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ABSTRACT

Research based on followup interviews with some "key actors" at the federal level about the most significant recent events in education identified five topics: the cutbacks in federal education spending, the deregulation and decentralization embodied in provisions of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA), proposed and de facto disestablishment of the Department of Education, and deemphasis of education as a national priority. Telephone interviews with the chief state school officers (CSSOs) of nine states centered on these five topics. State agencies were cutting back on a wide range of activities, and all were decreasing their staffs. Respondents generally viewed unknown or loose regulations as being worse than stringent regulations. Decentralization has led to maneuvering among state factions for control of block grants. Disestablishment and deemphasis have resulted in a communication breakdown between CSSOs and people in the Department of Education. Finally, the CSSOs predicted a decline in school improvement activities and a decrease in services targeted to the disadvantaged. The researchers conclude that, although the New Federalism will have long-term effects, it is educators' responsibility to minimize the effects of federal disengagement from education policy. (MLF)

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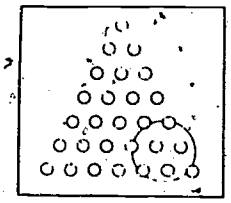

Cutbacks, Consolidation, Deregulation

How They Affect Public Education Agencies in the U.S.

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RESEARCH & EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE IMPROVEMENT NOTES

Cutbacks, Consolidation, Deregulation
How They Affect Public Education Agencies in the U.S.

Since Ronald Reagan was sworn in as fortieth president of the United States on January 20, 1981, he has taken a number of bold steps to realize his vision of an America revitalized by New Federalism. Nowhere, argues David. L. Clark, professor of education at Indiana University, have Administration efforts to advance the New Federalism been more successful than in education.

In order to gain an understanding of Administration education policy, David Clark and Laurence Iannaccone, professor of education at the University of California Santa Barbara, assisted by Mary Anne Amiot, a candidate for the doctor of education degree at Indiana University, interviewed several dozen "key actors" — policy makers, policy implementors, policy influencers, and policy analysts — in Washington, D.C., in spring-1981. Clark, Iannaccone, and Amiot drew on these interviews for presentations at the 1981 Far West Laboratory Summer Workshop, which was held in San Francisco on July 20-22 of last year. Subsequently, Clark and Amiot shared their findings with the education community at large in an article published in the December 1981 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*, "The Impact of the Reagan Administration on Federal Education Policy."

Federal Policy Moves

In their workshop presentations and article, Clark and Amiot discussed five key features of Administration efforts to redefine the federal role in education. They refer to these features as *the five D's*: ***diminution***, ***deregulation***, ***decentralization***, ***disestablishment***, and ***de-emphasis***. It is clear, says Clark, that the Administration means to disengage the federal government from education policy making.

This spring, Amiot, who is preparing a dissertation titled "The Reagan Administration's Impact on Educational Policy: An Analysis of the First Year and a Projection of Effects on Education," returned to Washington to talk with the same key actors who were interviewed in 1981. Amiot asked her informants to identify the most significant events for education that had taken place at the federal level in the year just past. Informants named five events: the education ***block grant*** that became law in August 1981 as Chapter 2 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA); de facto ***disestablishment*** of the U.S. Department of Education; ***deregulation*** and selective enforcement of remaining regulations; ***cutbacks*** in federal spending for education; and initiatives that emphasize ***exhortation*** over intervention.

The people with whom Amiot talked this spring said that the education ***block grant*** had been a major victory for the Administration for three reasons: First, it transfers leadership responsibility for education from the federal level to state and local levels, where Administration policy makers think it belongs. Second, it dismantles the categorical program apparatus that dominated federal education policy since the mid sixties. Third, it sends a clear signal, says David Clark, that "this Administration does not intend to engage in educational social interventions."

Although the Administration's proposal to replace the cabinet-level Department of Education with an independent Foundation for Educational Assistance has been stalled in Congress since late spring, Clark and Amiot maintain that de facto ***disestablishment*** is proceeding at a lively pace. As evidence, they note that the Department lost roughly one third of its career staff in the past year. Reassignment of remaining career staff and redefinition of Department priorities have isolated Department people from their contacts in Congress and from practitioners. Vacant slots have been filled by people who are deeply committed to the New Federalism.

The Administration's emphasis on ***deregulation*** has met some resistance. For example, both houses of Congress recently rejected the final administrative regulations proposed for Chapters 1 and 2 of ECIA. Despite setbacks, Clark maintains that "the important thing is the flow," which reverses the prevailing direction. In the past, Clark says, "enforcement was vigorous, and regulations were added." Now, enforcement is selective, and regulations are being withdrawn or weakened. "As long as the flow goes in the right direction," Clark argues, "the individual victories and defeats are not all that important." Clark credits the Administration for tenacity: "Even when a particular move

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is fought and forestalled temporarily, the same issue arises two or three months later."

In its push to balance the federal budget, the Administration gained Congressional support for substantial *cutbacks* in federal outlays for education. So far, forward funding has masked the effects of the cuts enacted in 1981. In Clark's view, the actual dollar amounts of the federal cutbacks are less important than their "differential impact." He notes that federal funds account for less than 10 percent of the total sum spent yearly on public education in the United States. He argues, however, that these relatively limited amounts of federal money provided the "margin of excellence" for many school districts. With that margin gone, Clark predicts that dissemination and school improvement activities will diminish.

Finally, the shift in focus of federal education efforts from intervention to *exhortation* is a necessary consequence of the other moves. Department officials want to replace policy, rules, and enforcement with encouragement, spotlighting, exhortation, and emulation. For the Administration, leadership is a matter of personal example.

State-Level Effects

Analysts of public education policy point out that the prime responsibility for public schooling in the United States rests with the states. To gauge the effects of federal moves over the past year at the state level, Amiot conducted telephone interviews in early June with the chief state school officers (CSSOs) of nine states. Amiot shared findings from these interviews at the 1982 Summer Workshop.

The states in Amiot's sample were chosen to represent the nine regions of the United States identified in a study by researchers from Harvard and M.I.T., who examined recent migration and population trends for their probable effects on school needs during the next decade. Every state in Amiot's sample met two other criteria as well: It had a reputation for strong educational leadership, and it was known for its sound educational programs.

The questions that Amiot put to chief state school officers centered on five topics that emerged in her Washington interviews this spring: the *cutbacks* in federal education spending, the *deregulation* and *decentralization* embodied in provisions of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act, proposed and de facto *disestablishment* of the Department of Education, and *de-emphasis* of education as a national priority. Amiot asked CSSOs how federal actions would affect the programs, policies, and regulations of the state education agency (SEA) that they headed. She also asked them to describe probable futures if the trend set in motion by the federal moves continued.

Cutbacks. According to Amiot, recent cutbacks in federal education spending affected all the states in her survey to some extent. She tracked a broad range of programs, and all were affected. However, few programs were totally eliminated. Moreover, the impact of federal cutbacks on individual states was uneven. Some states were affected more than others. Amiot hypothesizes that the strength of a state's economy is related to the impact that loss of federal funds will have on state education programs. But, she notes, government figures and forecasts suggest that the economic outlook for most states is gloomy. Only one of the nine states had been able to replace all the lost federal money with funds from state sources. That state had a strong economy, and its CSSO pointed out that education was a priority both for the state legislature and for the governor.

Every CSSO in Amiot's sample said that retaining staff was the first state-level priority. Many states were reducing expenses and cutting back on the services that they provided in order to do so. These states were eliminating out-of-state travel and trimming in-state travel budgets. As a result, they were "offering less technical assistance, doing less field work, cutting back on inservice; cutting back on evaluation, cutting back on monitoring." In short, state agencies were cutting back on a wide range of activities central to school improvement efforts of the past. In the last year and a half, one state education agency in Amiot's nine-state sample had lost roughly one quarter of its staff to the combined effects of federal cutbacks and state shortfalls. That staff cut was handled through attrition, but the effects on state agency manpower and morale were felt nonetheless. In short, none of the CSSOs with whom Amiot spoke reported adding or maintaining staff: "They all in fact did decrease."

Amiot says that most of the federal categorical programs consolidated in Chapter 2 provided what she and Clark call "the margin-of-excellence money." She points out that federal cuts will not cause state agencies to close their doors. But, they will lose "the leadership margin — the symbolism of school improvement, forward movement, and growth." Most of Amiot's respondents expressed a desire to maintain some kind of school improvement activities, but in most cases they thought they could do so only on a very small scale.

Deregulation. No chief was sure how deregulation would affect state-level policy. For one thing, Chapter 2 leaves the stated "purposes" of all twenty-eight programs that it consolidates still in place. For another, says Amiot, CSSOs "still have all the other rules and regulations to deal with." A recent Office of Management and Budget (OMB) circular raised the question of financial audits. Nevertheless, Amiot says, most of the CSSOs with whom she spoke expect to continue program audits, because their constituents "want them to." They feel that they have to "show taxpayers that state schools are increasing both in responsiveness and in excellence."

A few CSSOs in Amiot's sample voiced doubts about the intent of federal deregulation. Several explained deregulation as "backlash from the seventies." Others

expressed a certain rueful regret. "I never thought I would say that I wanted those regulations," one chief said, "but I do now." Many chiefs in Amiot's sample expected to replace federal regulations that had been withdrawn or rewritten during the past year with regulations of their own. CSSOs also wanted federal authorities to clarify the rules that remained. "Unknown or loose regulations are worse than stringent regulations," said one respondent. "The old rules were burdensome, but at least we knew what they were," said another. Only one of the nine state agencies represented by Amiot's informants had taken steps to eliminate state regulations that, as the CSSO put it, "in any way exceeded federal statute." CSSOs of the other eight states expected to "play by the book."

Decentralization. Amiot's findings suggest that consolidation and decentralization are having mixed effects. Since funds awarded to states under Chapter 2 are passed on to local education agencies (LEAs) by formula, only the large urban districts that received relatively large sums of federal desegregation assistance aid and some smaller but entrepreneurial districts that won various kinds of categorical program funds under the old competitive system will incur cuts that make them "losers." Since all LEAs receive some money under Chapter 2, most local districts can think of themselves as "winners."

Amiot reports that, while it was still too early for CSSOs to say for sure, most felt that LEAs in their state would spend their Chapter 2 money as general aid, not to support programs for targeted populations. Since the smallest districts receive only "floor" amounts under the formula allocation system introduced by Chapter 2, some CSSOs expected small rural districts to pool their resources, which would further "consolidation" of another kind. Some CSSOs saw a trend toward large one-time purchases: "We don't trust this money," CSSOs reported local superintendents as saying, "so we're going to buy some computers." "We think it's a one-time effort, so we're going to buy something that we can at least put in our schools." Two states have created an education block grant of their own. Amiot thinks that this trend will continue.

Another effect of decentralization, says Amiot, is the political maneuvering that it seems to have encouraged in some states — not among education interest groups, which have displayed substantial cohesiveness of purpose, but among state political forces. Some CSSOs reported that state legislatures had been bypassing the SEA — "taking responsibilities for money, taking ownership of money, rewriting school formulas, all without the input of the state superintendent." In other states, the governor had issued executive orders that circumvented the standard decision-making process. This maneuvering is critical, Amiot argues, because the education block grant is "the bellwether money." That is, the Administration has proposed to replace other federal social programs with block grants, so control of Chapter 2 money will set precedents. Amiot concludes that this is why the struggle over the relatively insignificant amounts of money made available by Chapter 2 has been so intense in certain states.

Disestablishment and De-emphasis. Two topics raised by informants in Amiot's interviews of late spring — disestablishment of the Department of Education and de-emphasis of education as a national priority — concerned CSSOs more than others. CSSOs "are all very aware of what the federal government does in education and of how it affects them," says Amiot. All the chiefs with whom she spoke know that the Administration wants to disengage the federal government from education policy making, and most were troubled by proposals to replace the Cabinet-level Department of Education with an independent Foundation for Educational Assistance.

Their comments on these two topics laid the emphasis on two themes: communication and school improvement. What did they mean by *communication*? In the past, says Amiot, chief state school officers relied heavily on the federal government for aid and guidance in certain program areas. They used weekly telephone conversations with certain key people in the Department of Education and less frequent but regular contacts with others in the Department to obtain information about policies and procedures. Now, she says, people in the Department with whom CSSOs worked for years are gone. As a result, chiefs report that communication is "breaking down." Moreover, she notes, "the rules for Chapter 2 were late in coming, and they were hard to understand." Most CSSOs invested heavily in legal staff to define their Chapter 2 allocation formula. They received little assistance from Department of Education staff. Many of the people whom CSSOs could reach "were newly placed," Amiot explains, "out of their area of expertise, or just new, without an education background."

On the question of school improvement, the CSSOs in Amiot's sample agreed that federal support for school improvement activities was the single most critical role that the federal government had played in public education. In their view, states were less able to support such activity. They indicated that if the Administration withdraws federal support from research and development efforts, state-supported school improvement activities will become extremely vulnerable. CSSOs say that states are willing to undertake such activities but that states need seed money, federal support, and federal leadership in order to do so.

The chiefs in Amiot's sample hailed federal leadership in past efforts that targeted special services to disadvantaged and otherwise underserved populations. The majority of Amiot's contacts said that states would not be able to carry programs targeted to the disadvantaged and the handicapped at anything like their current levels if federal support for these programs were withdrawn. As a result, these programs would slowly die.

Finally, the majority of Amiot's CSSO respondents thought that the various trends embodied in the New

Federalism would continue. The primary effect, in their view, was that "education's heyday was over," says Amiot. Growth would stop. The Administration would succeed in removing education from the national policy agenda. Public dissatisfaction with education increased during the seventies, Amiot explains. The Administration seems to have tapped that dissatisfaction to gain support for its moves. Amiot's respondents agreed with her analysis. "The White House will not let up," she predicts. While Congress has resisted Administration proposals this year for further cutbacks, Congress may be forced to make more cuts next year if the economy does not improve. Amiot's respondents worried that things beyond their control — like the economy — would influence their options to an increasing degree.

The CSSOs with whom Amiot talked predicted that school improvement activities would decline. Indeed, chiefs said that they would have to struggle merely to keep the existing programs, and they did not expect that many new programs would be started. They predicted a decrease in services targeted to disadvantaged and underserved populations. And, they felt that education would fail to attract the new talent it needs. For these reasons, Amiot feels that the "holistic education service delivery system" created and supported by federal education policy over the last twenty years will be replaced by "fifty uneven examples of education." What does she mean? "Each of the fifty states will interpret education as it sees fit," Amiot says, "in fifty different ways. Some states will come out okay. Others will be losers." If school improvement activities are continued, they will be fragmented, and the impetus will come from different sources — private industry or volunteers. As one of the chiefs whom she interviewed put it, "States that have the resources will continue to do a good job. States that don't, won't. They can't."

Interpretations and Forecasts

In wrap-up remarks at the 1982 Summer Workshop, David Clark summarized the effects of federal moves over the past year and a half. "The focus of education policy in this country has shifted," he said, "from national interests to local interests, from social concerns to economic concerns, from concern with improvement of the common school to concern with parental choice, from intervention to leadership through exhortation, from an emphasis on need to an emphasis on ability, from an emphasis on access to an emphasis on selectivity, from equity to standards, from concern with the total curriculum to concern for basic skills, from a concern with building university-school, school-school, and community-school partnerships to an emphasis on business-school partnerships, and from an emphasis on public education to what Administration spokesmen like to call 'American education.' "

What kind of future will these shifts produce? The experts differ in their views. Clark and Amiot shared their own and some contrasting views with participants at the 1982 Summer Workshop. Their own view, which is based on their research of the last two years, contrasted sharply with the views of Chester Finn and Onalee McGraw. Finn, once an assistant to Senator Daniel P. Moynihan (Dem.-New York), now a professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University, sketched his vision of the future for the op-ed page of the *Wall Street Journal*. Finn thinks that American education is already showing signs of revival. (See the box contrasting Finn's view with the view of Clark and Amiot.)

Onalee McGraw, author of the chapter on the U.S. Department of Education for *The First Year*, an assessment of President Reagan's first year in office by staff of the Heritage Foundation, is less enthusiastic but still optimistic. "The essential problems remain," she writes. "American education is in a state of crisis. The role of the federal government must be defined." Nevertheless, she credits the Department with a "commendable change in direction" in its first year under President Reagan's leadership. The chapters in *The First Year* measure the president's performance against recommendations made by the Heritage Society in *Mandate for Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative Administration*, a document presented to the Presidential Transition Team in November 1980. "Block grants, deregulation, and an advocacy of nonfederally funded solutions," writes McGraw, "all meet the spirit of the *Mandate* recommendations."

David Clark shared McGraw's assessment with participants at the 1982 Summer Workshop. He noted that there has been little public debate about the Administration's innovations in education. Recent federal policy moves will produce major changes, he says, but their impact has not been discussed, or even much noticed, not even by groups most directly affected. This is "not a very dramatic period," Clark observes, "because no one is arguing." Nevertheless, Clark thinks that "this transition period will have long-range effects. Socially oriented categorical aid programs will take decades to reconstruct," he predicts, "especially when so few people seem to be interested in reconstructing them." A change in Administration is irrelevant: "To think that it would be desirable — or even possible — to rebuild the framework that existed before the readjustment that this Administration has made is not to recognize either the scope of that readjustment or the satisfaction with which large numbers of people of diverse political backgrounds now view it."

For Clark, "The key to doing something in Washington is clearly in the hands of two groups — Congress and the professional education community." Unfortunately for their own case, says Clark, many members of the professional education community do not

seem to appreciate the opportunity that circumstances have thrust upon them. This makes it easy for Congress to "wash its hands of education and pass the buck back to the Administration," says Clark. In Amiot's interviews this spring, he notes, Congressional staffers repeatedly complained that members of the professional education community were not coming up with new ideas. Indeed, they said, the concerns of the professional education community seemed to have shrunk to single budget line items.

Clark makes no attempt to hide his own liberal leanings, but on one point he is in complete agreement with the Administration: "Forget Washington," he counsels. "Follow the President's advice. Contact the private foundations and seek their support for a Department of Education in exile, as it were. It could just as well be in Des Moines as in Washington. Set up a national education foundation — independent of the influence of a federal government that does not want to be involved in education — to consider the expression of national interests and national concerns in the field of education. Perhaps some of the new ideas that Congress says are not coming out of the professional education community could come out of there," he reasons.

As Clark interprets the near future, the amount of energy invested in public education will diminish. Yet, even this has its bright side, he argues, because it "is something that we can wrestle with on a local basis." Indeed, Clark thinks that we should "try to make some of Chester Finn's predictions come true." However much "a number of us would like to argue in favor of stimulating federal involvement in education policy," Clark concludes, it is "our responsibility to demonstrate that we can minimize the effects of federal disengagement from education policy."

Clark and Amiot return to many of the points made in their 1982 Summer Workshop presentations in "The Disassembly of the Federal Educational Role," an article to appear in the spring 1983 issue of *Education and Urban Society*. There, they argue that the New Federalism "will be initiated successfully in education" and that a "new sense of direction has been established, which will persist, chiefly intact, for the remainder of this century."

Clark and Amiot predict that the Department of Education will be replaced with a foundation "similar in intent to" the Foundation for Educational Assistance already proposed by Secretary of Education Terrel Bell. Clark and Amiot expect the Administration to promote its "substantive interests" actively and successfully. A tuition tax credit for private schools will be passed, they say, and "the themes of excellence and standards will dominate policy conversations about education" at all levels for the remainder of this decade. Clark and Amiot see the block grant structure as instrumental in accomplishing "a major transfer of policy, program, and leadership responsibilities in education from Washington" to state and local agencies. As a result, proponents of programs targeted to special groups and special interests "will have to turn their attention to protecting their clients' interests state by state."

Clark and Amiot are certain that events of "the current transition period" will cause the federal role in education not only to "diminish but [to] undergo marked qualitative changes." They are much less certain about the effect of these changes on American classrooms. So far, they argue, "the effect has been minimal." As for the future, the effect "probably depends upon the wisdom of those who choose to engage themselves in the reconfiguration" of education policy inaugurated by President Reagan. They conclude that "concerned educationists should be about the business of shaping that future."

Most Likely Futures: Two Contrasting Views

- Renewed educational vigor at state and local levels
- Standards without elitism
- Improvement in teacher quality and student achievement
- Revived interest in school discipline
- State and local initiatives to redefine and strengthen curriculum
- Emergence of state and local program leadership
- Increased public interest in and commitment to education

Source: Chester E. Finn, Jr. "American Education Revives," *Wall Street Journal*, July 7, 1982.

- General diminution in educational quality and school improvement efforts
- Aggravation of inequities across states and within states for districts with concentrated problems
- Reduced access to quality education for least well served populations
- Loss of educational leadership and talent at all levels
- Decreased public interest in and commitment to education

Source: Presentations by David L. Clark and Mary Anne Amiot, 1982 Far West Laboratory Summer Workshop, San Francisco, California, July 30, 1982.

Brief Notes

● **Validation.** With state and local education budgets under increasing pressure from inflation, federal and state cutbacks, and state and local shortfalls, procedures for validating products and practices developed in local classrooms for use by educators at other sites have become timely. To document existing resources in this area, a cooperative venture was undertaken in 1979 by the Research and Development Exchange (RDx), a network of regional education laboratories and university-based research and development centers. Funded by the National Institute of Education, that effort has resulted in four publications, all now available in ERIC.

The Search for Quality Control in Dissemination of Educational Products and Practices: A Look at the Literature and Major Issues, by Linda Reed (ED 209 777), describes the development and main features of five major validation systems, including the Joint Dissemination Review Panel (JDRP) and the Identification, Validation, Dissemination (IVD) process. *Survey of State Procedures for the Validation of Educational Programs,* by Linda Reed, Ed Patrick, and David Holdzkom (ED 209 778; a thirty-two-page *Executive Summary* is available as ED 209 779), reports findings of a survey conducted in 1980 of state education agency validation activities. *Resources on Validation of Educational Programs, Practices, and Products: An Annotated Bibliography,* by Karen Temmen (ED 209 780), completes the series. All four publications are available in ERIC as noted and also as paper copy (price: $11) from CEMREL, Inc., 3120 59th Street, St. Louis, Missouri 63139.

● **Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC).** On behalf of the National Institute of Education (NIE), The NETWORK, Inc., of Andover, Massachusetts, assisted by King Resources, Inc. and Ronald Havelock, has undertaken to study use of ERIC system resources by information service providers. To identify factors that influence selection, organization, and use of material that ERIC makes available and to explain how information service providers increase client satisfaction and information use, this three-year effort includes a nationwide survey, in-depth case studies, and examination of interactions between information providers and clients. NIE is interested in patterns and trends among service providers that deliberations about ERIC's future should take into account. NIE is also interested in ideas for products and services that would enable ERIC service providers to meet client needs more efficiently and effectively.

Those who wish to learn more about ERIC will want to read *ERIC: The First Fifteen Years,* by Delmar J. Trester. Available both in ERIC (ED 195 289) and as a paperbound book (price: $7; order from SMEAC Information Research Center, College of Education, Ohio State University, 1200 Chambers Road, Columbus, Ohio 43212), Trester's study shows how ERIC evolved from a small file of fugitive education research reports into a mature information analysis system.

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