

Fenwick English often tells that when he was an assistant superintendent for curriculum, a board of education member complained that his daughter was being taught the same subject two years in a row. English says he wanted to reply, "What you say has a lot of merit. There's just one thing you're mistaken about. *You think I'm in control!*"

Ever tried to describe the American school system to a foreign visitor? "We're not a single system at all; our schools are governed by 15,000 local boards of education. Of course, some boards are fiscally dependent on city or county councils, which limits their power quite a bit. Yes, state constitutions say education is a state responsibility, but states delegate most of their authority to local boards. Well, yes, some states do have a lot of rules and regulations, but some of those come not from state boards of education but from the legislatures—and of course, from Congress and federal agencies. More and more the courts are taking over, not only settling disputes but actually giving orders.

"Curriculum? Now, that is a local matter. Oh, some states have official curriculum guides and approved textbooks, but curriculum is mostly decided by local school boards. Well, yes, individual schools sometimes have their own curriculum. And teachers often ignore official curriculum guides. I suppose we'd have to admit that the curriculum is whatever individual teachers decide to teach. You might even say textbooks are the real curriculum; from that point of view, most curriculum in the United States is determined by textbook publishers."

When I try to describe our system, I find myself concluding lamely, "It all depends on the state and locality you're talking about, and on the issue being decided."

It would be nice if this theme issue could settle some of the confusion about the governance of schools once and for all, but that's unlikely. The best we can do is try to clarify things a bit.

For example, Thomas Timar and James Guthrie (p. 112) show that much of the turmoil in education can be explained by the efforts of policy makers to advance equality, efficiency, and liberty. Unfortunately, these values conflict. To achieve equity for the handicapped, we need rules to keep others from discriminating against them, and we have to pay for it.

Speaking of money, Susan Fuhrman (p. 122) explains how school finance reform in the 80s will be different from the 70s. She offers little cause for optimism except the possibility that education groups may work together more closely.

Edith Mosher (p. 110) says it's useless to yearn for the good old days when education was thought to be non-political and governors and legislators relied on educators for advice. Things are different now, she says, so educators had better learn about politics.

It may be surprising that Arthur Steller (p. 161) should describe local curriculum development as a political process. Steller, recently appointed assistant superintendent for elementary education in Shaker Heights, Ohio, makes suggestions based on experiences in other school districts.

Three articles and accompanying responses deal with criticism by local and national groups of school programs and textbooks. Charles Park (p. 146) warns of New Right organizations he considers a threat to democratic education. He lists names of individuals and groups that support local complaints about "secular humanism" in schools. Gerald Skoog (p. 154) examines the legal status of demands that "scientific creationism" be taught along with evolution in biology classes. Terry Larsen (p. 139) reviews what the courts have decided about the right of boards of education to withdraw books and textbooks that are under attack.

Complaints from parents and community groups may give administrators ulcers but—more important—they illustrate a trend to consumerism

in education. Many parents are unwilling to accept whatever school officials decide is best for their children. Michael Kirst (p. 103) favors involving parents by giving much more discretion to individual school councils. Mary Anne Raywid (p. 134) argues that parents should choose the school they think is best for their children. Ideas like these may point the direction for school governance in the future.

ASCD Upcoming Events

Dec. 2-3, 1980: Virginia ASCD, Fredericksburg; **Dec. 3-4, 1980:** NCSI, "Approaches to Improving High Schools," Chicago; **Dec. 4-5, 1980:** New Jersey ASCD, Cherry Hill; **Dec. 5-6, 1980:** Urban Curriculum Leaders Conference, Chicago; **Dec. 8-9, 1980:** NCSI, "Approaches for Motivating Teachers," Las Vegas; **Dec. 11-12, 1980:** NCSI, "Teacher Evaluation," Dallas; **Jan. 12-13, 1981:** NCSI, "Systematic Management of Curriculum," Phoenix; **Jan. 14-16, 1981:** North Carolina ASCD, Pinehurst; **Jan. 15-16, 1981:** NCSI, "Human Potential Through Time Management," Phoenix; **Jan. 19-20, 1981:** NCSI, "Classroom Management Skills," Houston; **Jan. 22-23, 1981:** NCSI, "Curriculum Evaluation," Sarasota; **Jan. 23-24, 1981:** Oregon ASCD, Lincoln City; **Feb. 9-10, 1981:** NCSIs, "Leadership Styles," Birmingham; "Teaching Strategies," Anaheim; **Feb. 11-12, 1981:** NCSI, "Leadership Styles," Atlanta; **Mar. 5-6, 1981:** NCSIs, "Coping with Stress by Managing Your Time," "School Climate," "Clinical Supervision: Improving Supervisory Skills of Practitioners," and "Developing and Implementing Middle Schools," St. Louis; **Mar. 27-28, 1981:** NCSI, "Leadership Styles," Washington, D. C.

"**Learning: Realities and Vision,**" ASCD's 36th Annual Conference and Exhibit Show, **Mar. 7-10, 1981,** St. Louis, Missouri, Cervantes Convention Center and Exhibition Center. Annual Conference Pre-registration closes **Feb. 2, 1981.**

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