



Goals for Our Schools

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THE ADVISORS of the White House Conference who are concerned with the subject of what our schools should accomplish fully realize that they are confronting the invisible issue which lies at the heart of most controversies about public education today. Fundamentally the question facing the schools and the public is a simple one: Should the schools attempt to teach only the skills of the mind, or should they be held responsible for health programs, vocational training, recreation, and a whole host of activities which are demanded of most modern school systems?

Back three hundred years ago the country's earliest schools taught children chiefly to read and to cipher. But gradually—and with increasing momentum during the past twenty-five years—our schools have become institutions which help to encourage almost every human characteristic deemed worthwhile by the community. How far should our schools go from one extreme to the other? This is a question which has been endlessly debated ever since the time of Aristotle, who said: "All people do not agree in those things they would have a child taught, both with respect to improvement in virtue and a happy life; nor is it clear whether the object of it should be to improve the reason or rectify the morals. From the present mode of education we cannot determine with certainty to which men incline, whether to instruct a child in what will be useful to him in life, or what leads to virtue, or what is excellent; for all these things have their separate defenders."

Taken part by part the fundamental question of what the scope of our modern schools should be sounds familiar. Should the schools teach children to drive automobiles? Should there be courses in typewriting? How many of the thousands of trades in the United States should a school attempt to teach? Should the schools attempt to teach moral and spiritual values? Should there be programs designed to encourage good citizenship? Should the schools emphasize the

Three R's more? Are there too many "frills" in modern education? All these questions of course go back to the original problem of defining the job of the public schools in the first place.

American schools are still trying to do everything they did fifty or a hundred years ago, but in addition they have acquired an almost limitless list of other duties. A modern public-school system in a fair-sized city often offers a catalogue of courses and activities a half-inch thick. Such a school system generally includes in its list a liberal arts program which has changed little over the years, and courses in the sciences which if the teachers are on their toes have to change almost every month. On top

of the academic program, and under it, and on all sides of it are courses in the operation of machine tools, in cooking, in child guidance, and in almost every kind of knowledge that one can imagine to be useful to anyone. Apparently nothing escapes planners of school programs. Courses in international relations, the avoidance of alcoholism, and the art of happy family living vie with aviation mechanics and salesmanship.

IT is tempting to be satirical about the growth of school offerings until one remembers that almost every subject in a school catalogue is there as a result of a specific public demand. Professional educators have often been accused of an excess of ambition in expanding the scope of education, but the records of most schoolboards will back up the contention that it is the public which has forced the adoption of most new activities. It is easy to argue in favor of a "balanced school program," but it is difficult to say that it is not necessary to

Education Has Many Purposes

ASK A GROUP of people what are the proper goals of education and you will come up with almost as many goals as people you query. Recently during a citizens' meeting on education in Stamford, Connecticut, a blackboard was filled with the goals those present considered important. Here, as listed in "The Connecticut Report," a book about the Connecticut Fact-Finding Commission on Education by Fred M. Hechinger, to be published by Macmillan, are some of the educational goals which the Stamford citizens listed on their blackboard:

- To prepare young people for a career.
- To teach a man how to think.
- To make it possible for people to get along with one another.
- To enable a person to look up important information when he needs it.
- To develop good taste in the things a person does outside his job.
- To develop the kind of interests and enthusiasm that will enable a person to put his leisure time to good use.
- To teach a person how to use the English language proficiently.
- To teach a man how to listen.
- To enable people to know how to run a home intelligently.
- To teach a man how to keep up with the news, how to read a newspaper or a magazine, how to appraise the news, and how to tell which columnists or commentators are reliable.
- To prepare young people for travel.
- To be a success.
- To acquaint a man with ways in which people climb the ladder of success.
- To prepare young people for bringing up children of their own and for assuming family responsibility.
- To develop spiritual and moral values.
- To know something about human experience and the course of history.
- To be able to make moral judgments.
- To give a child a strong mind and body.
- To develop to the fullest whatever possibilities or potentialities a human being may have.

teach youngsters something about driving automobiles. The enormous variety of subjects offered by a modern school system makes sense when one relates it to the enormous variety of the student body in an age when almost literally all children go to high school. The problem of establishing priorities both for the student's time and the taxpayer's money becomes staggering in the complex school systems of today. Almost as great a problem is that of guidance—the process of helping a student to choose a correct diet from the great educational cafeterias which are springing up.

To a rather dangerous degree arguments about education sometimes degenerate into a caricature of the ancient battle between the "liberals" and the "conservatives," with the "liberals" advocating that the schools be given more and more money to do everything while the "conservatives" argue that education is a fine thing but all you need is a good teacher on one end of a log and an apt pupil on the other.

IT would of course be much easier to answer questions concerning the purpose of the schools if, like the caricatures, these questions involved all-or-nothing answers, but almost always one can answer only in terms of degree. Should the schools concern themselves with moral and spiritual values? Certainly one cannot say No—every individual and every institution must concern itself with moral and spiritual values. But if one says Yes some people envisage schools which attempt to become churches. Surely the churches and the families of the students have the primary responsibility for encouraging moral and spiritual values and surely the schools should help. But to what degree should they help? What emphasis should be placed on moral and spiritual values? How can the schools emphasize the importance of religion without getting involved in sectarian controversies?

In addressing themselves to basic questions of this kind the members of the subcommittee on school goals obviously are not attempting to provide definitive answers which every community in the nation is supposed to fall upon with relief. They are instead trying to clarify the issues and to delineate certain broad areas of agreement which they hope can serve as bases for constructive action. Only in this way can the other problems to be discussed at the White House Conference be solved. For how can the questions of our school-building needs and of school finance be answered until there is agreement on what the people want the schools to do?

Efficiency and Economy

By HOWARD DAWSON, *director of Rural Education Service, National Education Association.*

IN the day of the automobile we are still perpetuating in our country too many school systems which are reminiscent of oxcart days. In almost every state there are a great many schoolchildren who are getting an inferior education for their parents' tax dollars, and this skimpy educational diet for millions of American boys and girls is not only the result of our trying to buy education for them at cut-rate prices but it is also the result of uneconomical and outmoded organization. Therefore one topic of discussion at the coming White House Conference on Education will be concerned with the problem of "In What Ways Can We Organize Our School Systems More Efficiently and More Economically?"

There are some ideals of efficiency and economy in our schools which have been gathered together by means of hundreds of research studies on this problem. Here is a brief summary of these ideals:

In our high schools the best proportion of teachers to pupils has been found to be twelve full-time teachers to every 300 pupils. There is evidence that gains in both economy and efficiency have been made as such a pupil enrollment reaches 700 pupils, but there is little or no evidence that anything is gained by having an enrollment of over 1,000 pupils in any high school.

In elementary schools a good proportion is 175 pupils to seven teachers for a six-grade elementary school provided there is at least one teacher for every one of the six grades. Improvements in economy and efficiency can be obtained as long as the school reaches no greater a size than 300 pupils and twelve teachers.

In an entire school district there should be at least 1,200 pupils and forty teachers in order for its schools to operate efficiently and economically. Gains in economy and efficiency can be expected up to the point at which 10,000 pupils are included in the same school district under the same administrative unit, but any greater growth in the numbers of teachers and pupils generally results in a loss of efficiency and economy.

Such standards as these are likely to

frighten many people. These people say that such standards are unattainable in areas where the population is sparse and scattered. But it is exactly the problem of attaining such standards which should be discussed at the White House Conference, for it can be said categorically that many of the problems of public education cannot be solved unless individual schools and school districts are properly organized. For unless school districts are properly organized the whole problem of financing education cannot be solved. Neither can the problem of the current teacher shortage or the problem of how many school buildings are needed throughout the country.

Here are some examples of the basic troubles that are inherent in school districts which are too small:

Small schools cost the parents of pupils more than they should. For example, in one Midwestern state the cost-per-pupil in small elementary schools is \$319 as compared with the \$178 cost-per-pupil in the same state's metropolitan elementary schools; and in the same state the cost-per-pupil in high schools having less than thirty pupils is \$805 as compared with the \$264 cost-per-pupil for high schools in the same state's first-class cities.

Small schools offer too narrow a curriculum to their pupils. For example, a recent study in Oklahoma re-

FRASER YOUNG'S LITERARY CRYPT NO. 637

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 637 will be found in the next issue.

ABCDEFGHIHF KCLFM PQX

DSMGCL ESBHFOM.

RETOFG XFBBZMCB.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 636
Many a treasure besides Ali Baba's is unlocked with a verbal key.

—HENRY VAN DYKE.