

Participatory Management: Panacea or Hoax?

Replacing administrators by teacher committees will not solve management problems and will give teacher unions too much power in the management of our schools.

The administration of public education is in danger of being overthrown by a seductive new movement. An educational bandwagon supporting an expanded notion of collegiality and teacher empowerment is gaining momentum, and educators who should know better are climbing aboard.

The Carnegie Task Force Report

In January, 1985, the Carnegie Corporation gave impetus to this misguided movement when it established The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy to develop education policies to meet the economic challenges of the future. The Forum appointed a task force on Teaching as a Profession to examine specific education policy issues and report findings and recommendations. The task force report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, was published in May, 1986, accompanied by a media blitz of unprecedented proportions.

The Carnegie task force asserts that implementing the proposals in *A Nation Prepared* will revolutionize education. I contend that the report serves only the interests of teachers' unions

and their constituents. The Carnegie report recommendations would wipe out middle management and render school district administrators and board members powerless to control or manage school programs. The report's confused analysis of professionalism and its anti-management impli-

cations have already drawn criticism from an array of educational leaders. I intend to show that implementing the recommendations of the Carnegie report would result in a major deterioration of public education.

What the Report Recommends

A Nation Prepared calls for sweeping changes in education policy that, to be successful, "must be implemented swiftly and completely." The report warns of certain economic decline if such action is not taken.

The report places particular emphasis on an overhaul of the teaching profession. One of the nation's goals, the report states, must be to increase professional autonomy by having teachers control the management and the instructional programs of schools. Schools should be organized so that teachers have more authority to make important policy decisions, including the use of instructional methods and materials, the staffing structure, the organization of the school day, the assignment of students to grade or class, the hiring and use of support staff and consultants, and the allocation of resources available to the school (p. 68).

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Under this organization, a teacher committee, headed by a lead teacher, would replace the principal in running the school. Committee members would be demoted or removed by the lead teacher or by "governing authorities" if students did not meet the standards decreed by state and local authorities (p. 63). One proposed strategy would have teachers hire administrators to handle management details (and presumably fire them if those details were not handled to the teachers' liking), while teachers supervise the instructional program (p. 61).

Why the Recommendations Are Wrong

The Carnegie report supports management by teachers on the grounds that decentralization would decrease bureaucratic regulation in schools. But I contend that just the opposite would happen—increasing the number of decision makers in schools would create a need for additional procedures and policies, thus increasing the bureaucratic obstacles to school improvement. Even more important, no one would carry the burden of individual accountability. Twenty years of research on effective schools shows that successful schools require strong leadership from the principal; nevertheless, *A Nation Prepared* proposes taking away the authority of building administrators.

The task force also lost sight of the responsibilities the state gives to school board members and district administrators. These officials are specifically empowered to make policy and operate schools; they are held accountable for their actions. Presently, the participation of teachers in this process has limits and conditions and is subject to managerial discretion.

The authority of school boards and administrators is already over-regulated by state government and controlled by the contractual restrictions imposed by collective bargaining, largely as a result of efforts by state teacher organizations to decrease flexibility in decision making. The Carnegie report, however, would lead one to believe that *teachers* are stifled by

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regulation, when most state legislation affecting teachers is intended to enhance teacher welfare (Lieberman 1986).

The Carnegie report suggests that the strong management model of leadership found in most schools is better suited to business or government than to education. Elsberg (1986) refutes this idea: "There is no evidence or supporting rationale for maintaining strong leaders in business and industry but eliminating them in the schools. The Task Force members offer no research data to substantiate that the changes they propose would benefit the children" (p. 76). The task force apparently believes that schools can be run by committees composed of individuals without supervisory or administrative training—although other organizations require strong individual leadership and accountability.

These proposals ignore the results of previous attempts to develop teacher leadership in schools. Wiggins (1986) notes that, in Portugal during the 1970s, an attempt to have schools managed by faculty committees was a miserable failure. In reviewing the fail-

ures of past master teacher programs, Freiberg (1984) asserts that many teachers are not prepared for dramatic changes in the work environment. In addition, he states that such systems become too expensive, offering incentives for a very few while alienating the rest of the staff. Thus, it is likely that many teachers would resist the changes proposed in the Carnegie report and others would become disenchanted on realizing that they cannot assume the higher-level positions. Elsberg (1986) adds that the Carnegie report in effect concedes that a committee of teachers would need to hire administrators, because they themselves would not have the expertise required to run a school and to exercise leadership.

Another danger inherent in adopting the Carnegie report's recommendations would be the elimination of individual accountability, which would adversely affect at least the following areas.

Teacher Evaluation. Under the present system of governance, the building principal is clearly the individual responsible for teacher evaluation. Under the cooperative endeavors proposed in *A Nation Prepared*, lead teachers or teacher committees would be responsible for evaluating the performance of all teachers in the building.

The Carnegie report and advocates of cooperative management propose "collective accountability" for student performance: the entire school staff works collaboratively and takes collective responsibility for student progress. But how could anyone ever prove that a decline in student performance was due to collective teacher incompetence rather than external, uncontrollable factors? School boards would never be able to show that individual teacher incompetence was a contributing factor in lower student achievement. Moreover, how could there be any continuity of leadership if committee members were, as the report recommends, removed or demoted because standards were not met?

A Nation Prepared states that lead teachers, who would derive their authority primarily from the respect of

their professional colleagues, would be responsible for recommending dismissal, subject to established procedures (p. 58). It seems highly unlikely that teachers who are being rated (and occasionally dismissed) would continue to have collegial feeling for those who exercise this authority. Moreover, to whom would the teacher accused of incompetence grieve? The union representative for that school might very well be the lead teacher recommending dismissal. Since union strength depends upon avoiding controversy within the ranks, problems of inadequate teacher performance would never be adequately resolved when the result might be a member-versus-member conflict.

Parent Problems. Under the organization proposed by the Carnegie task force, parents might be forced to appeal to union officials to resolve a building level problem involving their child, since administrators would no longer be available. A teacher union proposal requiring parents to grieve a teacher's action, as proposed in state level contract boilerplate, might become a reality.

Collective Bargaining. The disappearance of middle management un-

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der these proposals would also undermine the effectiveness of the management team in collective bargaining. Typically, principals are best able to explain why a particular contract demand might restrict their ability to manage the school effectively. Without middle management recommendations concerning proposed contract language, it would be difficult to manage the bargaining process or administer the completed contract.

The implementation of a collective bargaining contract calls for principals to be consistent, to act fairly, and to enforce its provisions equitably. School boards and superintendents need school level administrators who will ensure the safety of the students and the integrity of the curriculum. In a school system based on the recommendations of the Carnegie report, the bargaining tables would be turned, with the union considering district and community proposals for educational changes in schools dominated by unionized teachers.

Reaction to the Report

Since the publication of *A Nation Prepared*, a broad range of educational leaders have published reactions to the report. Early responses ranged from cautious support for some of the proposals to charges that the proposals are unrelated to the realities of the American educational system. The range of responses narrowed when the proposals on teacher leadership and decision making were considered. Excluding those sponsored by teacher union leaders, the early reviews agreed that the Carnegie Task Force went too far (perhaps manipulated by its union members) when it drafted the teacher leadership proposals.

But despite this critical reception, the report began to exert influence on developments in education. First the New York Board of Education agreed to a new contract that gave teachers the right to change board policy if a majority of teachers in any one building agreed. Then, effective July 1, 1987, the Rochester, New York, school system announced an increase in teacher salaries of over 52 percent, together

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with "real teacher control," as the Carnegie task force recommended. The *New York Times* saluted the Rochester superintendent and the union president as saviors of education and implied that there was national interest in what they had accomplished.

Exactly what they had accomplished soon came to light. In a revised draft of the Career in Teaching Plan, which was incorporated into the Rochester master agreement, the section on governing states: "The Career in Teaching Plan shall be directed by the program's Governing Panel. The 7-member Governing Panel will be composed of four (4) members appointed by the Rochester Teachers Association, and three (3) members appointed by the Superintendent of Schools. Teacher members of the Governing Panel—as well as teacher members of the PAR Panel—shall be considered Senior Teachers (Level IV). The document continues, "Decisions of the Panel shall require a vote, by secret ballot, of 5 to 2 or greater majority."

This language should be objectionable to boards of education and administrators for two reasons. First, it gives the union the right to pick a majority of the members of a committee who are to "structure career op-

tions and incentives for current and prospective teachers in the Rochester Public Schools, as well as to enhance their practice, compensation, and opportunities for leadership in instruction and profession-related matters." This panel "will select the Senior Teachers" and will "monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of Senior Teachers. Concerns about the plan may be appealed to the Governing Panel."

This language is also objectionable because it violates a major tenet of collective bargaining, which is that management must preserve the right to manage and make decisions. Requiring a 5 to 2 vote by the Governing Panel in effect gives the union veto power over the decision-making process and restricts management from taking appropriate action.

The Rochester agreement goes on to consider "Local Governance and Shared Decision Making." This section of the contract provides that "a faculty Building Committee—composed of the RTA faculty representative and no more than four teachers elected by the faculty in the building—would meet with the school principal to discuss and review local school practices, problems, and all other questions relating to instruction and school operations. Decisions of the Building Committee would be binding unless vetoed by the Building Principal, in writing, within five (5) school days subsequent to the time of the decision. The Building Committee may, by unanimous vote, submit the veto to a referendum by the school staff. A veto override would require a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote by the voting members of the school's Association Bargaining Units."

And finally, on January 10, 1988, an article in *The New York Times* stated: "The Dade County Public Schools have turned the running of 32 schools over to teams that include teachers and parents. . . . The position of assistant principal has been eliminated at four schools. The \$40,000 that would have been spent on each of these salaries is being used to pay for after-school programs, teaching supplies, and teachers' aides" (Fiske 1988).

Forgotten Lessons

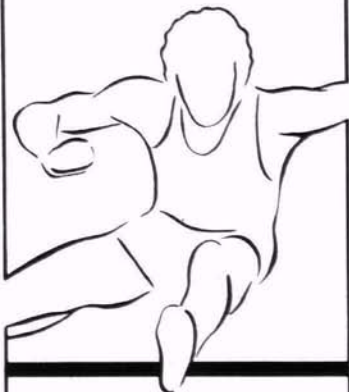
In the early days of collective bargaining, naive superintendents and boards of education were conned into giving up much of their authority. Since that time, have experience and association workshops made our leadership wise in the ways of labor negotiations? Apparently not. Susceptible superintendents and professors are again giving credence to a stratagem that has the backing of powerful interests seeking more power.

Proposals that replace administrators with committees not only run counter to effective schools research, they could create a nightmare of mismanagement in our schools. State and national administrative associations must act now to inform their members and friends of the damage these proposals could cause if they continue to spread from school district to school district. Successful reform of the teaching profession cannot be found in union-wrapped "all or nothing" deals like that proposed by the Carnegie Foundation. □

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