

THE FEDERAL COLOSSUS IN EDUCATION— THREAT OR PROMISE?



GALEN SAYLOR

Chairman, Department of Secondary Education
Teachers College, University of Nebraska, Lincoln

THAT the federal government is contributing in a colossal manner to the support of education from the nursery school level through the graduate college is, of course, a fact. A mere listing of some of the important acts that provide federal funds for the support of education reveals the tremendous scope of federal participation in the educational endeavors of this country.

- GI Rights Act (education for veterans), 1944
- Aid to Federally Impacted Areas, 1950
- Library Services Act, 1956
- National Defense Education Act, 1958
- Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offenses Control Act, 1961
- Manpower Training and Development Act, 1962
- Health Professions Educational Assistance Act, 1963
- Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Health Centers Act, 1963
- Higher Education Facilities Act, 1963
- Vocational Education Act, 1963
- National Defense Education Act—Extension and Amendments, 1963-64
- Library Services and Construction Act and Amendments, 1964
- Civil Rights Act—Titles IV and VI, 1964
- Amendments to Juvenile Delinquency Act of 1961, 1964
- Economic Opportunity Act, 1964
- Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965
- Higher Education Act, 1965 (pending).

There are many other federal assistance programs, such as the school lunch program, the educational phases of the National Science Foundation Act, and a multitude of other forms of federal aid for education, broadly conceived.

The increase in appropriations of federal funds for education is even more revealing of the extent to which the federal government is making a gigantic effort in the support of education. The comparative report prepared each year by the U. S. Office of Education entitled, "Federal Funds for Education," shows that in 1945 \$291,500,000 was appropriated by the Congress for the direct support of education and related activities; in 1955, this sum had increased to \$1,523,700,000; in 1960, the amount was \$2,324,100,000; in 1965, it was \$6,328,907,000; and the estimate for the fiscal year 1966 is \$8,711,131,000.¹ This is to say that in two decades federal appropriations for the support of educational programs and activities have increased thirty-fold.

A further revealing fact is the increase in the amount of direct appropriations to the United States Office of Education for support of that office and the aid programs directly administered by it; the office received \$34,336,483 in 1950; in 1960, it was granted \$474,280,893; and it is estimated that in 1966 the comparable amount will be \$3,905,708,000. This constitutes more than a hundred-fold increase in the direct appropriations to the U. S. Office of Education.

¹ Although Congress has not yet appropriated funds for the Higher Education act, if this legislation is signed, the total funds to be available in 1965-66 will probably be increased by about \$675,000,000.

The best estimates made available to the House Appropriations Committee indicate that federal support for education, nursery school level through graduate college, this year constitutes one-sixth of all funds spent for education in this country, and that in 1965-66 it will constitute one-fifth of all such expenditures. The federal government is indeed a major source of support for education and the programs and activities which it subsidizes are widespread and far-flung.

Threat or Promise?

This stupendous amount of federal support for education is indeed both a threat and a promise to good education for children, youth and young adults in America. Let us explore both possibilities more fully.

The Promise

Federal programs for the support of education in the United States show great promise for the development and advancement of the total opportunities for the education of children, youth and adults in this country for these reasons:

1. *Much greater sums of money become available for the support of the educational effort of this nation.* Obviously, the appropriation of more than 6 billion dollars directly for the support of education in this country is a huge sum of money and it represents a major contribution to our effort. If such sums of money were not available, the total program would of course be curtailed, or the citizens through local or state units of government would have to raise these large sums of money to maintain even our present effort.

2. *Extensive national effort of this size provides programs and services not possible or not feasible through local and state efforts.* Generally speaking, the program of elementary, secondary and collegiate education as it exists in this country is inadequately supported now by local and state agencies. The pressure everywhere on these units of government is to appropriate ever expanding sums of money for the support of our regular program of education. Little, if any, of their revenues can be used for new services, new programs, and new ventures of an educational nature even if it is generally agreed that such an expansion is desirable.

Moreover, some aspects of educational development, by their very nature, should be undertaken on a larger base than is possible by local or state authorities. Many of the existing programs of federal support are of this nature, such as the programs and services provided by the mental retardation act, the cooperative research program, the research and development centers, the various curriculum projects and commissions that are extensively engaged in the formulation of new instructional materials and plans for various areas of the curriculum, the establishment of educational service centers, and many other endeavors of this kind.

3. *The federal government is able to support and foster the development of new programs and new types of educational undertakings that generally would not be undertaken by local educational authorities.* Generally local boards of education, state departments of education, and the power structure of local communities would not counte-

nance or approve the undertaking of the types of new educational programs that the federal government frequently fosters and supports. Examples are the entire program being developed under the Economic Opportunity Act and most of the activities that will be possible under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

4. *Federal support for the existing educational enterprise frequently stimulates local and state agencies to increased effort in support of the regular and traditionally accepted program of education.* Good examples of such nudging are the Higher Education Facilities Act, which provides a portion of the cost of new facilities for higher education, Title III of the National Defense Education Act, which provided partial federal subsidy for the improvement of facilities and teaching resources in science, mathematics, and foreign languages, and the Vocational Education Act of 1963. Similarly, Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act will induce many school districts throughout the United States to expand and improve library service and to develop much more rapidly than they would be inclined to do otherwise their library resources for elementary and secondary schools.

5. *The federal government has clearly demonstrated that it can rapidly initiate the development and support of new programs in areas of urgent need that become evident because of new economic, social and cultural conditions.* In my belief, the Congress of the United States and the educational agencies established by it have shown dexterity and willingness to move

rapidly when great need for new kinds of programs is evident. Examples of this, of course, are the Manpower Training and Development Act, the National Defense Education Act, and the redesigning and expansion of the vocational education programs.

6. *Federal efforts in education serve to prod the pedantic, nudge the lethargic, and inspire the imaginative school officials and boards of education of local educational agencies throughout the nation.* Of course, we do have highly imaginative, creative, and aggressive educators and members of local boards of education throughout the nation, for it is such professional educators and scholars that advise the Congress of the United States and our national leaders on new developments and new programs that should be undertaken. Nevertheless it is evident that far too many of our local educational officials simply lack the professional qualifications to invent new programs needed to serve adequately all of the educational needs of their localities. But once the federal government provides support for new types of educational endeavors, a political climate is created in which the pedantic are prodded, although sometimes reluctantly, into action.

7. *Federal efforts in support of education clearly demonstrate a desire on the part of the Congress to develop a total program for the education of all Americans regardless of any economic, social, cultural, or racial factors that may under existing local programs deny or curtail the equality of access to educational opportunity.* The widespread nature of the federal programs clearly indicates that the Congress is insistent

that every American have the privilege of participating in the types of schooling and in educational programs that will enable him personally and individually to realize the maximum of his full potentialities regardless of any factors that in the past have restricted or curtailed these opportunities.

8. *The total federal effort in behalf of schools, colleges, and all educational agencies has fostered a new national interest in education and has made education a matter of great national concern.*

Everyone is well aware of the fact that the presidents of the United States in recent administrations, with the support of Congress, have been responsible for a reawakening and a revival of the American interest and concern for the education of its people.

The Threat

Yet there are also some threats evident in our present national efforts in support of education. Chief among these I detect the following:

1. *The stifling of the creativeness, inventiveness, and skill of discovery of local educational leaders and officials.* It is not, in my opinion, an inevitable corollary of federal participation in education that creativeness and inventiveness of individual practitioners, researchers, and scholars is stifled. Such an outcome, however, certainly is always a threat and such a possibility should be clearly recognized not only by the Congress of the United States and federal officials, but by the educators and citizens themselves so that conditions will be maintained that encourage stimulation of such inventive-

ness by everyone concerned with the educational enterprise.

The very nature of federal support itself makes possible if not encourages a situation in which those who administer the federal programs approve and support only those things that appeal to them or that carry out their ideas and desires. For example, in the cooperative research program decisions obviously must be made about what proposals to approve.

Similarly, in the establishment of research and development centers now under way in this country, someone must make a decision as to which proposal for a center shall receive federal support and which proposal shall be rejected. Whose philosophy of education, whose concept of what is good and what is not good, whose concept of what should receive the blessing of the federal government, and what should be denied its support are to prevail? Although these types of programs are at present only one small aspect of the federal participation, the possibilities here are very serious and indicate the nature of the problems that face us.

2. *Invidious control over the program of education itself.* Here I point to direct federal control of education through the acts that provide support for these programs. I believe that the actual curriculum and other types of educational programs provided children in the classrooms and schools of this nation must be determined by the teachers and their fellow staff members who guide and direct the development of learning opportunities and plan the total program of education for the children of a particular school and school system. Lessening the responsibility for

such decisions by the staff of the individual school system reduces the possibilities for adaptability, flexibility, experimentation, innovation, and, most seriously of all, administration to the educational needs of each child enrolled in school.

The threat that such decisions will be curtailed as a result of federal support is a serious one. I see no threat in the national curriculum projects that have been substantially subsidized by the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Office of Education. The local school authorities and teachers still have complete freedom insofar as those programs are concerned to decide whether they want to use the instructional materials, plans, and the recommendations formulated by these commissions and curriculum development centers, modify them, use some aspects and reject others, or completely reject the whole project itself. These projects represent one of the very rich resources being made available through federal support for the upgrading of various aspects of the educational programs of the schools and are indeed to be lauded and encouraged.

The real threat, I believe, comes from control by federal officials over the educational aspects of the plans developed for carrying out some of these acts, particularly the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. *This act gives the United States Commissioner of Education authority to approve plans for carrying out the act and hence the conditions within provisions of the law under which grants will be made.* The Economic Opportunity Act, Title II, prescribes the nature of community action plans and further states that "The

Director is authorized to prescribe such additional criteria for programs carried on under this part as he shall deem appropriate." This is the title under which many of the educational activities can be established for children.

Now being proposed to carry out provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act are testing programs and programs for the assessment of educational outcomes that indeed, in my opinion, constitute a serious threat to the prerogatives of the teachers and local school officials in each school district, and hence to sound educational planning and administration. It is a very alarming development in the history of federal support for education that for the first time in its history the federal government is demanding that evidence be submitted by local school systems on the effectiveness of these programs.

Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act requires that the local educational agency include in its plans, "effective procedures, including provision for proper objective measurements of educational achievement, will be adopted for evaluating at least annually the effectiveness of the programs in meeting the special education needs of educationally deprived children." Further, the Act requires that the local education agency report annually to the state educational agency "information relating to the educational achievement of students participating in programs carried out under this title." In turn, the state educational agency must "make to the commissioner periodic reports (including the results of the objective measurements required by Section 205[A] [5]) eval-

uating the effectiveness of payments under this title and of particular programs assisted under it in improving the educational attainments of educationally deprived children."

If this is not direct federal control over the curriculum of the schools, I do not know what federal control is. When you require a school system to report on the effectiveness of the program, you are requiring that school to report on its curriculum. Pure and simple. If the purpose of such a report is not to control the program, then why make it? It is presumed by the very wording of the Act that the Congress of the United States will use these reports on the measurement of educational attainment to determine what the nature of the programs shall be in subsequent legislation by Congress. And it should be pointed out that this Title of the Act is only authorized for one year and hence will be subject to scrutiny by Congress next year, at which time Congress will determine whether it wants to extend this program, modify it, or terminate it. Presumably, then, if the schools want to continue to receive such aid, they will have to establish programs that within even the next few months would demonstrate to Congress that they are "effective" with "effectiveness" in no way being defined or described.

As I state, it is to me a terrifying development that such provisions were written into the most recent federal program for the support of education. I remind the reader that *no such provisions requiring objective evidence of effectiveness were ever written into any other acts for the federal support of education in the entire history of the*

United States. The land grant universities were not required under the Morrill Act to report to the Commissioner of Education and hence to the Congress of the United States on their effectiveness in carrying out the provisions of that Act; the Smith-Hughes law in 1917 made no such requirements of any kind on the secondary schools of the United States that accepted federal support for vocational education and neither does the new Vocational Education Act of 1963. No one, local schools, colleges who administer institutes, or any agency that receives grants for research projects or other types of money under the National Defense Education Act is required to report to the United States Commissioner of Education on the effectiveness of these programs.

Any one who has had such grants or worked with such programs knows that the federal government in the past had relied on the imagination, creativeness, and integrity of the local agencies to provide outstanding programs under the provisions of these acts. Why has the Congress of the United States suddenly written into its most recent federal subsidy bill provisions that require the local school to gather evidence on the effectiveness of the program and then to submit this evidence directly to the United States Commissioner of Education through the state educational agency?

Title IV of the Civil Rights Act, moreover, requires the U.S. Commissioner of Education to gather evidence on the lack of availability of educational opportunities because of race, color, religion or national origin—a provision that gives the Commissioner au-

thority to study schools at the local level.

3. *Development of attitudes and modes of operation of dependency and indifference, of kowtowing to entrenched bureaucrats.* A third threat of federal support correlative to the other two is the possibility of the gradual evolution on the part of local citizens, boards of education, and school officials of an attitude of indifference to educational matters in the local communities and lethargy in doing anything to improve the quality of the program. There is a serious possibility of a decline in local interest and concern for education as support and control from sources beyond the local community increase. Anyone who has studied closely schools and educational programs in European countries, most of which have highly centralized and nationalized systems of education, is well aware of the almost total apathy and indifference of the citizens of the local community about the state and conditions of the educational programs of the community. Certainly, there is a gross lack of any effort to introduce change, to experiment, and to innovate.

Although such a threat, obviously, is one of long-term development, I nevertheless fear a gradual weakening of the concern local citizens in many communities now have about their schools as federal involvement increases.

The Future

For the future, I believe the following things should be done:

1. Much greater support for the total program of education should be provided by the federal government. Fed-

eral support for education should double and then triple and then continue to increase in the years immediately ahead.

2. Federal support should be provided for a great variety of programs, projects and other educational undertakings of all kinds. The total effort of the federal government should reach out into all aspects of education and the funds should in large part be used to stimulate and support more comprehensive and extensive educational efforts than are carried out as a part of our traditional program of schooling in local districts.

3. A large part of the program of the federal government should constitute research and development activities of broad scope, such as would not be feasible for local educational systems or even state departments of education to undertake. A part of these research efforts should consist of broadly conceived and widespread efforts to assess educational outcomes and evaluation of the effectiveness of educational programs, but only on a basis that ensures integrity of local control over the curriculum provided pupils.

4. In providing categorical aid, the

federal government should be certain that it supports only those aspects of the total educational program that represent a wise investment of funds. Philosophically and educationally, programs supported by the federal government should offer great promise for major advances in the education of this country.

5. All educational efforts should be correlated and unified through a common administrative agency at all levels, federal, state, and local. This is not to say that the school district or the school system itself must carry out and administer all programs, but rather that all programs whether receiving federal support or not should be part of a comprehensive and planned program of total education for all children, youth and young adults.

6. The administration of and carrying out of federally-supported educational programs should under no circumstances be placed in the hands of persons who lack extensive and adequate professional preparation for such positions. There should be no place in such federal programs for politicians not fully qualified by training and experience to administer such programs.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The statements by Galen Saylor, Mark R. Shedd and Joseph O. Loretan are based on addresses given on June 28, 1965 during the National Education Association Convention in New York City. On page 24 is an Addendum Statement prepared by Galen Saylor since the date of the original presentation.*

Copyright © 1965 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.