

What Is the Status of State-Federal Relationships in Schooling?

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"The federal role of super educator has been gaining momentum for many years. Yet a national policy for education is needed instead of the piecemeal thrusts of various magnitudes embedded in federal legislation, regulations, projects, and official pronouncements."

At the heart of this question is the more basic question of what should be the appropriate role of the federal government in American education. It is obvious even to the casual observer that government at both the federal and state levels has an interest in education. Perhaps what is observed more keenly by the persons most directly involved—educators at local, state, and federal levels—is the continuing debate about what is the "appropriate" role in education to be played by each echelon of government. The author's basic premise is that there is an appropriate role for each level of government to fulfill and that the delineation of roles is coming into sharper focus.

Evolving Federal Role

The importance of education has been recognized by the federal government from its inception. In fact, this unique experiment in human relations that we call American democracy was conceptualized on the premise that if all of its citizens are appropriately educated, then they could have an active and participatory role in the functioning of that government. As the decades have passed, just exactly what that role should be has been evolving.

The most common description of the appropriate relationship among federal, state, and local education agencies is that it is a national concern and a state responsibility, but a local function. As the framers of the Constitution obviously by design omitted any direct reference to education as a federal function, then it has become one of the "reserved powers" of the states. The federal concern, however, has begun to manifest itself over the decades in ways that have become increasingly more direct in their impact on individuals. The earliest role addressed itself to citizenship development. The second phase was concerned with the matter of the development of leadership as the expansionistic tendencies of the northern states moved west. A third phase came when there was an absence of skilled craftsmen and, consequently, the nationwide necessity for stimulating vocational education, which led to categorical grants to states. In the 1930s, the impact of the Depression prompted education to become the vehicle by which certain goals of national relief and recovery could be met. Following



"In the 1930s, the impact of the Depression prompted education to become the vehicle by which certain goals of national relief and recovery could be met." Photo: The Library of Congress.

World War II, federal objectives appeared to be directed toward permitting the reentry into the mainstream of society by many persons whose lives had been so significantly modified by World War II. In the past 20 years, the basic change of the federal government's involvement in influencing today's schools has been to move from the "content-oriented" approach to a more "practical-problems" approach to curriculum and instruction.

For example, the passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958 has been traced almost directly to the launching of Sputnik and the resulting national emergency, because schools had not produced an adequate supply of scientists, mathematicians, and diplomats. Consequently, the provision of funds to states for strengthening these programs was not to achieve the objective of improving these curricula, but for the purpose of producing an increased number of professionals who could, in fact, provide the national security that we needed in the United States.

There continues to be an emphasis on meeting some of the needs in the scientific fields as well as in vocational education, but a new set of priorities has appeared at the federal level. Essentially, there is an emphasis on categories or groups of citizens who have special needs—the disadvantaged, handicapped, minorities, and gifted. Similarly, there seems to be a concern about the

functioning of citizens in terms of their ability to solve some of their personal problems, whether they function as a producer, consumer, or learner, and also in relationship to the environment in which they live.

Has Federal Involvement Changed?

To further validate the perceptions already stated, colleagues who have similar responsibilities in several of the other states and territories were asked their responses to the following questions:

1. To what extent do you feel federal involvement in education has influenced curriculum in the public schools in your state?
2. Have you observed a marked change from the early 1960s to the present?

With the exception of a representative from the Canal Zone, each respondent indicated that the influence on curriculum has been significant. By and large, the influences were more positive than negative. As might be suspected, the negative views tended to center around the concerns for federal encroachment on decision making through categorical financial aid. By contrast, the number of specific, positive influences identified was somewhat surprising. The most frequently mentioned curriculum influences were:

1. The utilization of paraprofessional and support personnel as a result of the Education Professions Development Act

2. In-service education of teachers as a result of National Defense Education Act

3. The extensive development of curriculum materials in mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, and other disciplines as a result of NDEA and National Science Foundation financial support

4. The enrichment of educational opportunities for the disadvantaged through the funds from Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

5. The adoption/adaptation of validated instructional practices as supported by Title IV-C (formerly Title III) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

6. Some major changes in course offerings as well as in athletics and other extracurricular activities as a result of Title IX of the Civil Rights Act

7. The emphasis on individualized education programs

8. The focus on needs assessment as related to educational program planning

9. The identification of critical issues that are of concern to all citizens.

Absence of a Clear-cut Policy

In all of this activity, there are two considerations that appear. First, there still continues to be an absence of a clear-cut policy on education at the federal level. In fact, in a guest editorial in the *CCSSO Stateline Quarterly Newsletter*, U.S. Commissioner of Education Ernest L. Boyer indicated that one of his four goals would deal with this issue. According to Commissioner Boyer:

... it's time to clarify the Federal, State, and local roles in education and seek to understand just what a central agency should and should not do.

Education in America is primarily a State and local function. Any move to "federalize" it must be vigorously opposed. At the same time, the Federal Government does have an obligation to promote national goals. Certainly it should at least (1) help the schools when Federal policy brings them a special challenge or obligation; (2) help the schools to move toward equal opportunity for education, to overcome economic and social barriers; (3) help exceptional and

disadvantaged students; and (4) promote the excellence essential to our Nation's intellectual health.

At the same time, even in the absence of such a policy, there exists a much more aggressive role in education than ever before. As an example, the Controller General of the United States issued a report on April 15, 1977, in which he responded to requests from Representatives Daniel J. Flood and Albert H. Quie to determine the "major federal programs and activities which fund the development and dissemination of curriculum materials on behavioral modification techniques for use in the schools." The requests from Representatives Flood and Quie obviously were generated because of the continuing conflict about the federal government's role in education policy-making, particularly with regard to curriculum development. The findings revealed that the federal role varies. In fact, data were not available to the General Accounting Office to determine all the projects that might have impact on these two activities or the amount of money supporting such activities. In general, it was determined that most of the projects in the Office of Education programs could involve curriculum development materials. The use of behavior modification techniques within these programs appears restricted to a small percentage of projects.

In addition, projects funding the development of materials and techniques are supported by the National Institute of Education, the National Science Foundation, the National Institute for Mental Health, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The federal government's control over individual projects that may develop techniques varies: (a) In local projects funded through formula grants to states, the federal government has little, if any, control over the design or operation of the projects; (b) In projects funded under disadvantaged grants or contracts, the federal role is more active and includes selecting from proposals the projects to be funded; and (c) In at least one program, the federal government has assumed the prime responsibility for making sure that adequate curriculum materials exist. In bilingual education, the Office of Education, through a network of projects, is assuming a leadership role in coordinating all material development efforts.

Federal participation in education has had some positive results. It has highlighted the short-

comings of schools so that remedial action could be taken. It has focused attention on the education of the poor. Certain federal programs have required the participation of all parties concerned, particularly students and parents. Yet, even with these accomplishments, there are three facets of federal impact that can best be brought into focus by exploring the state role in education.

Continuing State Responsibility

From the very beginning, education has been a state responsibility. The ability of the state to define its responsibility has, in fact, shaped the nature and quality of educational experience for the citizens of the various states. Similarly, the manner in which states have assigned the initiative to local education agencies to actually deliver education has made the problem even more complex. Regional differences, a philosophy about economics, religion, and the social order have been interwoven into all educational decisions; this has created a dichotomy as it pertains to local control.

The writer views local control in two diverse ways. On the one hand, it is its greatest strength. In those places where the total citizenry is involved, where education is open, and where high priority is given to delivery of quality services, it is a strength. At the same time, local control is public education's greatest weakness. In those communities where there is an absence of commitment or low priority for education, the result can be repressive. Such a situation has created an environment in which, too frequently, state education agencies have been placed in the position of *helping local education agencies do what they should not have done in the first place*. For example, qualifications for professional personnel are established; however, persons are frequently employed on an emergency basis who do not possess even the minimum qualifications.

In the past 20 years, again with the assistance of the federal government in strengthening state departments of education, there appears to be a change in this direction. During this period of time, there has been a significant increase in the number of dollars available for education. However, there have been concomitant demands for improved health services, transportation services, and other public services. Such an occurrence has

put the crunch on state legislatures responsible for appropriating funds to ask the question, "What are you doing with the money you are receiving?" It has led to the whole movement of educational accountability.

On the horizon, there appears to be a move at the state level to begin to define the qualitative standards by which local education agencies will be evaluated as they deliver educational programs. This posture again places the state and federal governments in conflict. Two examples will illustrate. In the education of the disadvantaged, ESEA Title I, the first general pronouncements from the Office of Education were that the funds could be spent for *anything* that would ameliorate the educational deficits of those eligibles identified. Progressively, however, this broad focus was narrowed to basic academic skills or early intervention. At the same time, states were beginning to develop accountability measures, and the first cut was identification of those cognitive skills that were more easily assessed and evaluated. The conflict is, then, who determines what objectives in reading and mathematics are to be measured. The age-old question of a national program of education or a national curriculum surfaced. In a sense of accountability, many congressmen have wanted more precise data on which to make judgments about the efficacy of expenditure of federal funds.

This conflict finally was brought into sharp focus in July 1977 when, in response to a request of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Education, Arts, and Humanities, Mary Berry, Assistant Secretary for Education, agreed to explore the possibility of developing some national criterion-referenced tests in the basic skills area. Subsequently, Patricia Graham, newly appointed Director of the National Institute of Education, said such a goal cannot be realized because of the great divergence of the population. Yet, these two issues point to what I would characterize as a more active involvement of federal government in education—a new role influencing the day-by-day operation of today's schools.

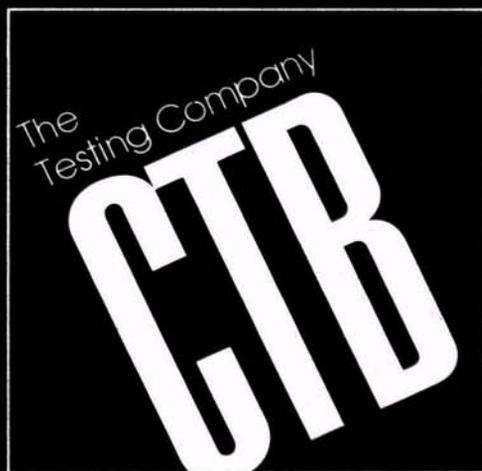
This federal role of super educator has been gaining momentum for many years. There is no doubt that a national policy for education is needed instead of the piecemeal thrusts of various magnitudes embedded in federal legislation, regu-

lations, projects, and official pronouncements. In the next few years, there may be additional directional thrusts emerging as suggested by current federal studies and activities.

Some emerging ideas are probably reflected in a study conducted by HEW on population, education, and the federal role; a study of state programs in bilingual education; a study in national assessment of educational progress on functional literacy; a study of compensatory education; the matter of minimal competency testing; and training educators for the handicapped.

These or similar types of curriculum and instructional thrusts will continue, but without the impact and effectiveness that would come from commitment by all echelons of government to a clear and thoughtfully developed national policy on the appropriate role of the federal government's participation in education. Perhaps what is needed is a new mechanism to develop and propose federal education policy, such as a National Forum on Education commissioned by the President of the United States and/or Congress. Persons chosen as participants in this National Forum might be selected from those attending and submitting substantive input on appropriate federal/state/local role relationships at one of four Regional Forums held in various parts of the United States. Hopefully, from this undertaking, meaningful and appropriate role relationships might be generated, and new legislation might be passed by Congress that would reflect a federal role in education that strongly enhances and supports efforts of states and local school districts to provide quality educational experiences for the children who will be citizens and leaders in the twenty-first century. *FL*

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