

● Where Should Education Go?

Who Should Set the Goals for the Schools?

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A DUAL system of education is being created in the United States. It is being created because the schools of America have not solved the dropout problem, or the problems of the disadvantaged children, and hence are not serving the national interest. The second system is being created as a result of recent laws passed by Congress. In writing these laws and the accompanying guidelines, Congress and the "experts" of the United States Office of Education and the Department of Labor have established national goals for the schools. This procedure needs careful examination by the American public before it becomes too firmly fixed as national policy.

A review of the recent national education legislation will illustrate the way national goals can be established. In 1958 the shock of Sputnik I brought the passage of the National Defense Education Act. Members of Congress expected the schools and the school people to improve the quality of the areas of the curriculum which, in their minds, were vital to the national defense. These areas were science, mathematics, foreign languages, and counseling.

The legislation provided funds to meet the goals which had been set, and in general, local school districts were free to spend these funds within these curricular areas with a minimum of federal or state interference. The goals of this act were accepted by the nation's educational system, and in large part they have been met. The Morse-Perkins Vocational Act of 1963 and the 1965 expansion of the National Defense Education Act continued the policy of minimizing federal control of the educational system through control of funding.

Change of Policy

With the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1963 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, this policy of minimum control changed. After three years of operation, Head Start guidelines now include requirements to "organize" the parents of the children enrolled, to pay the costs of dental and medical examinations and follow-up care, to have no more than fifteen children in a class, and to place two full-time teacher aides with each class. Although these requirements may be justifiable from an educational point

of view, they are costly. The cost of operating a Head Start Program has doubled in three years. It may be more to the point, however, to compare the cost of the Head Start Program with the regular first-grade program of our schools. The cost of Head Start is four times higher, and this includes only local district cost.

In addition to this an entirely new administrative layer has been added to the "educational" structure. A conservative estimate of the cost of the Head Start program would be six times the cost per child per year of the regular first-grade programs. A similar story could be told of the Job Corps, with one adult supervisor to each five enrollees, and the Neighborhood Youth Corps, although the latter would be to a lesser extent. The point of all this is that setting educational goals on the national level and then stating, in guidelines, how they are to be met is expensive.

In 1965 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed by the 89th Congress. The goals of this act are to return economically deprived children to the mainstream of American life, to breathe new life into school libraries, to encourage innovation and exemplary programs in the schools, to establish regional laboratories, and to strengthen state departments of education. Again, these goals have been set on the national level, and the guidelines which have been written are making the programs restrictive and costly.

Study of the employment records of the United States Office of Education and the state departments of education attests to the legion of workers who have been employed to write the guidelines, approve, allocate, inspect, audit, and

evaluate projects submitted by local school districts. In most sections of the nation, county or state auditors already review expenditures of school districts, and in most cases, state departments of education have reviewed educational programs submitted by local districts. It should be recognized that the effective changes that have occurred in the education field because of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act have occurred in local school districts. What has happened above this level is in terms of review, report, and audit.

Local decisions have been made by local persons who are responsible to the local populace for the education of the children of the community. Programs for improvement were initiated, written, and put into operation at the local level. The only new ingredient furnished by the federal legislation and needed by the educational system has been money! Put more bluntly, with the exception of financial support, a dual system of checks and balances is all that has been accomplished.

Thus far two criticisms of setting educational goals on the national level have been made and illustrated. They are the tremendous cost of the practice and the lack of creative effort above the local district level. Other more general criticisms of the practice would be the opportunity it offers for "empire building" by national agencies and the bypassing of the state prerogative of control of education.

As a constructive alternative to the educational goal-setting by Congressional enactment and United States Office of Education or Department of Labor "guidelining," I would suggest that the goals for the schools of America

should be set by the professional educational organizations of this nation. This would assure that the *means* of reaching the goals would have the attention of those most qualified to suggest them—the teachers. Two examples of how this process might function may be worthwhile.

It was decided that high school students should be more proficient than they are in the use of the English language. English teachers said that the goal could be reached by restricting the number of students in their classes to not more than one hundred a day. Again, it was decided that more individual attention would improve the learning of boys and girls in our classrooms. Teachers replied that a classroom ratio of twenty children to one teacher would be a way of meeting this goal. Passage of professional negotiation acts in many of the states ensures that teachers will be involved in decisions affecting them, and decisions concerning the goals of the education field surely come under this category.

A review of yearbooks of professional associations will show that these associations are capable of setting realistic goals. As an example, the 1966 Yearbook of the American Association of School Administrators, *Imperatives in Education*, lists nine "points at which the educational program must be revised and reshaped to meet the needs of the times."

(a) To make urban life rewarding and satisfying; (b) to prepare people for the world of work; (c) to discover and nurture creative talent; (d) to strengthen the moral fiber of society; (e) to deal constructively with psychological tensions; (f) to keep democracy working; (g) to make intelligent use of natural resources; (h) to make the

best use of leisure time; and (i) to work with peoples of the world for human betterment.

In conclusion, what the federal legislation has provided for the goals set by Congress is money. States and local districts have not had the funds available to meet the goals set by the public or the educational profession. This money is available, however, from the federal government level and it seems that we have a choice of ways to spend it.

One way is to let Congress and lesser federal agencies set the goals and thereby establish a dual system of education such as Head Start and the Job Corps. The other way is to work through the educational system that has developed as the public school system in the fifty states and has made education in the United States the envy of the world. The latter way will allow the American people to set the goals for the schools of the nation and permit the classroom teachers and district administrators to determine the means of reaching the goals. In the long run this action will meet the goals currently being set by Congress and will be far less expensive.

To label the schools as failures before this strategy is tried is both unjust and unwise. The schools have not failed America. Congress has failed by not realizing the tremendous job there is to be done, by not recognizing the great potential of the established educational channels for accomplishing this task through establishment of goals, and by delineating the means of reaching those goals.

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