

ED 031 797

EA 002 451

By-Allen, James E., Jr.

Federalism in Education--The Role of the Federal Government.

Pub Date 8 Jul 69

Note-11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Education Commission of the States (Denver, July 8, 1969).

EDRS Price MF-\$0.25 HC-\$0.65

Descriptors-\*Educational Finance, \*Educational Research, \*Federal Aid, \*Federal Government, \*Government Role, School Districts, State Federal Support, State Government, Urban Schools

Although State and local governments fill a strategic role in the area of education, the Federal government provides leadership in research and development and financial support. Federal financial support should be broadly allocated in three basic ways: (1) Designated block grants which give each State maximum flexibility, (2) categorical aids for the support of underdeveloped functions or special needs, and (3) research and development funds. States must commit themselves to a thorough overhaul of their own structures and practices in educational finance to meet future educational needs. A perspective which permits the overall appraisal of the needs and the progress of education is a unique feature of Federal participation in the educational system. The overriding mission of the Office of Education is to be a stronger advocate for change and relevance in education. (MLF)

ED031797

FEDERALISM IN EDUCATION -- THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT\*

Address by James E. Allen, Jr.  
Assistant Secretary for Education  
and  
U.S. Commissioner of Education

It is a particular pleasure to address the members of the Education Commission of the States. This is my first meeting with you since becoming United States Commissioner of Education a little more than two months ago, and while I am no longer a member of this organization, the perspective of my new position and its responsibilities have only served to reinforce my belief in the importance of the Commission.

It has always been my conviction that in the three-way partnership that characterizes our federalistic system of Government, the States hold the strategic position of power and that their exercise of this power is ultimately the most significant factor in determining the character and vitality of education in our Nation.

Your emphasis at this third annual meeting of the Education Commission of the States on partnership indicates your awareness of the necessary shape of our educational endeavor in the future, and the use of the word survival indicates your awareness of the desperate need to use fully the tremendous potential of this partnership.

---

\*Before the Annual Meeting of the Education Commission of the States, Denver Hilton Hotel, Denver, Colorado, Tuesday, July 8, 1969, 12:30 p.m.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

EA 002 451

It is my intention on this occasion to deal primarily with the role of the Federal level in this partnership, but as a matter of logic it seems to me necessary first to define generally the role of the local and State levels.

The primary role of the local government units in education is to make and carry out those decisions most intimately connected with the educational growth and development of the student; to determine what means should be used to meet standards; and to preserve and exercise the options in educational practice available for meeting special problems and special opportunities.

The role of the State is basically determined by the fact that the legal responsibility for the provision of educational opportunities is assigned to the States. To meet this responsibility, each State must set the standards and conditions wherein opportunities for quality education can be locally provided equitably and adequately everywhere within its borders.

What then is the role of the Federal Government?

It is my position that the role of the Federal Government in education is not to substitute for or take over in any sense the responsibilities and functions of the States and localities, but rather to provide support in whatever form is needed to enable them to carry out their tasks with maximum effectiveness.

The unique feature and obligation of Federal participation in education is that of perspective -- perspective which allows for the identification of those problems and needs that transcend State borders and thus require a broader approach; perspective which permits the overall appraisal of the needs and progress of education that can serve as a basis for the development of a nationwide strategy for the continuing improvement and renewal of the educational enterprise, and the marshalling of the resources to facilitate it.

Obviously, this matter of perspective is a factor in every aspect of Federal participation in education. From this perspective it is increasingly clear that a fundamental need of education is for the enhancement and renewal of the capabilities of our entire educational system. The exercise of the capabilities of local and State levels is seriously restricted by lack of commitment, inadequate finance, outmoded legal structure and administrative practices, and endless other encumbrances accumulated through years of a kind of patchwork growth of the education system.

The elimination of these restrictions on their capabilities must be the serious and immediate concern of the political and educational forces in the States and localities; but even with the complete removal of these restrictions it is obvious that the nature and the dimension of the present and future educational task exceed the capability of these levels of educational government.

It is, therefore, the Federal Government that must carry the major share of the responsibility for the enhancement and renewal of the capabilities of our educational system. This responsibility falls into two major areas of action.

The first is that comprising research and development, planning, demonstration and dissemination.

As I see the role of the Federal Government in this area, it is one of active leadership -- the setting of goals, the identification of special needs and problems, the search for solutions -- to provide practical answers and technical assistance for use at the State and local levels. Stronger leadership in this area has already been demonstrated with the initiation a few years ago of a major research role for the Office of Education and with the creation of Educational Laboratories, Research and Development Centers, and other activities in planning, research and evaluation. I shall announce in a few days further actions to strengthen the role of the Office of Education in this field.

The second major area for Federal action is that of finance.

The larger role in the support of education assumed by the Federal Government in recent years is one of the outstanding educational changes of our time and the further shaping of the role is one of the crucial issues now before us.

It is essential in shaping this further role to realize that Federal support is only a part of the whole question of how we are to finance education in our country.

As it now stands, we have no ordered system, but rather a hodgepodge that is inequitable, inefficient and inadequate. The conditions which reflect both the causes and the results of our "lack of system" are all too familiar, certainly to this audience:

- The unevenness of support that produces in one State only \$432 per pupil per year and in another State, at the other end of the scale, \$1140 per pupil, with equally varying levels of expenditure within States, and even within districts.
- The inequity in resource allocation that gives to our cities proportionately less for the proportionately greater demands of their special problems and needs.
- The wide variations in both tax base and assessment practices which result in unequal distribution of the burden of education costs among individuals and school districts.
- The instability of support stemming primarily from periodic tax rebellion and the uncertainty and delay of legislative funding that severely handicaps orderly planning and operation -- resulting in a most un-businesslike approach to one of the Nation's largest and most important businesses.

Certainly these are not the conditions that can characterize a system of basic financial support capable of meeting the vast educational needs of the decades ahead. Recognizing these conditions is nothing new. We have been discussing and deploring them for many years, but unfortunately it has been too much talk and too little action, and the action that has taken place has been mostly in terms of piecemeal correction and patching here and there. To continue to proceed in this fashion can only serve to delay the inevitable day when educators and political leaders alike must accept the need for a thorough overhaul of the financing of education.

All the circumstances surrounding education today indicate that the time is now and that if we persist in delaying, we shall have at best chaos, at worst disaster.

This kind of overhaul must begin with the States. Their position with respect to educational finance, as in most other aspects of education, is a strategic one.

While, as I recognized earlier, the States cannot, even under ideal internal circumstances, carry out the educational task alone, neither can the Federal Government be expected to continue indefinitely to compensate for the States' failures to correct conditions that limit the full exercise of their capabilities.

It is therefore imperative that the States give full commitment to a thorough overhaul of their own structure and practices and markedly accelerate their efforts to accomplish such things as strengthening their State education departments, eliminating inefficient school districts, updating school finance patterns, revising and simplifying education laws, raising and enforcing educational standards, initiating incentives for better school performance, etc.

Admittedly this is not an easy task because it means the kind of basic change, the departure from tradition, that always arouses a certain amount of fear and resistance. But this is an obligation that the States cannot escape both to maintain the power of their position and to function effectively as partners in a properly balanced system of federalism in education.

To help in achieving this kind of renaissance of the States was a primary motivation for the creation of the Commission, and I hope that you will use all your energy and influence to push for broad and rapid action at the State level.

The role of the Federal Government in education cannot be ultimately determined nor be fully effective until the States do put their own schoolhouses in order. This is not to say, however, that, as a practical matter, fuller financial participation by the Federal Government can await such a happy day.

While the increases in Federal participation that have already taken place are tremendous, they indicate in reality more ambition than substance, and their results might be compared with Mark Twain's description of the Platte River -- "a mile wide and an inch deep."

This is by no means to disparage the accomplishments of Federal aid for they have been substantial. Facts recently gathered by the Office of Education in a study of eleven cities and their metropolitan regions indicate that in fiscal year 1968, for the first time, Federal funds allocated to local school districts were instrumental in reducing the financial gap in funds available for education between large central cities and their suburbs. I don't think there is any question that programs such as Title I of ESEA are making an important difference in the quality and availability of education in core cities and poor rural areas of the country.



Nevertheless, the outstanding single fact today about Federal aid to education is its scarcity. There simply isn't enough of it. At the moment, that is an especially unfortunate fact of life. The existing budgetary restrictions are understandable, even though unpalatable. They are not, however, forever fixed and we must continue to press for full funding of present programs and to develop new legislative channels of assistance to the States and localities.

Whatever the timing may be, a great deal more Federal support is inevitable. By 1980, if not sooner, it is likely that the country will be spending \$100 billion a year on education, twice the present amount, and the Federal Government -- which collects two-thirds of all tax revenues -- obviously must bear a much more substantial share of the cost than at present. The educational requirements of the next decade would appear to justify a Federal sharing in the order of 25 to 30 percent of the cost of elementary and secondary education within the 1970's as compared with the present 8 percent.

For the most effective help to State and local school systems, this aid should, I believe, be broadly allocated by the Federal Government in three basic ways:

Designated Block Grants -- to help guarantee a minimum level of educational opportunity throughout the Nation and to support a broad range of educational programs at all levels. Such aid can be distributed to the States either as revenue-sharing or on a formula basis -- leaving to each State maximum flexibility to foster and support programs best suited to their needs.

Categorical Aids -- for the support of underdeveloped functions or special needs. The present emphasis upon aid for the handicapped, for the poor, and for strengthening State education departments are illustrations of this kind of needed Federal assistance. While certain of the present categorical programs will undoubtedly be consolidated or phased out, there will continue to be a need for this specialized and directed type of aid.

Research and Development Funds -- to enable the Federal Government to carry out its role of leadership in supporting and encouraging large-scale educational research and development activities, experimental schools, demonstration projects, dissemination systems, evaluation techniques, and training programs. Despite dramatic increases in funds for this purpose, less than one-tenth of one percent of total educational expenditure in this country is earmarked for Research and Development purposes. We should be moving toward a figure of at least five percent.

The Federal Government is increasingly acknowledging that it must bear a major share of the responsibility for the enhancement and renewal of the capabilities of our educational system and will, I believe, in the months and years ahead, accept fully this responsibility. This full acceptance constitutes a fundamental part of achieving an orderly system for the financing of education in our country. Again, however, I must emphasize that it is only a part, and that increased Federal participation can be fully effective only if it is accompanied by increased effectiveness at the State and local level.

The goal we seek then must be arrived at cooperatively so that the accommodations and arrangements at all levels will fit together in a pattern tailored to the changing educational requirements of our Nation.

The urgency that I ascribe to the need for reforms that will produce an adequate and stable system of financial support can perhaps best be summed up by saying that I believe that without such economic reforms educational planning will rapidly become a waste of time.

Spearheading the necessary movement to unite the educational and political forces in our country in an effort to bring about reforms is a leadership function that rightfully can be expected of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and of the Office of Education, and we are directing our attention to the best means of proceeding.

In conclusion then, I repeat my earlier statement that the shaping of the expanding role of the Federal Government in education is one of the crucial issues we face as a Nation. It is crucial not only because the Federal Government must bear a major share of the responsibility for enhancing and renewing the capabilities of our educational system, but also because the Federal Government has such a substantial role to play in alleviating the immediate financial plight of many States and localities, especially our urban centers -- a plight of such serious dimensions as to be classified as an emergency.

It is these two aspects of the Federal role that are guiding the emerging goals and plans of the Office of Education. To be a stronger advocate for change and relevance in education is our overriding mission, and it is my hope that this advocacy can be used to mobilize Federal action and support for meeting immediate emergency needs as well as for generating the new vitality that will ensure that the growth in education will be true advancement.

Knowing that education for the 70's and beyond must be developed through the independently exercised but closely shared responsibilities of the three levels of government, we in the Office of Education are trying to make certain that we will be prepared to participate effectively in the Federal-State-local partnership that holds not only our hope for "survival" but our hope for achieving the greatness in education which we know to be possible.

\* \* \* \* \*