

THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND FEDERAL FUNDING

NICHOLAS P. GEORGIADY

Associate Superintendent, Bureau of Research and Educational Planning,
Department of Education, State of Michigan, Lansing

THE tempo of activity in education has been stepped up quite markedly in recent months. Aside from the quickened pace of educational planning resulting from the need to meet a rapidly changing society and a growing complexity of problems, further acceleration has been caused by the sudden infusion of vast sums of money for education from federal sources.

Operating expenditures for public elementary and secondary schools are predicted to reach 27.7 billion dollars by 1970 as indicated by the Council of State Governments. A growing share of these expenditures will be borne by federal sources so that by 1970 this will amount to 15 percent of the total operating expenditures for local schools or more than five billion dollars.

From this, it can readily be seen that the federal government has a huge and growing investment in education and feels a strong need to protect this investment. There can be no quarrel with this. The question, however, resolves itself into one of developing the means for best protecting this investment and at the same time preserving the integrity of state educational agencies and the autonomy of local educational agencies.

Opportunities Through Federal Funds

State educational agencies have long been starved by lack of adequate funds to discharge their manifest responsibilities for exercising leadership in education in their states. Inadequate staff and equally inadequate resources of any kind have imposed serious and severe limitations on their past activities. In most instances, limited resources have precluded the exercise of desirable and desired leadership and have forced limitation of attention to regulatory responsibilities at most.

The advent of Title V, of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, has brought about an arrest and a reversal of this condition. At long last, badly needed funds have been made available to states for doing the kinds of things

they have long dreamed of doing. Staff is rapidly being added in many programs, making possible an extension of services into areas hitherto neglected. New programs have been developed to meet growing demands for leadership from local educational agencies.

Existing staff members who have assumed new and greater responsibilities have been provided with opportunities for professional improvement through in-service education programs. Intervisitations among state agencies, with universities and colleges, and with the U. S. Office of Education are adding new dimensions to professional growth of state educational agency staff members. In some instances, badly needed facilities necessary to an expanded staff and new programs are under consideration.

Certainly a major contribution of federal funds is the opportunity afforded to conduct research on the status of education in each state today and to study in depth the educational problems plaguing many schools throughout the land. Armed with the objective findings of such studies, state educational agencies will then be in a position to plan logically and appropriately the kinds of recommendations which can be used as guidelines by local districts in modifying their own educational programs to assure that these are truly meeting the needs of children and youth today. This is in marked contrast with the all-too-frequent practice made necessary by limitations of funds, staff and time wherein major educational decisions have been made on the basis of limited or nonexistent data.

Potential Liabilities in Federal Funds

While it may appear that the whole picture for state educational agencies has become a rosy one, thanks to the sudden infusion of large sums of federal funds, there are a number of ominous and threatening clouds on the horizon. Prominent among these is the sense of urgency prevailing in these times. State educational agencies are under great pressure to move rapidly into areas for which they are often ill-prepared. The development of crash programs is a likely outcome of such conditions, and the dangers of hastily planned ventures are great.

Concomitant to this is the fact that many state educational agencies, long accustomed to spartan and meager budgets, are having a difficult time breaking out of the straitjacket imposed by such severe past limitations. As a result, plans which reflect creativity and uniqueness, the very essence of desired new programs, are often lacking. The bandwagon effect of doing what has been done elsewhere simply because it is readily available and expedient is an ever-present danger and one which needs to be recognized and guarded against.

Criticism has also been leveled against the federal funds provided, since these, critics say, are likely to result in the development of what could amount to a federal system of schools. Criteria for evaluation of acceptable programs could dictate such a condition. Criteria for evaluation of results of such new programs also might well help to fashion a national system of schools.

A word has been said of the dangers of the "crash" nature of using federal funds. There is a further danger in that to make rapid use of federal funds, many

state educational agencies have concentrated much of their presently limited manpower on the rapid development of programs to accommodate these funds. As a result, many ongoing responsibilities and normal operations of state educational agencies have been neglected. The net result, unfortunately, is one which imposes hardships on the ultimate recipient of all educational services, the students in the schools.

The shortage of trained, qualified educational personnel for the many new positions in state educational agencies is another problem. Here, the agency is in direct competition with other state agencies, with the U. S. Office of Education, with colleges and universities and with local educational agencies for the limited manpower available for these new positions. Since it is obvious that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to meet all these needs, the acceleration of present professional improvement programs and the development of new means will become urgent. Internships should play an important role in helping to meet this condition.

While much, if not major, attention has centered on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, there are other sources of federal funds that deserve attention. In fact, there are so many such sources of funds that it has become difficult to remain abreast of the many possibilities for funding programs. What is needed here is more know-how and more know-where with regard to federal funds.

The collection of information on the numerous and growing numbers of federal agencies and programs providing funds which could be used for educational purposes is imperative. Even the most highly competent state educational agency personnel is hard pressed to remain familiar with all these sources so that state educational agencies can avail themselves of such funds and so that this information can also be provided to interested local educational agencies. Some attention, then, needs to be given to reporting periodically in coordinated fashion, above and beyond the few reports now being made, of the sources of federal funds and the other information necessary to their use.

Control and Correction

The matter of the growing use of federal funds for education as a growing force and influence of the federal government in education is both a blessing and a problem. The need for a positive approach in viewing this as a blessing and an opportunity is great. However, it is also necessary to recognize the problem of overemphasis and lack of balance in the planning which is taking place. State educational agencies have a responsibility to be alert and to react to the dangers inherent in the situation.

Where areas of weakness are identified and where the specter of federal control becomes a real threat, there should be immediate communication with the federal agency to assert the fears that are felt. As long as there is open communication with the federal agency, with frequent and close communication, the dangers in the situation can be minimized and controlled. It is essential that state educational agencies and others recognize that there is an element of control here, namely, that which is inherent in democratic government.

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