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THE FRUSTRATIONS OF PROGRESS.

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MANY CHANGES HAVE BEEN EFFECTED IN THE POSTURE, PURPOSES, AND PROGRAMS OF AMERICAN PUBLIC EDUCATION DURING THE LAST 15 YEARS. NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE STILL MANY PERPLEXING PROBLEMS TO BE SOLVED. WHAT IS NEEDED IS A PRACTICAL PROGRAM ADVANCED BY POSITIVE LEADERSHIP. SIX RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A PROGRESSIVE AGENDA IN EDUCATION WHICH DEMAND ATTENTION FROM EVERY SCHOOL ARE--(1) RENEWED EMPHASIS ON PRESCHOOL EDUCATION, (2) CONCENTRATED ATTENTION ON REDUCING THE ISOLATION OF THE SCHOOLS, (3) COORDINATED WORK-STUDY PROGRAMS FOR JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, (4) PRESERVICE AND INSERVICE TEACHER TRAINING WITH EMPHASIS ON SPECIAL PROGRAMS FOR INNER-CITY SCHOOLS, (5) INCREASED EMPHASIS ON INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION AND SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING, AND (6) NEW EFFORTS DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE RACIAL INTEGRATION. THIS PAPER IS AN ADDRESS PRESENTED BEFORE THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS (ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY, FEBRUARY 21, 1968). (MM)

THE FRUSTRATIONS OF PROGRESS*

An Address by Harold Howe II
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These are as difficult times as any described by Thomas Paine. They try the souls of those responsible for American foreign policy, for the American economy, for the life and vitality of American cities.

They are equally trying times for those responsible for American schools. From an unobtrusive position in the wings, educators have been yanked to center stage and, without rehearsal, cast in major roles for a social drama that is being acted while it is being written. They receive prompting from every side on how they should read their lines. Books and articles announce the failure of city schools, enthusiastic reformers suggest that private industry should run education, and parents and students proclaim their disillusionment with the schools and with those who operate them. Political officials from Senators and Congressmen to local aldermen regularly view with alarm and only occasionally point with pride. Special interest groups organized for every conceivable purpose from principle to profit to prejudice shout for educators to adopt this or that nostrum, confident that each will restore the health of public education. Meanwhile the racial crisis and the urban crisis interact with each other and point the finger of failure at the schools of the central city.

Yet I am not at all sure that the performance of American schools in the recent past justifies the blanket condemnation regularly directed at

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*Before the Annual Conference of the American Association of School Administrators in the Atlantic City Auditorium, Atlantic City, New Jersey, 9:30 a.m. Wednesday, February 21, 1968.

them, or that the record indicates that someone else should run the schools. A partial list of differences between public schools today and those of about 15 years ago suggests how far we have come in that time:

-- Of all the children attending fifth grade in 1950, only 57 percent went on to graduate from high school; of those in fifth grade in 1960, about 72 percent completed high school; those in fifth grade today will do even better.

-- In 1950, the schools in a major portion of the country were segregated by law; today that form of segregation is illegal and considerable progress has been made in eliminating the dual school system. In addition, we have begun to attack those forms of racial isolation that lie beyond the law but within the conscience of just men.

-- In 1950, we were spending an average of $209 for each pupil in our public schools, from all sources--local, State, and Federal; today--calculating the figure in dollars of equal purchasing power--we spend an estimated $434, a 108 percent increase.

-- Fifteen years ago, our city school boards were either relatively unaware of the special problems of the poor, the unsuccessful, and the nonconforming, or they chose to ignore those problems. Today every city school board in the country has brought these problems out from under the table and put them on its agenda.

-- In the 1950's local, State, and national leaders viewed the schools only as adjuncts to society--nonproductive services to be provided while the serious work went on beyond them and outside of them. Schools were accepted as local expressions of what the

most vocal citizens wanted for their children, and if those citizens seemed to want schools that reinforced the opportunities of fortunate children and denied opportunities to the sons and daughters of the unfortunate, so be it. Today, leaders at every level regard our schools as central to the solution of the deep, abiding problems of American society. In every State and community they have accepted for themselves the job of making the schools serve all the children of all the people--a task which schools celebrated in theory in 1950, but ignored in practice.

These changes in the posture, purposes, and programs of our schools stem from a variety of influences. Some, such as the civil rights movement, were broad social forces that acted on the schools as on every other aspect of our society. Others, such as the Supreme Court's Brown vs. Board of Education decision or the dramatic outpouring of Federal aid to education, came from the Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary branches of our central government.

President Eisenhower's National Defense Education Act of 1958 broke the ice for Federal aid to education; President Kennedy awakened the conscience of the Nation to the special needs of its poor citizens and their children; and President Johnson has mounted an extraordinary series of educational policies and programs that he regards as his proudest achievement--a view that history will almost surely confirm. Some of you here today have had a major responsibility for bringing about these changes in our schools through your own initiatives as well as through your imaginative use of new resources provided by the Federal Government.

The processes of social change are never pleasant for those who have to manage them while being tossed about by them, and the changes in our schools have involved you in controversy and difficulty. The processes of change have made your jobs less manageable and forced you deeper into that social revolution which we must moderate and direct as well as nourish if "equality of opportunity" is to be anything more than a phrase. And every one of these changes, instead of filling us with a sense of progress and a rightful pride in what we have accomplished, has called attention to new and perplexing problems. They have raised the expectations and the voices of those Americans who formerly accepted second-class citizenship; they have brought rivalries among local, State, and Federal officials; and they have brought the schools before the people and the press, subjecting educators to a quite unaccustomed, searching examination.

Both dissent and public scrutiny are vital to the operations of democracy, and both are necessary concomitants of the public official's accountability to the people.

And yet it seems to me that we have more critics and mourners than we need, too many who assert the American problem and not enough who assert the signs of progress toward the American dream. There is a spirit abroad in the Nation today which threatens the hope implicit in the changes we are going through and in the uncomfortable effects those changes produce. It is a spirit of discouragement, of placing so much emphasis on the malaise in our society, by pointing out the discontent and discord within it, that we may miss what I believe to be a central point: <u>that our social problems stem not from total failure but from partial success</u>.

Look at the record of the last decade. At long last, on a number of domestic fronts, America is on the way to a just society. After ignoring the job for 100 years or more, we now recognize that we must rebuild and reorganize our metropolitan areas and particularly our core cities. After ignoring racial discrimination for more than 100 years or pretending that it did not exist, we have admitted to ourselves and to the world that this shameful injustice permeates our social institutions, and we are about the business of attacking it in every one of its manifestations. We admit, now, that the American public school, in which we took so much pride, in large part offered opportunity only to those who already had it, and we are moving to redress that wrong.

I offer these hopeful remarks about our society and our schools not in any attempt to turn away the critics' wrath with Sunday School optimism, but because I believe there is reason to take heart in the midst of our troubles. Can anyone argue that we were more just or more honest when our minorities were effectively segregated and quiescent, when our poor were suffering in unrecognized silence, when our college students were more interested in campus frivolities than in facing the realities of the world?

The fact is that in a few short years we have launched an attack on all those aspects of America which diminish Americans. These ancient enemies die hard, and their death brings the uncertainty, disruption, and doubt with which we live today, particularly in our cities. To turn this disruption and doubt into a sense of purpose and progress is the key job in America today. It will be accomplished by a combination of positive leadership and a practical program advanced by that leadership. In the schools each

superintendent has an obligation to offer his city, his county, his State a constructive response to the violence, hate, frustration, and suspicion our social revolution has awakened.

To provide such a response, the superintendent will need a program. Let me recommend one. But before I do that, let me mention a general principle that must inspire any program for educational renewal addressed to our pressing problems. It is the principle of "critical mass." Borrowed from physics and translated into an educational context, this concept calls for a focus of all those human and material resources necessary to produce major educational improvement--to make a difference. It suggests that any amount of resources short of the critical mass will fail to produce measurable change. Perhaps more important, it implies that human and financial resources must zero in on a particular problem, not be dispersed generally through every school in the uncertain hope of over-all improvement.

In effect the idea of critical mass says to us educators: "Select your priority problems, those you must solve first in order to avoid disaster. Concentrate your resources upon them and be willing to let other matters go if necessary, while you focus on the most pressing needs."

This is the message built into the great Elementary and Secondary Education Act passed by the 89th Congress and renewed by the 90th. It says to each of 22,000 local education agencies: "Here is some money for a special high priority purpose--to build success in school for the young people from America's least fortunate families, to make the schools as much a ladder to success in life for these children as the schools are for children from fortunate families."

You and I have been at this job for two years now. Although we cannot claim success, we can point to progress. Indeed, if we had been realistic about it in the beginning, we never would have expected success in two years' time. Human beings change slowly and human institutions like our schools even more slowly. But we can claim to have learned a thing or two from our successes and our failures. We have a clearer view of the programs the schools must mount if they are to do their share in making our cities healthy again and their share in rescuing the underprivileged people of America.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Americans have only one defect--they have a passion for sudden achievement." How can we put that passion to work realistically? How should we concentrate our resources in the years ahead?

Here are six recommendations which experience now tells us need attention from every school.

First, renewed emphasis on preschool education. Dr. John H. Fischer of Columbia Teachers College has summarized the case for preschool education as follows:

> There is substantial evidence that the level of intellectual capability young people will achieve at 17 is already half-determined by the age of four, and that another 30 percent is predictable at seven years. This is no ground for believing that a child's academic fate is sealed by his seventh birthday, but it means that any community that seriously wants to improve its children's opportunities will start them to school early. In terms of sheer economy, it can

be shown that the earlier the investment in systematic intellectual development is begun, the greater will be the rate of return.

If this statement be true--and it is supported by exhaustive research--it is clear that wisdom in the use of our resources for education warrants a nationwide stress on school experience for four-year-olds and perhaps for younger children. And in embarking on such a course, it seems to me we should focus on offering opportunities for early learning to disadvantaged children--those whose homes deny them the educational background that middle-income homes provide. For these children a school system without a kindergarten is a denial of opportunity. Our planning should guarantee that ten years from now every four-year-old in America attends a school specially set up for his needs.

The second program-component in need of concentrated attention is that of reducing the isolation of the schools. Youngsters spend only six hours a day in school, five days a week. For better or for worse they continue to learn during the other 12 waking hours, and unless these other 12 hours reinforce school work, or at least do not militate against it, even the finest school and the finest staff can fail to increase a youngster's achievement.

And yet it seems to me that the American public school--particularly in poverty neighborhoods--has become an increasingly separatist endeavor, fencing out the community and assuming that learning goes on only during the school day, inside the fence which surrounds the asphalt playground and the building with the wire mesh windows.

Education occurs on both sides of that fence. Schools must ally themselves with all the other forces in the community that advance or retard learning, taking advantage of the beneficial influences and seeking to moderate the harmful ones.

In a youngster's early years, this means seeking alliances with the parents, developing arrangements to give them some voice in the conduct of the schools their children are required to attend. Especially in the big cities, it means some degree of school district decentralization--but with a hard-minded recognition that decentralization involves more than simply shifting bureaucrats around to different offices. It requires that the local administrator be given more leeway in tailoring his school to the character of the community, welcoming the contributions of parents and helping parents understand what kinds of contributions they can make. It calls not only for letting parents see how the school is run and explaining to them its policies and programs, but also converting the school into a community resource that offers adults instruction in a range of subjects, whether for practical use or leisure enjoyment. It means making the school a center for the organization of community activities, whether the activity be a benefit cake-sale or a voter-registration drive. It means a school whose doors are open nights, weekends, and summers. It means alliances between the school and community agencies of all kinds. For the superintendent it means less isolation from the Mayor's office and from the Community Action Agency and a new willingness to work jointly with these and other local authorities.

As a third point I recommend on behalf of junior and senior high school students that we end the student's isolation from the world in which he should spend his adult life if the school can help him to reach it: the world of work. Schools must seek the contributions of employers, finding out from them how the curriculum can be supplemented or altered to give graduates the best possible chance for success outside of school. We should explore the possibilities for more work-study arrangements and we should recognize that work outside the school is a learning experience. We must find a way to let a student gain credit toward graduation for his part-time job, even if this means changing the State law. Many an employer has finer facilities for practical work--office machines, scientific equipment, technical devices--than most schools, and the right part-time job can refine academic ability and develop saleable skills. Schools could bring in specialists from private industry to teach part-time in the classroom, seek the advice of local businessmen on the skills most in demand, and offer their students help in job placement. The crucial element is the initiative of the school superintendent in combining school work with work outside of school as part of an education. Dropouts will return to school if it means the chance for a job and some money in their jeans. If universities can have extension centers off their campuses to serve all kinds of people, it would seem reasonable for schools to maintain extension services among the city's employers. The Superintendent of Schools who has typically put vocational education low on his agenda must bring it to the top. He needs a better answer than he has now to the question: "What does the school do for the 80 percent of its students who do not go on to get a B.A. degree?"

A fourth element that I believe we must emphasize is the training and retraining of teachers. More than anything else, I am convinced, disadvantaged children need specially prepared teachers: a new breed of professional who understands how to teach children by starting with what they can do and understand rather than confronting them with tasks which automatically make them failures. At the same time, this teacher must have high expectations for children and infinite patience in seeing those expectations realized.

Schoolmen must take a much more active role in shaping future teachers. Just last month, the Minneapolis public schools announced a joint program with 35 colleges and universities to develop a better teacher-training program for inner-city schools. Assistant Superintendent Nathaniel Ober outlined the motivations underlying the new partnership in this way:

> Teachers need to be trained to communicate with and respond to children with inner-city problems so that they won't come into the classroom speaking as foreigners. We also are concerned as a school system with having more to say about teacher education. It is absolutely essential to join as partners (with colleges and universities) rather than just receive what comes for us. We want to move ahead and work toward this kind of cooperation rather than sit back and complain about the teachers we sometimes get.

Colleges and universities do not have to live with the products of their teacher-training programs; school administrators do, and they often wind up being criticized for the inadequacies of teachers they had no part in training. Despite all the research on the culture of poverty that has come out of the universities, I suspect most education faculties are vastly

more ignorant of the problems that poverty produces in the classroom than any ghetto-school teacher who has been on the job for two years. It is time that school superintendents stopped taking lumps for the failures of others and took the lead in preventing these failures.

While taking more of a hand in training the teachers of the future, we must also devote attention to retraining those we already have. Of all the resources we have for this job, the one that seems to me least used is one that each of your school districts already possesses: its successful teachers of the disadvantaged. You can begin using your outstanding teachers now to train others--not through lectures or inservice courses scheduled at the day's end when the teacher is physically and emotionally drained, but through flexible arrangements that permit your less experienced or less capable teachers to observe and work with those who are most experienced and most capable. Teaching is like tennis. You learn to do it better by doing it in company with someone who is better at it than you are. This is a basic principle of the Teacher Corps. Any city that wants to can start its own Teacher Corps among its own teachers.

The fifth program-component that we ought to stress is individualized instruction. Though we have claimed that enabling the individual student to succeed is the objective of our schools, our daily administrative practices claim the reverse: our marking system represents a group judgment, a comparison of one student to the 30 others in his class rather than an evaluation of his achievement in relation to his own abilities. Our classes group children according to their birthdays, despite our knowledge

that chronological age has an extremely modest bearing on performance and even less on ability. We must remove the strait jacket that such arrangements impose on children and allow each to proceed at his own pace, neither holding back the gifted nor forcing the slow.

Contrary to a common misconception, Individually Prescribed Instruction does not require computers. The Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh pioneered this concept, using the Oakleaf school as its laboratory. Though Oakleaf is now turning to electronic data processing to handle paperwork, it originally depended wholly on clerks to evaluate student papers, reserving teachers for necessary tutoring work. IPI diagnoses each student's needs, prescribes a personal work plan at each step of his progress, and allows the student to set his own learning pace. The results so far are impressive: many students are performing two to four grade levels above the norm for their age, and the atmosphere of self-directed learning appears to boost attendance and virtually eliminate discipline problems.

Thirty schools are now using the materials developed through the Oakleaf experiment; 100 will use them next fall, and hundreds of others throughout the country have exhibited an interest in adopting them. Though final returns on IPI are not yet in, this technique appears to offer real hope for success with culturally-deprived youngsters as well as for improving the education of average and gifted students.

The sixth and last of my recommendations may be the hardest to achieve--racial integration of the schools. Whatever the difficulties, it is worth reaching for--and some school districts with courageous leadership from their superintendents and boards of education have achieved it.

We know that the success of a child is affected in no small measure by whom he goes to school with: that children learn as much from their classmates as from their teachers--maybe more; that a child's feeling about his chances for success in life are diminished by attending a segregated school. We know also that there is a strong connection between this feeling, this "self-image," and what he actually achieves in school.

We know that the Supreme Court of the United States has declared segregated schools "inherently unequal." We know that the Federal courts both North and South regard assignment of teachers on the basis of race as a discriminatory practice. We know that inferior segregated schools have been the door to second-class citizenship for millions of Americans these past 100 years.

Knowing all these things, how can we conceivably continue in comfort with segregated schools and at the same time profess that "all men are created equal" and that we are "one Nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all"?

The job of desegregation is more than just hard--it is grindingly, desperately tough. In smaller cities with less dramatic problems much can be achieved now. In our largest cities the task sometimes seems almost impossible. Any complete solution in those places is certainly years away, and finding it is the responsibility not just of the schools but also of employers, of State government, of city planners, and of a variety of other groups and agencies. Our immediate job as educators is to make sure that school desegregation remains on the agenda. Americans can and will respond to the idea in the old catch phrase: "We do the difficult every day, the impossible takes a little longer."

Each of you should have this matter before your board of education--not just for the sake of minority group children but for the sake of white children as well, and for the sake of a healthy community. In America there is no such thing as high quality, totally segregated education.

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It is my conviction that the six points I have dwelt on here will be fundamental characteristics of the best schools of the future. And this program can be acted upon now. If we care to do so, we can without delay apply the concept of the critical mass to the resources already available to us, and thereby make better use of those resources -- investing our human and material capital in the places where it will do the most good.

Yet there is no question in my mind that such a program opens the door to even more controversy than you are already engaged in. Putting a new emphasis on community involvement, on pre-school education, on individually prescribed instruction, on integration will puzzle some of your constituents and irritate others.

The question we all face is whether we have the nerve and the fortitude to bear the resentments, the frustrations of unmet hope, and the impatience for faster progress that continued change is bound to bring -- and at the same time to absorb the criticisms of those who say we are going too fast; or whether, feeling so threatened by criticism, those of us with leadership responsibility and economic security will tighten up, try to reverse the course of change, and so commit our Nation to a tragic confrontation between the haves and the have-nots in a land

where there is plenty for all.

As educators, we really have only one choice: the choice to accept the difficulties created by progress and to push on for more. The mood of discouragement continually celebrated by some can lead the rest of us to underestimate the distance we have already traveled toward a better society, as well as to overestimate how far we have still to go.

We are a long way from a perfect world--but I would maintain that the United States today is closer to being a just society than it has ever been, and that our puzzled and frustrated decade will make the years to come more manageable for the young Americans who will inherit the work we have begun.

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