

# PROPOSALS FOR GIVING YOUTH A BETTER CHANCE

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There have been many reports on youth unemployment and many other reports on secondary schools, but most have been quite separate and directed toward different audiences. *Giving Youth a Better Chance* breaks new ground because it deals with both the labor market and the school problems of youth. It argues strongly for increased opportunities for combining school and work experience at an early age, and for much closer integration at an early age, of policies affecting in-school and out-of-school youth.

The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, sponsors of the report, had previously worked for increased public support for higher education, especially in the form of student aid. Now they felt the time had come to confront the serious inequities between resources allocated to college youth and those devoted by our society to non-college youth. They reviewed problems such as violence in schools, widespread absenteeism, declining test scores, and a continuing high school dropout rate of about 25 percent, and made a number of recommendations, including:

1. Young people should not be compelled to stay in school beyond their 16th birthday. (In this respect the Council's recommendations agree with those made by several special commissions on the secondary schools.)

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2. However, young people who choose to leave school at age 16 should not be left to their own devices. It is the responsibility of the schools, the community colleges, and all other relevant community agencies to broaden the opportunities available to youth at that stage.

3. There are numerous ways to combine education and work experience. Work options should not preclude continuing in secondary school or entering a community college or a middle college, which combines the last two years of high school with the first two years of college. Other possibilities include apprenticeships in a far wider range of occupations than the traditional ones; jobs or training programs in public, non-profit, or private employment; youth service programs; or pre-military training.

Many students simply do not see the connection between their academic programs and their futures. They might continue their education, however, if it played a vital role in opening up work experiences for them in the school itself, in other public and nonprofit agencies, or in private employment. Programs aimed at developing work opportunities for large numbers of students on a voluntary basis have worked successfully in some communities, notably in Portland, Oregon. The report also notes a statewide program of counseling and work experience in Wisconsin, financed by combined allocations from vocational education funds, the public employment service, and CETA funds.



**High schools should help create broader options for employment and education for all youth.**



4. A work-study program should be tied in with the work experience programs and applied initially to low-income students.

5. Communities should consider radical restructuring of their school systems along the lines of a model suggested by former U.S. Commissioner of Education, Ernest L. Boyer, and following the example of secondary schools that have successfully changed their structure. The Council endorses magnet schools, alternative schools, schools-within-schools, minischools, and other types of experimental programs.

6. There should be much closer coordination than in the past between programs designed for in-school youth and programs intended for out-of-school youth.

7. The federal government should positively support innovation in secondary schools and refrain from interfering with educational programs. It should serve as a catalyst for change, primarily through grants awarded on a competitive basis to local school districts that develop their own plans for changes in school structure. The federal government has only minimally supported secondary schools, except in vocational education. By far the largest proportion of funds provided under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has been channeled to elementary schools and early childhood programs. This has been quite deliberate, based on recommendations of experts who argue that the handicaps of disadvantaged children are overcome by enriched school resources at an early age so the children will make normal progress. Although this approach is still debated, much of the research indicates that early progress is not sustained in the absence of continued "enrichment" of programs at later ages. Also, experiments with improved educational resources in secondary schools have achieved favorable results.

8. The federal government should encourage moving high school vocational education out of the classroom and into the shop, the community college, apprenticeships, and special employer-sponsored training programs. It is difficult for high schools to maintain up-to-date equipment in most vocational programs and the dropout rate, at least among males, is higher in vocational programs than

in other types of programs. However, the report favors continued support of specialized technical high schools and emphasizes, at the same time, the importance of policies aimed at integration.

9. At least for the present, the draft should not be reconstituted, but the federal government should emphasize opportunities for pre-military training and gradually develop a volunteer national youth service program, with emphasis on local initiative, but benefiting from federal subsidies.

10. A National Education Fund should be established which would receive deposits from (1) voluntary savings by participants in youth service programs, (2) federal educational credits for youth service (on a more generous basis for those in military than those in civilian service), (3) employer deposits on behalf of employees, (4) voluntary savings by employees up to age 55, and (5) contributions by parents on behalf of their children. Withdrawals from the Fund could be made only for approved educational purposes (for example, in accredited colleges and universities), except under special circumstances.

11. A number of proposals relate to labor market programs for youth, including exempting teenagers from social security coverage, thereby enabling employers to hire them without incurring higher payroll taxes and making it possible for young people to take home a larger proportion of their pay.

The total cost to the federal government to carry out these recommendations in the first year is estimated at \$1.5 to \$1.9 billion (probably closer to the latter figure because of the present severe unemployment situation). The cost would rise somewhat in later years as the voluntary youth service expanded in size. However, these costs must be weighed against the savings in prison costs, unemployment costs, and other social costs if the aims of the proposals are achieved, along with the gradually reduced costs of special training programs for out-of-school youth. ■

*Giving Youth a Better Chance is available from Jossey-Bass Publishers, 615 Montgomery Street, San Francisco, California. 1979. \$13.95.*

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