Involve the poor themselves in developing and operating the anti-poverty programs
4. Administer and coordinate the Community Action programs thru public or private non-profit agencies or a combination of these.⁴
5. Maintain whatever effort has already begun on behalf of the poor.

In many communities, the schools and
(Continued on page 591)

³ *The War on Poverty, op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 3.

circumstances, and the proper tools and training. Only the person who has an opportunity to use considerable judgment of his own in how he carries out his responsibilities—judgment as to the ways he will use time, energy and resources—can operate as the kind of professional person we need in the schools. Only such a person can, in turn, deal with each student as an individual whose dignity is to be maintained and advanced.

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Economic Opportunity—Marburger

(Continued from page 548)

their personnel represent the only organized institution. Further, the major emphasis of community action programs is educational.

It is imperative that the schools initiate the community action organization where none exists or catalyze the agencies and institutions with the potential for initiating the community action organization into forming a cooperative action team. To act otherwise—to be indecisive or obstructive—could possibly lead to a fragmentation of the educational programs among those agencies which recognize the need but are less equipped to perform the task.

There is no imperative that a comprehensive educational program need be initially proposed. Program development monies are available for those communities which are unable easily to assess their needs or lack the personnel resources. Programs can be built in stages. A modest preschool program might be the initial attempt with development funds requested to examine the next directions.

Technical assistance funds can also be made available to state educational agencies, colleges and universities and private nonprofit organizations for assistance to communities and school systems in need of such help.

Responsibility of the Schools

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 can provide to local school systems substantial assistance for the education of the disadvantaged youth of the community. It allows for preventive (pre-school, in-service education of staff, specialized personnel) as well as the range of remedial and rehabilitative services to adults and youth.

There is evidence from demonstration projects, pilot projects, and community action projects, to show us that the schools *can* make a significant impact on the education of the poor. Competent school administrators, teachers, and special personnel have demonstrated that planning and action, by both school and community, not only create success within the local area but mobilize the larger community for support of schools.

Mistakes have been made on both sides. Injudicious selection of personnel, over-zealousness of school or community persons, institutional as well as individual rigidity, will continue to frustrate the best efforts, but if schools are to meet the challenge of the sixties, and if communities and community leaders are to subordinate self-interest to the higher goal of superior education for all youth, then enlightened leadership, using all appropriate means, can show new responsibility and new vitality in an effective program of education for democracy. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 can be one means for demonstrating that responsibility.

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