

Letters

PROMOTING PROMOTIONAL GATES

ASCD is to be commended for performing an important service to the community by publishing *Equity for All Students: The New York City Promotional Gates Program* (May 1984) which focuses on some critical issues in education.

It was gratifying that the findings of the ASCD Task Force, which visited New York City, confirmed our own conclusions, as well as our efforts to modify and improve the program. I would like to comment on the Task Force Recommendations.

- We agree that retention in general

is not an effective tool for improving student achievement. In implementing the Promotional Gates all types of supportive programs were provided, including enrichment and cultural activities, as well as health and guidance services.

- We agree that policy development at the local level should include a thorough review of relevant research. The program was based on the research of Ronald Edmonds, who at the time was Senior Assistant for Instruction to then Chancellor Frank J. Macchiarola, who identified the five factors associated with school effectiveness. The New York City model was one of many attempts by school systems (Chicago, Richmond, the District of Columbia) to adopt more stringent standards for student achievement.

- We agree with the recommendation that a single criterion should not be used to make retention/promotion decisions. Initially one test score was used in the Gates Program. An appeals procedure was put in place to ensure that every possible consideration would be given to evaluate pupil achievement. As the program progressed, the comprehension sub-test of the California Achievement Test (CAT), the score of the Degrees of Reading Power Test (DRP), and a review of the score on the problem-solving aspect of the customized New York City Mathematics Test were used to measure growth. The Gates Program now has a procedure for making retention/promotion decisions which is not based on a single test score.

To date, all available evaluative data highlights the success of the students who participated in the Promotional Policy Program and confirm that devotion to this effort has proven to redirect and alter their lives.

We appreciate the opportunity for the New York City Schools to be repre-

sented in your publication along with academic scholars, educational innovators, and representatives of other school systems.

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NOT A QUESTION OF PUBLIC OR PRIVATE

Geoff Whitty (April 1984) discussed the problems of privatization of education with balance and insight. I propose a view from another perspective. The rise of public education in the western world in the mid to late 19th century came as a major reform movement. In most constituencies it was geared to patriotism and to commercial competition for New World resources. With these purposes it was necessary, even in democracies, to impose absolute moral, political, and national values on students. Universal education was the means by which they were imposed.

National educational programs were thus devised for institutional rather than humanistic purposes. Britain, Germany, France, and the United States were all seeking a greater share of wealth and power at home and from weaker lands abroad. Missionaries and colonels joined forces to cover the world, sometimes fighting the natives, often fighting each other. Pick any major war, as an example. The base of the process was universal literacy, built upon efficient public instruction, and led in significant part by graduates of the established private schools, perhaps more in some countries than in others, and backed by the religious and commercial establishments.

This process also provided the base for our great humanitarian movements and spurred cultural and artistic



growth. Good schools today, public and private, have maintained the best of the values and goals of earlier schools, and are producing some very good students—perhaps the same number as always. But there are twice the number of students now. Those who demean the present system by citing falling test scores and emphasizing the high functional illiteracy rates are not addressing the real problem, which is that today there are no clearly defined purposes for education as there were in the 19th century.

The goals a century ago were clear: universal literacy in order to read the Bible, military manuals, and balance

sheets, as well as good literature and political pamphlets. But the system set up for an illiterate population is inappropriate for a literate one.

We must look at 19th century education practices as a phase from which we have now emerged. The progenitors of that phase inspired remarkable success. The tight bureaucracies and inspectorial methods worked; the goal to produce minimum universal literacy was achieved with great dispatch—but it should not be surprising that a 19th century educational structure in a 21st century society is inadequate to produce an able and progressive citizenry.

Our goals today should be: 1) creative development of a minimum universal standard of living; 2) strong and positive initiative for world peace; 3) full employment; and 4) serious commitment to our cultural environment. Once these goals are set the appropriate educational system can be developed. The question, then, is not so much one of private or public education as it is one of harnessing our resources to adapt, update, and change.

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