

We can't say the equity movement began in 1954, because it's as old as humanity itself. Still, in the last quarter century we've witnessed waves of reforms aimed at improving the chances of one group or another. Much of this attention has focused on schools, which play such an important part in society's sorting process.

This may be an appropriate time to assess progress toward equity in education, because we appear to be at a crossroads. Congress has postponed implementation of the Lau regulations on bilingual education, perhaps permanently, and prohibited the Justice Department from prosecuting desegregation cases. The Supreme Court has declined to accept cases that might set direction for metropolitan-wide desegregation, which is the only way large Northern cities can be desegregated. And speakers for the new Reagan Administration promise to deregulate education.

A lot of educators will be glad. They see the quest for equity not as a noble cause but as endless harassment by radicals, lawyers, and bureaucrats which strangles them in red tape, interferes with sound practice, and contributes to public disenchantment with schools. Most of the oft-criticized government regulations deal with the education of minorities, the poor, females, the handicapped, and students who can't speak English.

The rules and reports *are* a burden, and some of the actions taken in the name of equity are questionable. School systems are forced repeatedly, sometimes with only a few weeks warning, to disrupt carefully-planned schedules and rearrange students and teachers as though they were interchangeable parts. Courts order schools to provide expensive services for individual handicapped students at a time when resources for other students are shrinking. Civil Rights reporting requirements give the impression that schools are guilty of discrimination unless they prove themselves innocent.

You might argue with my illustra-

tions, but you can probably supply others of your own. We must concede that these actions have been taken only after much persuasion and negotiation when there seemed no other way to achieve students' Constitutional rights.

Nevertheless, Congress, the Supreme Court, and the new administration reflect the national mood. Our commitment to equality, which seemed so strong in the 60s, is weaker now, a casualty of economic conditions and international uncertainty. We are more concerned about our own welfare than that of others. People are saying, "We've done enough; now it's up to individuals to help themselves."

It's always up to individuals, but if the judgments of authors in this issue are correct, we've not done enough collectively. William Price-Curtis observes that our inability to desegregate schools reflects continued unwillingness of whites to accept minorities on an equal basis. Robert Green and his colleagues discuss factors that have impeded desegregation. They stress the need to include the suburbs in metropolitan desegregation and to eliminate tracking and other practices that resegregate schools.

Ramón Santiago and Rosa Castro Feinberg cite statistics showing the plight of Hispanic students—for example, that Hispanics aged 14-19 are twice as likely as Anglos not to complete high school.

Summarizing national evaluations of compensatory education, William Cooley says Title I programs may be effective for some students in some schools, but overall they are not having the impact on achievement people had hoped they would.

Margaret Weber and her colleagues report no increase—a decline, in fact—in the number of women school administrators. Jeana Wirtenberg and her co-authors say subtle sexism continues to pervade elementary and secondary education.

Noting that many educators think PL 94-142 gives special privileges to

handicapped students, Marian Stearns and Rhonda Ann Cooperstein say national evaluators found a few instances to support that view, but concluded that many handicapped students are still not receiving equitable treatment.

It would be inaccurate and unfair to paint too grim a picture. Price-Curtis reports gradual improvement in enrollments, graduation rates, and years of school completed by Blacks. The challenge, he says, is to increase the proportion of minorities in professional schools. Irving Lazar summarizes studies documenting the cost-effectiveness of early intervention programs. Nearly every author offers evidence of progress. The fact remains, however, that we have not attained equality.

The new administration and conservative Congress will probably make good on their promise to remove at least some of the equity requirements. If so, the purpose of those requirements will remain unfulfilled. With or without regulations, we will need to work even harder for a just and open society. ■

## ASCD Upcoming Events

**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:** NCSI, "Leadership Styles," Atlanta.

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

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