

SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES NEED EACH OTHER

High schools and colleges should be partners in pursuing educational excellence.

ERNEST L. BOYER

During my term as United States Commissioner of Education I visited classrooms all across the country and talked with teachers and administrators at every level. My tenure was exciting and rewarding, but frankly, I was dismayed by our fragmented academic structure. The truth is that presidents and deans rarely talk to principals and district superintendents. College faculty refuse to meet with their counterparts in public schools, and curriculum reforms at every level are planned in total isolation. Time and time again I was reminded of that insightful quote by Henry Clinton Morrison who, over 50 years ago, declared that: "As a people, we do not think in terms of *education*; we think in terms of *schools*. We have no educational *system*; we have an elementary school, a high school, and a college."

A hundred years ago some educators understood the problem far better than we do today. In 1884, the Massachusetts Classical and High School Teachers' Association unanimously passed two resolutions. The first declared the lack of cooperation between high schools and colleges was an "evil." The second declared that increased cooperation between the schools and higher education would be a positive "good." Having drawn a vivid line between what was "good" and what was "evil," the secondary school administrators then invited 19 New England college presidents to join them in a meeting.

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Much time passed and, in the end, just three presidents replied!

Fortunately, Charles W. Eliot of Harvard did respond since, in the academic pecking order, Harvard's presence added clout to the encounter. And from this first high school/college conclave a national panel was established, popularly called "The Committee of Ten," which brought together educators from both levels. In 1884, President Eliot commented that "The greatest promise of usefulness" of the committee "lies in its obvious tendency to promote cooperation among school and college teachers," to advance what Eliot called "comprehensive education reforms."

In 1908 Abraham Flexner of the Carnegie Foundation described the schools as the source of "the raw material" with which "colleges must work." In 1945, almost a half-century later, the Harvard "Red Book" suggested that it's impossible to talk about general education at the college level without also looking at curriculum in the schools. And following Sputnik, gifted high school and college teachers came together to work out a sequential course of study in math, English, biology, and physics.

It's such a simple point—the need for close collaboration—and yet in recent years it has been essentially ignored. Universities have pretended they could have quality in higher education without working with the schools which are, in fact, the foundation of everything they do. I'm convinced the time has come to end this isolation. The high schools in America are in serious trouble and higher education must become involved. ■

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