

Editorial

State/Federal Role in Curriculum Development

Calvin M. Frazier

There is great temptation to begin this editorial by saying there is *no* role for the federal bureaucrats in curriculum development and then concentrate on a state strategy for improving our curricular efforts. Why is this a temptation? Because this writer and many others have become increasingly discouraged with federal regulations, paperwork, and mandates without dollars. Well-intentioned efforts have become distorted with assurance forms, detailed directions, and "black-mail" approval procedures to the point that we look toward execution of the culprit rather than exploring rehabilitation opportunities.

As a vocal critic of Washington's involvement, I have reached a point short of telling the feds to "take their marbles" (few that they are) and "get out of the game." However, there are ways for state responsibilities for education to co-exist with federal dollars.

In the past decade we've seen the best and the worst of federal involvement in education. Federal legislation has stimulated a creative input into education through provisions in the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act that would not have come about had the states been left to their own resources. Human rights issues have been pressed in areas that were slow in coming to the forefront in state capitol discussions. But there have been abuses, and there are long-range philosophical problems that argue persuasively for limits being placed on federal involvement and a greater participation structured for the states in the coming decades.

We may be getting closer to defining federal and state roles in education and in gaining a consensus acceptance for this definition. Congressmen, in a bipartisan manner, have read the discontent of the countryside and are cautious to expand existing federal programs and embark on new ones until some of the past criticism is resolved. Likewise, state leaders have realized that federal

hands helped because states have been remiss in such critical areas as curricular equality for women and language development programs for students with language skills other than English. Therefore, while states have complained more about detailed regulations and data demands, many are aware of the gains made in the past decade and are more specific in their criticism rather than calling for an end to all federal aid.

Assessing the State-Federal Partnership

Assuming there is federal interest in recognizing that states have the basic responsibility for education and that states are willing to make their appropriate contribution, there is need for a thoughtful assessment of our state-federal partnership in education. Hence, the importance of this particular issue of *Educational Leadership* as various writers examine the curricular implications of this governance question.

There needs to be an overall plan by which an effective partnership can be achieved. Some of the elements are in place, but a schematic for the whole picture is lacking. In setting the stage for the articles to follow, I would like to present a possible unifying pattern for interaction, building on the insights we've gained over the past 13 years of heightened federal-state activity.

One all-important first step must be taken if we are to eliminate the current hostility between the two levels of government. School districts and states—meaning the official state education agency—must be able to articulate valid program concerns and priorities to the federal agencies. This communication has not taken place in a consistent manner in the past. As a result, federal program emphases such as career education, education for the handicapped, bilingual education, and vocational education are here because of pressure from special interest groups. State agencies and local

school districts have been forced to implement legislation they did not actively seek, and the basis for a mutually satisfying federal-state relationship has been lost.

The key to improving the federal-state relationship is for local school districts and state agencies to establish some systematic pattern for prioritizing curriculum needs of the states. With this information base, state agencies will be in a position to work with the federal leadership,

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Congress, and federal agencies in developing programs to address the states' priorities. Psychologically, this step is critical. The program priorities may be the same as those now being set primarily by special interest groups, but the structured, state input would provide a trust level now missing.

Where To Begin?

Where does a state begin to order these priorities? The process begins in the local school district. Throughout the country, in most instances, the local school board is expected to identify the expectations citizens have for the schools. Occasionally, these general goals are set at the state level. Regardless of the source, the *individual school* must begin this process by judging its success in meeting citizen aspirations. The principal and staff should be joined in this periodic evaluation by parent representatives and, to the extent appropriate, the students. Certainly, at the

secondary school level, student involvement can be significant. Taking the goals as a point of departure, judgment should be made as to how effectively students are achieving in the basic skill areas and are developing their special aptitudes, attitudes of respect for others, and habits conducive to good physical and mental health. These examples are illustrative of the generalized program goals on which the local school system is built, and it is vital that a collective effort be made systematically to judge the validity of these goals and the system's success in attaining these ends.

At the conclusion of the school-level analysis, some listing of the strengths and weaknesses should emerge. Priorities should be set for future efforts by the staff. These school priorities provide the planning base for the model being proposed. Given this input from individual schools, local school district priorities can be established. State agencies can in turn reflect these school and district expressions in developing a state support system. Finally, states can sift the common denominator priorities and indicate what is needed at the national level to enhance the achievement of the high priority state program objectives.

In addition to its potential for improving federal-state relations, there are numerous advantages of such a system:

1. Those charged with educational planning at all levels now have a direction that reflects student-oriented needs, as well as operational priorities such as the salary or facility deficiencies that tend to be advanced at the local level more often and more forcibly than student and curriculum concerns. Ironically, because of this local district preoccupation with salary and facility concerns, the state and federal levels have been forced to deal with curriculum concerns more than school districts that traditionally have claimed control of instruction.
2. The prioritizing system forces qualitative

judgments to be made that too often have not been made by educators in an organized manner.

3. Prioritizing the program needs allows for redirecting existing resources or arguing more convincingly for new human and fiscal support at all governmental levels for curriculum needs.

4. Public input can be provided in a systematic manner, and all groups would have a vehicle for raising their curriculum concerns without feeling that Washington is the only source of sensitivity and support.

These are but a few of the general returns to be realized by utilizing the model outlined. In terms of making federal involvement in curriculum efforts more fruitful, there are specific gains that might be realized. In particular, the potential contribution of the National Institute of Education would be enhanced considerably. NIE has been under considerable pressure from Congress for failing to achieve early expectations relative to the nation's research and development activities in education. Part of the problem has been the forces exerted on NIE from a number of directions. In addition to Congressional pressure, priorities for leaders have been forced on NIE from laboratory and center boards, colleges and universities, and individuals, but only occasionally from defined state requests.

A panel has been formed recently to review the operation of labs and centers because of a concern for the expenditure of monies in these institutions that have not always reflected state priorities. Given a more unified prioritizing of needs by all of the states, labs and centers could become a means of assisting states in their research, development, and dissemination activities. If the major concerns of states are identified as learning basic skills and improving discipline, some relationship must be shown to exist between those concerns and the expenditures of NIE. Given this opportunity for input, states would feel a closer tie to NIE, lab, and center programs. States

could embark on various components of nationwide research efforts and make maximum use of the few funds available for research and development in education. An example of this cooperative effort could be developed now between states, NIE, the Bureau of the Handicapped, and selected labs and centers in conducting research and development activities related to better service to handicapped children. This appears to be a high priority thrust in most states; yet we lack a unified effort to answer questions about staffing problems, grouping patterns, materials, and evaluation techniques. Federal and state dollars could be utilized more effectively if some joint planning efforts were undertaken immediately in anticipation of questions coming from Congress and state legislators at an increasing rate on the effectiveness of dollars flowing into handicapped education programs.

Possibilities such as the prioritizing model indicated need to be examined as potential solutions to some of the discord. The federal government will be involved in education for years to come. The pattern is set, and there seems to be no major reversal coming in the near future. The important step to be taken now is a structuring of the federal involvement to the point where it is seen as a means of supporting the state's basic responsibility for education and assisting in curricular programs reflecting local and state priorities. [E]



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