

Can six major reform projects really change secondary schools? It depends on educators' will to improve.

The 1980s: Season for High School Reform

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No one can say in 1982 whether high school students are certain to attain higher academic achievement by the end of the 1980s. But if six national projects to reform secondary education are successful, that ought to be the most visible—and perhaps the most welcome—result of all their efforts.

None of the six projects is older than the decade itself, and all but one will conclude in the mid 80s. They spring from the welter of questions, doubts, dissatisfactions, and reappraisals prompted by the troubling performance of America's public high schools. Few of us need to be reminded of the evidence that has been gathered to argue that secondary schooling has fallen into disrepair.

If, however, you are unfamiliar with the six high school reform projects, here is a description of them and an assessment of their prospects:

An Education of Value. A study of the values underlying secondary schooling, by Stephen K. Bailey,* past President of the National Academy of Education; Judith B. McLaughlin, Executive Director of the project; and several colleagues.

The Paideia Proposal. Mortimer J.

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Adler, Director of the Institute for Philosophical Research, is the leader of some two dozen intellectuals who propose a grand redesign of curriculum, instruction, and teacher preparation for public schooling.

Project Equality. George H. Hanford, President, has initiated ten years of studies and actions by the College Board intended to redefine and strengthen the academic preparation of college-bound high school graduates. Adrienne Y. Bailey, Vice President for Academic Affairs, directs the project.

Redefining General Education in the American High School. Gordon Cawelti, Executive Director of ASCD, has organized a network of 17 high schools to consult with each other as they individually revise their curricula for general education.

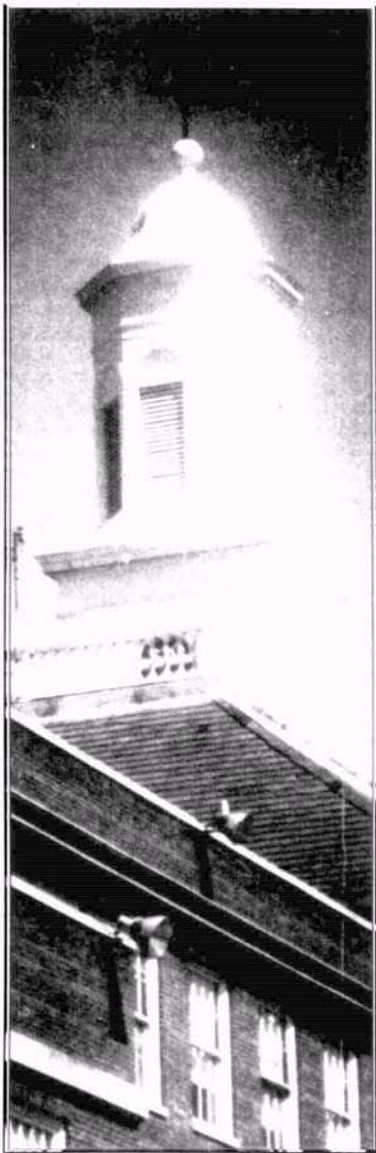
A Study of the American High School. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Ernest L. Boyer, President) will combine its own inquiries with a synthesis of other studies to describe the condition of secondary schooling and to propose solutions for its problems. Paul L. Houts directs the project.

*As you may know, Stephen Bailey died on March 27, 1982. When contacted, Judith McLaughlin stated that the project will continue. Our regrets to the Bailey family.

A Study of High Schools. Chairman Theodore R.Sizer, Executive Director Arthur G. Powell, and several colleagues, under the auspices of the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Association of Independent Schools, are working on a study that will prescribe secondary schooling to meet America's needs for the rest of this century.

From early indications, all the projects will be judgmental and prescriptive—not just descriptive. This means that high schools can look forward to new marching orders as the various reports are published. It would be impossible to forecast the substance of the reports, but preliminary indications suggest the following common themes: strong emphasis on academic goals; a core curriculum for most if not all students; much consternation about the education and professional training of teachers; considerable attention to mathematics, science, computers, writing, history, and foreign languages; an assumption that nearly every high school graduate will sooner or later enroll in post-secondary education of some sort; and a general concern for the progression from schooling to life after high school graduation.

In contrast to the commonalities, there are major differences of method in the work of the six groups.



Paideia

For about three years, the Paideia group met two or three times a year to refine Mortimer Adler's ideas about the ends and means of universal public schooling. After a final gathering at Aspen in the late summer of 1981, Adler wrote *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*, scheduled for publication in 1982. In a readable and vigorous though didactic style, Adler argues the case for





schooling that would ensure all children the intellectual grounding needed to succeed in three callings all must answer: life-long learning, earning a livelihood, and responsible citizenship. Adler's prowess in logical exposition and advocacy makes the *Proposal* stimulating stuff. Anyone who gives it a serious reading will be forced to re-examine comfortable assumptions and trusted conventional wisdom. For this reason, Adler's most immediate contribution will be to provoke more discussion on high school reform and to make the debate more rational and more sharply focused than it might otherwise be.

A lifetime of playing intellectual provocateur has earned celebrity status for Adler and the title "Knowledge Magistrate" from Norman Cousins. In both capacities, Adler has been on the conference circuit for several months, talking about his ideas and giving virtuoso performances at the lectern. But one wonders who will keep the flame burning and who will bear the torch from city to city when Adler wearies of his solo campaign, since there is no permanent organization ready to take up the cause.

Project EQuality

If Project Paideia is the crusade of one man and some intellectual friends (and it is), then Project EQuality serves as its organizational opposite. The College Board is the General Motors of educational associations: ponderously large, securely established, and frustratingly slow to move but irresistible when set in motion. George Hanford got it moving about a year ago on a course still not precisely charted but headed toward much stronger college preparatory programs in high schools. With a few assistants and some seed money from a foundation, Hanford devoted a large chunk of his own time to the project, persuaded the College Board's trustees to fund it, and appointed a new vice-president to direct it. Hanford believes the College Board should rediscover and renew its root purpose: smoothing the transition from high school to college. The capitalized E and Q in EQuality symbolize Hanford's faith that equality of opportunity need not be gained at the expense of quality in academic achievement.

The first stage of the project entailed a series of conferences in seven cities around the country: Atlanta, Chicago, Hartford, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Nashville, and Washington. Typically,

a dozen high school teachers and administrators would meet with a like number of college professors and administrators to discuss some 30 or 40 suggested "basic academic competencies" thought to be essential to the success of urban high school graduates during their first year in open-admission colleges. The list of competencies was pummeled, k'aded, and massaged with surprisingly uniform results in the seven cities, then passed through another refining process at a large symposium in St. Louis in May 1981 and finally published in September 1981. From this emerged 35 competencies clustered under six headings: reading, writing, speaking and listening, mathematics, reasoning, and studying. Just a sampling of three competencies gives the flavor of the list: The ability to organize, select, and relate ideas and to outline and develop them in coherent paragraphs; the ability to make [quantitative] estimates and approximations and to judge the reasonableness of [numerical] results; the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion. The abilities included in the full list cut across disciplines; they are not the exclusive property of academic departments nor the sole responsibility of single courses. They are the skills on which further learning hinges.

What the College Board has accomplished in the first phase of Project EQuality is noteworthy. It has mobilized a mammoth organization whose more than 2,500 member institutions (school, colleges, and educational associations), seven regional offices, and public relations resources give it power to be heard in every corner of American education. It has demonstrated that representatives from schools and colleges can talk constructively as equals. More important, it has declared to parents, students, schools, and colleges that an adequate preparation for higher learning is part of a specified set of essential abilities that can and should be developed in school, not postponed to remedial courses in college.

The second phase of Project EQuality is now in progress, again with school and college people collaborating. Their aim is to develop a basic academic curriculum as a companion to basic academic competencies. By specifying desired learning in six subjects (English, mathematics, foreign language, history/social studies, natural science, and the arts), the project will define standards and expectations of knowledge for all college-bound students. The College

Board plans to announce the conclusion of phase two late in 1982. Then comes the hard part—making it all happen inside schools.

National Academy of Education

A third reform group hopes to publish its report in 1982 or 1983. Stephen K. Bailey, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and past president of the National Academy of Education, had been working with three colleagues and a 12-member advisory panel for nearly two years to examine the value assumptions underlying American secondary education. They are completing a book manuscript titled *An Education of Value*. It will have three main parts: (1) The Essential Values, an explanation of American education's relationship to American values; (2) The Essential Curriculum, an analysis of course content and scholastic standards; (3) The Essential Conditions, a setting forth of needed changes in learning conditions to sustain the curriculum and the standards discussed in Part 2.

NASSP and NAIS

At a Cambridge address around the corner from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a former dean of that institution is conducting another study of high schools. Theodore Sizer heads a team of 15 researchers who expect to publish their reports in late 1983 or early 1984. According to current plans, there will be three types of publications: (1) a collection of historical essays analyzing the forces in and around education that have shaped the development of high schools, especially since the 1940s; (2) a report on intensive field studies in 14 public and private high schools; and (3) a plan with concrete recommendations designed to improve the quality of what Sizer calls the "basic educational transaction between teacher, student, and subject." Needed improvement depends, Sizer believes, on "shared sense of institutional mission (ethos)" and agreement about the specific educational purposes of high school.

Sizer expects to spread his ideas not only by means of published reports but also by working closely with the two sponsoring organizations, NASSP and NAIS, and by conversation with other professional organizations and interested individuals.

Carnegie Foundation

Carnegie's Study of the American High

School is big budget business, if only because a West Coast foundation has provided a kitty of \$2 million to help test whether high schools actually can be reformed along the lines the study expects to discover and recommend. Before getting to that stage, however, study director Paul Houts will be overseeing the following activities:

- A survey and synthesis of the research literature related to the topics under study
- Visits to exemplary schools
- Analysis of data from High School and Beyond, a study directed by James Coleman at the National Opinion Re-

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search Center in Chicago and from the Study of Schooling directed by John Goodlad at UCLA

- A survey in as many as 50 schools to determine what priority communities give to the various goals of secondary schooling

- Intensive observation of practice in 15 representative schools.

All of this work will come together in a 1983 Carnegie Report on the High School, followed by a program of grants given to schools across the country. Plans for these grants are not yet announced, but Carnegie officials want to support school improvement efforts that attack problems identified in the study and that emphasize:

- Clear definition of goals
- Curriculum improvement by setting priorities and by upgrading the *substance* of teaching and learning
- Inservice education of teachers for the strengthening of instruction
- Leadership development for the principal and the other key officials

- Collaboration between the school and a post-secondary institution.

ASCD

Whereas the Carnegie project will *conclude* with schools trying to reform, the 17 high schools cooperating in ASCD's experiment are starting at that point. ASCD Executive Director Gordon Cawelti notes an absence of consensus on the substance of general education for high school students. He, therefore, assumes no single definition of general education would ever be right for all schools, but he argues for a *determined* curriculum in each school rather than the haphazard patchwork that exists. Participating schools will spend 1981-82 planning curriculum change to be implemented during the subsequent three-to-five years. Teams from ASCD's 17 schools have met twice to exchange ideas and converse with the likes of Mortimer Adler, Harry Broudy, and Ernest Boyer. If it succeeds, the project will demonstrate that schools, when they put their minds and their money to the task, *can* develop a limited, coherent curriculum of general education for all students—a curriculum, Cawelti hopes, that will prepare students for life in the year 2000 and beyond.

If it succeeds . . .

There is the crux of all the reform activities. The big IF. There are, of course, successful high schools right now, both public and private. By their example, they challenge their less successful counterparts to emulate their success. Logic implies that even one successful high school means that all others can succeed, too, given the wherewithal.

When schools fail, the chief missing ingredient—the necessary but absent wherewithal—is will: the will to set goals, the will to say what is essential, the will to reduce or abandon what is not, the will to do what reform-oriented research dictates. Schools cannot be reformed by adding to them nor by rearranging what they do. Reform means saying no to claims that rob schools of the time, money, dedication, and energy they need to concentrate on teaching and learning.

None of the six national high schools reform projects will be able to give local communities the will to reform. They all give promise of providing an appealing vision of what communities ought to expect of their high schools. Will that vision be sufficient to produce reform?

We watch and wait. ■

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