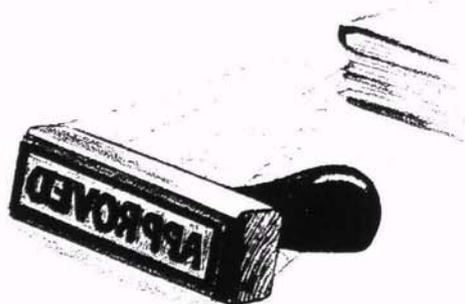


CAPTIVE TO FUNDED PROJECTS?



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ARE educators unduly hemmed in, restricted, forced to comply with unnecessary or even absurd guidelines and regulations? Are they required to conform to senseless deadlines by the U.S. Office of Education in its administration of federal funds for the support of education? Or are most of these complaints and charges just false bugaboos thrown out by smug, lethargic, unimaginative, conservative status quo'ers who resent the efforts of brash outsiders who attempt to prod them into action or to put them in a situation where they are practically forced to move if they want to keep alive in the educational world? Perhaps, the whole situation is one grand illustration of what sociologists call differentiation, integration, and social disturbance.

To gain what I hope is a valid understanding and to check my own opinions of the situation, I corresponded with a number of educators whom I consider to be outstanding school administrators and leaders in the profession of educational administration. Moreover, practically all of the conditions and situations which give rise to criticisms among educators have already been well documented and well supported by testimony in the extensive investigation of the U.S. Office of Education made by the Special Subcommittee on Education of the House of Rep-

resentatives under the chairmanship of Congresswoman Edith Green.¹

These Are the Charges

To state them bluntly and categorically, I believe that the most serious charges of the restrictive and wasteful nature of the acts of the U.S. Office of Education in administering federal grants for education are as follows:

1. Extreme bias in determining the projects to be funded.

Federal support for education is allocated on two broad bases: (a) grants made to the states in accordance with a formula spelled out by Congress in the act authorizing the aid; and (b) grants made directly by the

¹ Congress of the United States, House of Representatives, Special Subcommittee on Education, *Study of the United States Office of Education, House Document 193*. 90th Congress, First Session. Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967. Stephen K. Bailey and Edith K. Mosher, in an extensive study of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (*ESEA: The Office of Education Administers a Law*, Syracuse University Press, 1968) report many of the same reactions.

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U.S. Office of Education to school systems, colleges and universities, research agencies, educational laboratories, institutes, private and nonprofit agencies, and individuals.

Grants to states are made in accordance with regulations stated in the law itself or guidelines formulated by the U.S. Office of Education in accordance with law. The state agency must submit a plan for the administration of a particular aid program to the U.S. Office of Education and have it approved before grants can be made to local systems or institutions. Although, as will be noted later, these guidelines restrict the nature of the applications that will be approved, there seems to be little complaint or criticism of the U.S. Office of Education or of state agencies on the administration and allocation of these funds to the ultimate users.

But in the administration of all types of federal aid in which the U.S. Office of Education itself exercises almost complete discretion with regard to the specific projects to be funded within the authorization, there is a great deal of vehement criticism of the whole process. And all this criticism is amply justified. In administering these aid programs, the staff of the U.S. Office of Education is virtually all-powerful and holds in its hands the authority to determine finally what institution, what school system, what agency, what researcher, what institute is to receive support for particular projects and in what amounts. It is a rigid thumbs-up or thumbs-down control over educational research, experimentation, innovation, and development in this country within the general categories established by Congress.

The process may start or end with advisory committees, which in many instances, according to widespread word-of-mouth reports, are simply rubber-stamp groups or review committees after the fact, or with "reading" committees, or field readers, or whatever device may be used to get opinions about the merits of a proposal. Hence the first type of control over the approval of all projects within this broad sweep of federal grants is the determination of who is to be a member of an advisory committee, who is to be on a reading committee, or who is to be a field

reader. If you have served in one of these capacities, you know what I mean, and if you have not been asked to serve you also know what I mean by this type of control.

William Asher, Professor of Education and Psychology, Co-director of the Purdue Educational Research Center, charges in the *Educational Researcher*, the official newsletter of the American Educational Research Association, for December 1967, that:

In possibly bypassing recommendations of the outside readers or picking outside readers whose area of expertise is not primarily in the scientific design of research, essentially the decision to support or not to support is made on an internal basis. "Research" projects will thus be increasingly funded, not on the basis of objectively judged scientific merit, but in terms of their correspondence with currently popular ideas held by Office of Education administrators.²

Anyone who has submitted an application for the funding of a research project, conference, or dissemination activity of any kind, or any institution that has submitted an application for prospective- or experienced-teacher fellowship programs or for approval of a graduate program for NDEA fellowships well knows the truth of the assertion that the projects must conform to the concepts, points of view, or whatever is in current vogue in the way of promoting their own ideas on educational change among officials in the U.S. Office of Education who administer the programs.

Probably two of the most glaring examples of imposition of the current foibles and points of view of bureaucrats in the U.S. Office of Education on the educational scene are: (a) the "Organic Curriculum," now renamed "An Education System for the '70's," propounded by David S. Bushnell, Director, Division of Comprehensive and Vocational Education Research; and (b) a designing of model programs for the training of preschool and elementary school teachers, directed by Howard Hjelm, Director of the Office of Education's Bureau of Research, Division of Ele-

² William Asher. "Review Policy Criticized." Letter to the Editor. *Educational Researcher*, December 1967. p. 3.

mentary and Secondary Education. (Shifted to another division and program in October 1968, thus illustrating part of Charge 2.)

In the Bushnell project for the reform of secondary education, about 15 public school systems have been invited to develop aspects of this new model for the education of secondary school youth devised by Bushnell and whomever he chose as advisors and consultants. The school system must agree, of course, to carry out aspects of the model or develop plans that conform to the model as a condition for receiving a substantial federal grant for the improvement of education in their communities.

Officials in the Bureau of Research hope that the project for designing models for new programs of teacher education "eventually will revolutionize teacher-training practices in this country."³ Hjelm is quoted as saying, "What we are looking for is a complete development system, a new approach that can be used at this country's major teacher-training institutions. We are inviting proposals that can be applied to the education of preschool, elementary and possibly middle-school teachers."⁴

The Office of Education chose nine institutions to develop and design these models for the training of teachers. From these models the bureau expects to "select about four of the most meritorious models. These will be used as a base for a secondary request, which will be aimed at large teacher-training institutions. The second-round request will seek proposals for developing a complete instructional program for teachers in training."⁵

A third recent development representing the same type of imposition of predetermined ideas on research and development in education in this country is the contract made by the Office of Education's Bureau of Research with the National Academy of Sciences, a private, nonprofit organization that advises the federal government on science and technology. The contract provides that NAS, through a new 15-member committee on Basic Research in Education, "will attempt to develop

a strategic approach to basic research in education. . . . it will prepare guidelines, solicit proposals, screen them and recommend projects for the Bureau to support. The Bureau, with the power of final approval, will make awards directly to individuals or institutions."⁶

It is obvious, of course, to anyone that the expenditure of large amounts of funds for the support of research, innovation, experimentation, dissemination, and planning in the field of education should have direction and should be devoted to the support of the most promising and best-designed proposals. The entire question here is: Who decides what projects and applications are worthy of support? Should this power be vested solely in staff members of the U.S. Office of Education, recognizing that they can use any kind of an advisory group or consultative group they wish or may be required to do under the law; or should there be some broader base for determining what projects, programs, institutions, agencies, or individuals should get the money? There is no reason to believe that prescience in educational development rests solely with the staff members of the U.S. Office of Education. In fact most educators even seriously question whether much of this gift exists among the inhabitants of that huge building on Maryland Avenue in Washington, D.C.

2. Uncertainty of approval, funding, and continuity.

Beyond the basic question of authority for decision making, school and college administrators are primarily irked, disgruntled, and very caustic in their criticisms about the whole process of application, approval, timing, funding, and continuity of projects subsidized not only by the U.S. Office of Education directly but also by the federal government through grants to the states. Much of this criticism must be directed to the Congress of the United States itself, rather than to government officials in the U.S. Office of Education. These matters all have been well aired in Edith Green's report and will only be stated here.

³ *Educational Researcher*, No. 1, 1968. p. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Educational Researcher*, No. 5, 1968. p. 10.

Congress has been notoriously lax in gearing its authorizations and appropriations for projects and programs to the administrative processes of educational institutions, particularly budget making and staffing. Almost all of the educational leaders whom I consulted were very bitter on this point. Public school officials cite the needlessly long delays in the approval of projects both at the state and U.S. Office of Education levels so that they simply have no basis on which to proceed in planning for the use of federal funds during a school year.

It is often true that programs that should begin at the opening of the school year are not approved until midyear or even late in the second half of the school year, obviously too late to be carried out at all or certainly not effectively for that school year. Consequently, the money, which usually must be spent or committed by June 30, is often in part wasted or spent ill-advisedly simply because the school administrators have been totally unable to carry out the project as originally planned and submitted. School systems, of course, are unable to employ staff people or assign staff members to projects until funding is assured, by which time it usually is too late to find the people qualified for the program or to reassign staff members to the new projects.

College and university administrators are in an extremely difficult position in planning expansions and working with state officials and legislators because of delays, cutbacks, red tape, and all sorts of things. And everyone is aware of the chaotic situation with respect to the funding of the regional educational laboratories, the research and development centers, the ERIC Clearing Houses, and almost any federally funded educational enterprise you want to name.

A further complaint of educators is the lack of assurance of continuity in the funding of projects. School administrators state that they are often reluctant to propose some new and innovative program for fear that, if it is approved and funded, new personnel in the U.S. Office of Education, curtailment of funds, or a change of emphasis in the U.S. Office will cause the program to be disap-

proved or stalled later just when the school system may be in the important developmental stages of the project itself. This means that they must drop the program without being able to attain evidence on its validity and appropriateness as a new educational program or are forced to revise local budgets in an endeavor to carry on solely by use of funds previously committed for other programs.

In sum, sound and efficient administration of educational agencies of all kinds throughout the nation has been seriously defeated by the utter failure of the federal government at Congressional and bureau levels to be realistic in funding, to be honest and fair in informing applicants of the actual status of projects, and the like. A popular way to state this is that the whole thing is "one of the godawfullest messes" you ever saw in educational administration.

3. Unwarranted requirements in preparing applications for funds.

The most serious charge in this area relates to the guidelines set up for all applications. School administrators, researchers, directors of educational agencies, and state department officials themselves feel that many of the guidelines not only are confusing and poorly formulated, but, most serious of all, are unduly restrictive and narrow, thus preventing imaginative and forward-looking educators from actually developing what they are certain would be meritorious and innovative projects.

A number of school officials said in effect: We feel that we know best what is needed to improve education at the local level; if we do not, we should not be at the head of the school system. Yet federal and state bureaucrats set up guidelines so restrictive that we are unable to include, in our applications, projects that we know hold the most promise for the improvement of education in our particular school systems.

On the other hand, some educational leaders believe that the guidelines, in spite of their restrictive and confusing nature, have certain advantages. Such regulations may force the educator to plan his new programs

and innovations very thoroughly, and may force him to engage in types of planning that often do not characterize local school systems.

Yet, recipients and applicants generally are very bitter about the necessity of writing such elaborate applications, describing in considerable detail specific steps and even the names of staff members, consultants, directors, and others who will be engaged in the project, months or a year or more in advance of the time when the funds finally will be made available. It seems ridiculous to force a researcher, for example, to name staff people who will be employed if the project is funded. If the state or federal official does not have enough confidence in the applicant to let him carry out the project with competent people, one wonders why the government would make the grant at all.

Most readers are aware of the endless time that has been spent in contacting people all over the country, asking if they would be willing to serve as consultants or would be resource people in a workshop or institute for some project that, even if approved at all, is not scheduled to begin until months hence. This is an absurd way to conduct our educational business and our educational research and development programs in these busy times.

4. Improper emphasis in the total program of education.

Perhaps this is the most serious criticism of the present program of federal aid to schools, yet the situation varies so greatly from school system to school system that there is a mixture of blessings and regressions. Nevertheless, educators point out that the categorical types of aid which we have had in the past do encourage, if not force, school systems to develop particular phases of their educational program; but whether this is detrimental to the total program of education depends primarily on the local situation. For example, some schools already had developed excellent facilities for science instruction when the NDEA programs in 1958 made funds available for the improvement of facilities in this area. Perhaps a school sys-

tem was most in need of better facilities for art, music, or industrial arts, yet it had no choice in the matter and either had to find some way of using the money allocated for science, mathematics, and foreign languages or lose it.

This is not solely a question of general versus categorical aid but rather of who determines priorities for the expenditure of federal funds. Vocational education, for example, is riding high now in most systems because of the tremendous increase in federal funding and the broadening of the program; but it is pertinent to ask whether the greatest advances in education for these times might not be made by extensive subsidies in the humanities.

5. Multiplicity of federal funding agencies and the ineptness of local community action agencies.

Educators have long railed against the multiplicity of agencies that administer federal funds for support of education and the necessity of dealing directly with many of these agencies, rather than having all money channeled through the U.S. Office of Education and eventually through the state department of education. This continues to be a sore point with administrators and causes them a great deal of extra effort and time in applying for and administering federal funds. This situation also results in dislocations in the school program and in disjointed efforts to provide an integrated program of educational development for the children and young people of the community.

Many administrators are particularly critical of local community action agencies which administer funds allocated to the Office of Economic Opportunity. The criticism is directed in particular at the administration of the Head Start Program, but it also applies to some of the related programs for disadvantaged children. The administration of the Head Start Program has been most irksome to many educational leaders: delays in approving plans and making funds available till well after the start of the school year; uncertainty and indecision on the part of the local directors of these agencies; dictums that

are in opposition to the judgment of the professional educator; and the general uncertainty and instability of the program.

6. *The establishment of regional offices of the U.S. Office of Education.*

There has been outspoken opposition by school administrators to expansion of the work of regional offices of the U.S. Office of Education or even to the establishment of these regional offices. Such opposition has recently resulted in a major retraction in this aspect of the U.S. Office of Education. The objections made were largely on the grounds that the regional offices would represent an additional federal agency involving dictation and control, and would constitute a serious threat to the authority of the state departments of education.

Alternatives and Recommendations

First, I should make absolutely clear that I believe that federal support to education is essential and that the amount appropriated by Congress should be increased substantially. Yet one of the primary responsibilities of all concerned—federal government, state departments of education, and administrators—is to investigate and appraise carefully the process of support itself and the ways in which decisions that have significance for the future education of this country are made and by whom.

Many school administrators and other educators strongly advocate that federal aid should be general aid rather than categorical. There is little question but that Congress will continue in the years ahead to designate the categories for which federal funds must be expended.

It is my opinion that practically all federal support for the common school and higher education should be allocated to the states on appropriate formula bases (and this applies to categorical aid of the present type). The state agency, the state department of education for the elementary and secondary schools, and an appropriate administrative agency for higher education would then have complete decision-making responsibilities on the allocation to local school dis-

tricts or institutions of the various aid funds in each of the categories established by Congress. If Congress so specified, the allocation to local school districts within the states for some categories could also be on a formula basis such as now exists in Title I of ESEA; but if it wished to give the decision-making responsibility for all categories to the state agency, this of course would be highly desirable.

Such a major shift in the administration of federal aid would mean a reduction in the staff of the U.S. Office of Education by as much as half and possibly even two-thirds of the present personnel. The staffs of state departments of education and state administrative agencies for higher education would need to be increased somewhat but certainly not in the same proportionate numbers.

There would need to be some provisions made for consortiums to carry on projects and programs of a regional or national significance. Undoubtedly a small portion of the funds should be retained by the U.S. Office of Education for special demonstration projects, experimentation, innovations, and basic and fundamental research of national significance and importance. Yet I would still insist that most of the federal funds be allocated directly to states for administration by state agencies. Some of the funds especially earmarked for support of research, dissemination, and the like would be controlled by the U.S. Office of Education, but even a considerable portion of these monies also should be administered by state agencies.

The state agencies would be required to set up major advisory and consultative boards and committees for various types of programs. I think provision should be made for systematic and thorough evaluation and review, by outside evaluative agencies, of the state's use of federal funds. But the evaluation should not be done by the U.S. Office of Education, although the Office might be represented on the evaluative board or agency.

In general, this is the basic plan for the administration of federal support of vocational education that has been in vogue since the original Smith-Hughes Law was passed

in 1917. If the Congress is willing to trust the states to plan, administer, and operate programs of vocational education largely determined and carried forward under state auspices with some general federal supervision, it seems to me such a plan would also work in the administration of funds for support of such programs as now exist—Head Start, anti-poverty programs under Title I of the ESEA Act, the Pacemaker projects under Title III, and the research, dissemination, and innovative funds made available under Title IV. I think the same thing applies to the administration of all of the funds under the new Education Professions Act for the education of teachers. Similarly, funds for support of all aspects of higher education authorized by Congress should be allocated to the states for redistribution.

Interestingly, Walter Heller, the eminent economist who has served as Chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisers under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, said in an address in Lincoln, Nebraska, on October 24 that he believed that the federal government should give the states control over the expenditure of federal aid funds.

What we primarily need in the administration of programs of federal support for education is complete confidence on the part of whoever administers the funds—presently officials of the U.S. Office of Education for many of the programs and officials of state agencies for others—in the capabilities, integrity, foresightedness, and vision of the officials of local school systems and the institutions of higher learning. In the long run, better results will be obtained by having the

state agencies work with these administrators in developing the vision, imagination, and concern so necessary for the improvement of education, rather than by having bureaucrats write reams of guidelines that try to force unconcerned administrators into some kind of half-hearted action or that hem in the imaginative ones who know what to do.

All of the guidelines, the red tape, the voluminous applications, the solicited models or innovations for this or that, depending on who sits behind a particular desk in the U.S. Office of Education, and the resultant uncertainty of approval, financing, and continuation that we have had in recent years have really resulted in very meager returns on the federal investment in education. Congress should be seriously concerned about the output obtained from its generous input of federal monies. Any person who is familiar with the present situation and honestly evaluates it must conclude, as several national study commissions have already pointed out for various phases of the program, that very meager educational results are presently being obtained from all of these tremendous efforts. Now Congress should try a different approach—one tested by 50 years of grants for vocational education.

The whole question is related to the most effective methods of achieving the best things for the people through organized government. I believe that experience over many, many decades indicates that the returns are very meager when supernumeraries in federal bureaus feel that they have the answers and that everyone else is an ignoramus, a dullard, or a smug, lazy, unconcerned individual. □



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