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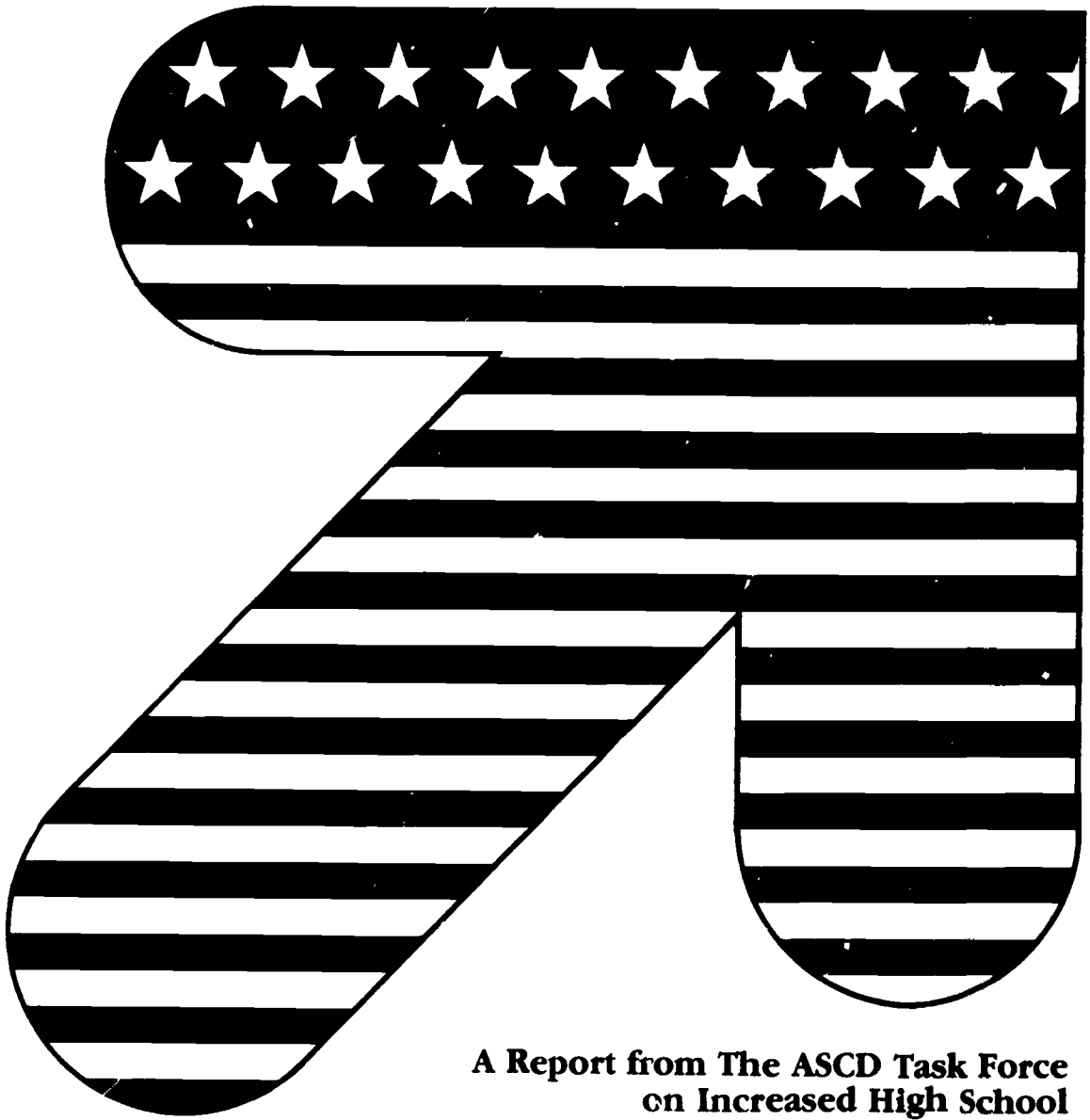
ABSTRACT

Since the 1983 publication of "A Nation at Risk," most states have responded to public demand for educational improvement by enacting legislation increasing the number of units in academic subjects required for high school graduation. Required courses now consume three-quarters of the high school years, countering the former trend to large offerings of various elective courses. This task force report to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development examines the observed and anticipated consequences of these requirements for the curriculum, for students, and for teachers. Major findings include: (1) students are required to make greater effort, and those going on to college will be better prepared to succeed; (2) negative consequences are more likely for those students not going to college as evidenced by the accelerating dropout rate; (3) inadequate attention has been paid to requiring carefully balanced programs; (4) time for elective courses has decreased, and increased requirements reinforce past artificial divisions of knowledge; and (5) teachers' professional latitude is being sharply curtailed. It is recommended that educators closely monitor, document, and evaluate actual consequences of increased graduation requirements on students and teachers, and that these findings be relayed to parents and legislators to ensure that future policy changes are enacted with wisdom. (LMO)

WITH CONSEQUENCES FOR ALL



A Report from The ASCD Task Force on Increased High School Graduation Requirements

Editing: Ron Brandt, Executive Editor
Pamela Dronka, Associate Editor

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A Report from The ASCD Task Force on Increased High School Graduation Requirements

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Members of the ASCD Task Force on the Consequences of Increased Secondary Requirements

Tony Hanley, Director of Secondary Education, Alexandria Public Schools, Alexandria, Virginia.

Donald Offermann (Task Force Chair), Associate Principal for Instruction, Oak Park and River Forest High School, Oak Park, Illinois.

Chris Pipho, Senior Information Specialist, Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colorado.

Mary Anne Raywid, Chair, Department of Administration and Policy Studies, School of Education, Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York.

Daniel Tanner, Professor of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Barbara Benham Tye, Associate Professor of Education, Chapman College, Orange, California.

Diane Berreth (Staff Liaison), Associate Director, ASCD, Alexandria, Virginia.

ASCD appreciates information and commentary provided by Dennis Gray, Deputy Director of the Council for Basic Education, Washington, D.C., during the task force's deliberations.

This report does not necessarily reflect the official positions of the organizations that task force members represented.

Barbara Benham Tye crafted the original draft of this report, working from individual segments submitted by each of the task force members. ASCD Associate Director Diane Berreth and Task Force Chair Don Offermann made subsequent revisions before the manuscript was edited for clarity and style by Associate Editor Pamela Dronka and Executive Editor Ron Brandt.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With Consequences for All

Since A Nation at Risk was published in 1983, some 30 national reports and well over 300 state commissions have sustained the alleged weaknesses of high schools as a running news story. Most states have responded to the public demand for improvement by enacting legislation increasing the number of units in academic subjects required for graduation. Because of this, ASCD established a task force of experts to examine the consequences of such legislation for the curriculum, for teachers, and for students that can be observed and anticipated in the years ahead.

Required general education courses have increased to the point where they now consume three-quarters of the high school years, thus offsetting a trend over the last two decades of offering a large array of elective courses. Following are some major findings of the ASCD Task Force.

- More of today's students are required to make a greater effort to meet teachers' expectations in academic subjects. Most educators seem to agree that many students have completed high

school much too easily in recent decades. In contrast, today's students who go on to higher education will be more likely to have studied in areas that will help assure their success in college. However, the most academically able students are probably those least affected by increased graduation requirements.

- Negative consequences are more likely for high school students who do not go on to college. Although nearly three-fourths of today's students graduate from high school, this rate has drooped in recent years while the dropout rate has accelerated. Although this seems not to worry some reformers, it clearly runs counter to this country's goal of universal education.
- Inadequate attention has been paid to ensuring that the new mandates require a carefully balanced program of general education. Very often no courses are required in the arts or humanities even though virtually all scholars consider them essential to a balanced precollegiate program.

- Increasing the number of units required in academic subjects will obviously decrease the time remaining for elective courses. Increased requirements seem to reinforce past artificial divisions of knowledge, which do nothing to develop student awareness that knowledge is interrelated and that true understanding of a concept often draws knowledge from a variety of perspectives.
- Some stern pronouncements are causing "bogus rigor," narrow definitions are being imposed from the top, and teachers' professional latitude is being sharply curtailed. Therefore, we may be moving into an era which all education for the noncollege-bound and much education for all adolescents will become "a body of reductionist certitude and exactitude."
- The thrust of reform must not be allowed to fade into another short-lived social cause that produces a spate of critical salvos and some secondary reshuffling, but no real solutions. Although the schools have primary responsibility for cognitive development, real danger exists that new school programs may impede adolescents' holistic development, which is crucial to the caliber of future adults.

- Obviously, increased graduation requirements bring about both negative and positive results. The ASCD Task Force calls on the profession to closely monitor, document, and evaluate the actual consequences for students and teachers and accurately relay these findings to parents and legislators to ensure that future policy changes are enacted with wisdom by an informed public.

WITH CONSEQUENCES FOR ALL

When A Nation at Risk was published in the spring of 1983, the time was ripe--few realized just how ripe--for renewed attention to the condition of secondary education in the United States. Nearly ten years had elapsed since the nation had trained its attention on the American high school, but education policymakers suddenly appeared moved to redress their laspe with a degree of intensity prcportional to the previous neglect. Since 1983, some 30 national reports and well over 300 state commissions have maintained the alleged weaknesses of high schools as a running news story.

Only seven months after A Nation at Risk, U.S. Secretary of Education Terrel Bell reported that the most frequent state-level legislation to improve the curriculum had been in "strengthening basic course requirements." No fewer than 44 states, he said, had proceeded with measures to increase high school graduation requirements and thereby raise "standards."[1]

We know of no one who questions the need for secondary school improvement. Certainly school peoole themselves do not. However, whether real and long-lasting improvement can result from the flood of mandates handed down from state

legislatures is another matter. In truth, all people concerned about schools, including policymakers in state governments and departments of education, are waiting to see the results of tougher graduation requirements.

Some restraint from all-out optimism about stern state "You will's" is wise. Good intentions notwithstanding, mandates can be blunt instruments for the improvement of schooling. They rarely take into account that individual pupils, teacners, schools, and communities differ in important respects. Mandates often produce side effects that even supporters would judge insupportable--if the less desirable strings attached had been anticipated.

Governors, legislators, and state boards are not naturally inclined to reverse any of their newly enacted measures. Having adopted the plans, state officials are understandably invested in them. But policymakers do not have the responsibility to implement their reforms. Educators have that, along with the responsibility to deal with any untoward consequences. Educators therefore have a civic duty to collect and report thorough and objective information on the effects of increased secondary requirements and to communicate their findings to both policymakers and the general public.

Some Background Essentials

The original purpose of public secondary schools was to prepare an academically promising elite for college. However, during the larger humanitarian movement early in the century, the federal government enacted labor laws to prevent children under 16 from competing for scarce jobs. As children were barred from the work force and the number of jobs that required high school graduation increased, the diploma became more frequently demanded as an entry credential to the American work force.

This evolutionary process has been accompanied by ever-increasing nationwide standardization of state requirements in education during the past two decades. In response to different social and economic conditions, policymakers have from time to time adjusted the requirements for high school graduation, including the numbers and types of courses needed to earn a diploma.

During the past 50 years, some periods of public sensibility have created breadth in the curriculum. The dominant intent was to engage young people in a broad array of learning experiences through a comprehensive curriculum. A strong commitment to equality of educational opportunity characterized these periods.

At other times, the national priority has shifted to the narrow band of the "academic" side of the curriculum. Students accordingly were confined to fewer choices in their studies, and programs for nurturing gifted and talented students were established while neglecting less-advantaged learners. Such curricular retrenchment has usually followed a conservative socioeconomic shift. The tone of recent reforms thus reflects the response of policymakers to our nation's alleged decline from its dominant position in world industrial markets.

Laws that rearrange curricular emphasis, however, commonly have outcomes that were neither intended nor foreseen. In considering how raising secondary requirements across-the-board will reverberate throughout education, we clustered the likely results under three general headings: effects on curriculum, effects on students, and effects on teachers.

I. Possible Consequences of Increased Academic Requirements: The Effects on Curriculum.

Q. Will increased course requirements enhance student achievement?

The most recent wave of legislated curriculum requirements focuses on additional years of coursework in the traditional academic subjects plus, in some states, computer literacy.[2] In enacting these requirements, most states have neither sought to identify the content of the additional courses, nor have they generally appropriated new dollars to upgrade curriculum and instruction.

In the absence of adequate funding for better courses and teaching, compliance is likely to consist of students taking more of the usual courses in the traditional subjects. More credits do not automatically convert to increased learning, however, and unless more coherent programs are articulated to actively engage all students in their common curriculum, achievement gains are likely to be small or negligible.

Q. How will curriculum balance be affected?

The annual Gallup polls have repeatedly shown that Americans want their secondary schools to be comprehensive in function;[3] polls also report that the public sees the goals of education as the development of (1) enlightened citizens, (2) productive workers, and (3) lifelong learners.

To produce such graduates, the expression "unity through diversity" has served as an underlying principle both in our national life and in the operation of secondary schools. During the first half of the century, visionary educators began to promote this sense of unity by establishing general education, a common universe of learnings. All students were to have access to such an education, regardless of their particular background or aspirations. Other supplemental courses, differing in content, interest area, and difficulty, balanced general education and helped to meet the needs of a pupil population with widely divergent characteristics.

Increasing core requirements seems to have extensively eliminated this curriculum balance. Much of the initial concern in this latest round of secondary education reform was prompted by the contention that high school students in the U.S. were not taking enough mathematics, science, and English

courses to maintain American economic and military strength. It seemed logical to many people to respond by demanding that students take more such courses. Because an addition in one place in the curriculum necessitates subtraction of something else, though, we need to attend to what is lost as mathematics, science, and English gain priority over other studies.

Q. Do increased secondary requirements change the nature of the high school?

State mandates now require more of "basic academic subjects," a term not consonant with "general education," or "common learnings." In effect, as basic education crowds out diversified coursework, there is a rising danger that only students privileged to go on to college will have opportunities to experience education specialized beyond a few core subjects. It is significant that the recent trend toward increased state-mandated requirements for high school graduation is co hed in such terminology as "basic academic subjects" or the "New Basics," rather than as "general education" or "common learnings."

The others will be relegated to basic education and will not have access to the college experience that a noted college educator described as the means of "the testing of oneself and one's values" and as a "broad intellectual adventure;" they will be limited to the high school "concentrating on facts and skills."[4]

Thus the high school curriculum is to be one of reductionist certitude and exactitude, and only the college curriculum is to be rich, flexible, stimulating, and tolerant of the vicissitudes of youth and young adulthood. Students who end their education after high school graduation will be denied the opportunities to think, to test, and to stretch into new zones of knowledge as the supplemental curriculum is diminished.

Q. Will mandated changes improve the curriculum?

Redistributing courses will not, by itself, prompt any real curriculum improvement. Furthermore, the altered course requirements carry the risk of reinforcing the erroneous notion that knowledge can be conveniently divided into tidy, discrete segments and that some realms of knowledge have more value than others. In a society wherein advancement will be predicated on the ability to manage and use information wisely, the understanding that all knowledge is related is growing more vital to personal and global security. Increased requirements that reinforce past artificial divisions of knowledge do nothing to develop student awareness that knowledge is interrelated and that full understanding of a concept often draws knowledge from a variety of perspectives.

II. Possible Consequences of Increased Academic Requirements: The Effects on Students.

Q. Will increased academic requirements affect all students the same way?

If stricter academic requirements do what they were adopted to do, no doubt some of the effects will be desirable. On an individual level, some students' lives may be enriched by the added exposure; other collective benefits may accrue, such as larger percentages of upcoming cohorts internalizing the critical thinking skills of science because society made study in that field an imperative.

More students will pursue rigorous, challenging courses. Some will be better prepared for college work, will require less remediation there, and can gain more credit for advanced placement. Stronger backgrounds in academic subjects may make it possible for college students to specialize in their studies earlier.

There remains, however, the disquieting possibility that these added requirements will prove counterproductive for substantial numbers of students, and thus ulitmately for society. To explore this issue, it may be useful to divide

entrants to high school into four quartiles. The first quartile corresponds roughly to the 31 percent of academically successful students who eventually enter four-year colleges. Quartile two, about 18 percent of high school students, includes those who enroll in two-year college programs after high school. The third quartile is the approximately 24 percent of students who are not currently destined for--or typically interested in--further education; they are likely to enter the work force immediately upon graduation. The bottom quartile students are those most likely to fail and drop out of school prior to graduation; they now do so at a national rate of about 27 percent.

Barring the possibility that course content will be diluted to accommodate students with less academic aptitude, new state-mandated requirements will probably change life very little for top-quartile students. College entrance requirements and expectations have always governed programs of study for college-bound students, and college requirements generally demand as much or more than the new mandates require. Moreover, since these top performers have always expended great effort in school, impressive qualitative increments in their achievement are unlikely. The greatest difference for these students will perhaps be slightly different academic distributions and fewer available electives.

The second quartile is the group that might be affected most positively by new requirements. These young people have sufficient perserverance and academic orientation to have postsecondary aspirations, but their achievement falls below that of the most academically talented. Whether increased requirements will spur second-quartile students on to higher achievement or whether rock-ribbed requirements will actually discourage their efforts is still an unsettled issue. The intervening variable of school climate may turn out to have a significant influence on how this population responds.

Although current national averages suggest that most of the third-quartile group graduates from high school, large percentages of these students are in vocational programs that new requirements will scale down or eliminate in most states. If the removal of such alternatives results in extensive withdrawals among third-quartile students, the aggregate impact of the new requirements will reduce rather than increase academic learning for many students. Simultaneously, this quartile will be denied access to courses that promote their retention in school and employability.

Many fourth-quartile students have not been well served by the traditional academic subjects. Imposing increased course

requirements in these studies (with a stronger focus on drill and repetition) is likely to lead to lower success rates for this group. Students' self-esteem and sense of fate control will ultimately deteriorate, further depressing achievement and initiating an unhealthy downward spiral. Consequently, many of these borderline students may drop out of school earlier and in greater numbers.

Q. What is the relationship between school climate and the new requirements?

The "get-tough" orientation of many reforms assumes, and sometimes explicitly states, that demanding more will result in enhanced performance. Can such a correlation be re-established in a culture that has changed considerably in other respects? Or will stiffened demands make the school environment tense and oppressive, intensifying stress-related illness, intergenerational conflict, and estrangement from school? No one can reply with certainty at this point, but as the answer emerges, we had better be ready to deal with its impact.

Even supporters agree that the new requirements will add to the pressure high school students experience due to both the kind and quality of work students will be expected to do. The

detailed specifications of school time included in some of the mandates may also add to the tension. In New York, for instance, the new plan for 7th and 8th graders leaves only ten minutes per day unencumbered by state requirements. As students and teachers attempting to remain in compliance feel impelled to complete one task in haste in order to take up another, the pressure will mount. A sense of duress and regimentation could become increasingly characteristic of the classroom environment.

Furthermore, as low-achieving students enroll in academic classes they would have preferred to avoid, teachers will be faced with two unattractive options. They can simplify courses so that a fairly large percentage of students have a reasonable chance to earn credit, or they can maintain "standards" and hand out discouraging grades to more students. If coursework is diluted, the top achievers will be insufficiently challenged and bored. If coursework is kept potent, the low achievers will be overwhelmed and frustrated. Neither boredom nor frustration is conducive to good school climate.

Demanding that all students concentrate more on basics may also stunt the development of other useful abilities that schools have facilitated rather than taught directly. Goodlad's research found, for instance, that extraclass

activities provide useful experiences uncommon in academic classes; participation in student government, clubs, or publications, he said, provides adolescents with "opportunities for making decisions, exercising creativity, and assuming responsibility."[5]

School climate will also suffer as the exploratory and enrichment studies, in which both academically talented and marginal students often excel, are offered less frequently and considered less important. Other policies being adopted that close off opportunities for marginal students (such as the restriction of extracurricular activities to higher academic achievers) are likely to further reduce third- and fourth-quartile students' chances for success, cloud the general school climate, and recognize only academic success as worthy of respect.

Q. Are the changed requirements beneficial, benign, or harmful to student maturation and development?

Some observers are concerned that increased academic requirements and testing programs may bring about so much emphasis on the school's traditional knowledge-transmission function that its human-development function will suffer. If

the education system teaches and tests intensively in factual knowledge areas, little time may remain to help students learn what to do with the data. Students may show increased test scores that check for familiarity with discrete bits of knowledge while experiencing little or no growth in the processes needed to synthesize and apply knowledge to life experience.

While cognitive development is the primary responsibility of schools, the development of young people in the holistic sense is so crucial to the caliber of future adults that for school programs to impede adolescent development in any way would be an enormous net minus for society. It is not clear whether a narrower focus on traditional academic work will prove a hazard to students' developmental health, but we need to be alert to the potential problem so as to identify and rectify it promptly if it occurs.

Q. How will increased secondary school requirements affect the national commitment to equal opportunity?

Increased secondary requirements may hit equity broadside. The present strong negative correlation between school success and race/ethnicity already challenges the

capacity of our schools to compensate for disadvantaged social groups. Current reports of Hispanic dropout rates reach as high as 80 percent in New York City and 70 percent in Chicago. Overall black dropout rates are 28 percent, twice the rate for whites. The dropout rates among the poor are also significantly higher than those among other students. If more third- and fourth-quartile students respond to increased requirements by abandoning their pursuit of a diploma, society's "have-nots" will be the ones most negatively affected by the new requirements.[6] Concern is therefore growing that if increased requirements push dropout rates still higher, education, already unable to forestall the formation of a permanent underclass,[7] may unwillingly make a bad situation worse.

The national commitment to equal opportunity places a serious responsibility on all of us to weigh any proposal very carefully if it seems likely to disengage more people from the functioning citizenry. Certainly if new requirements send dropout rates soaring, the chances for life-long success will shrivel for a significant number of minority, foreign-born, disadvantaged, and handicapped young people.

The consequence would not only be personal tragedy. The burden of nonproductive people and the social unrest that attends them would blight and beset the general culture as well. For example, if the present national dropout rate of 27 percent increased to 35 percent, the average daily attendance funding for schools would plummet. Program cutbacks would result, and the expensive social programs required when people are unemployable would further drain away public resources that might otherwise be channeled to education and other positive social forces.

III. Possible Consequences of Increased Academic Requirements: The Effects on Teachers.

Q. How do increased secondary requirements affect teacher morale?

In general, school people seem to regard the "excellence" movement with strong, but mixed, feelings. On the one hand, they genuinely hope that the public attention to public schooling will lead to much-needed improvements. On the other hand, grave doubts offset these hopeful feelings. Will schooling remain a cause celebre for long enough to result in increased public understanding of schools? Will resources be committed to spark and sustain meaningful, permanent improvement? Will reforms be well conceived and implemented?

Some of the dark suspicions of those who reject reforms seem to be well founded. A certain scorn for teachers has been implicit in the excellence movement as a whole. Indeed, a punitive spirit seems to pervade many of the proposed changes, a magnificent display of ingratitude that cannot help but undermine educators' morale and cause conscientious, hardworking school people to bristle. Such a divisive strategy violates everything known about how to bring about effective educational change.[8]

The top-down direction from which reforms have come is likewise an irritant that frustrates educators whose intimate understanding of school conditions has been ignored by those setting policy governing those conditions. In some states, distribution requirements are being so narrowly defined as to create a virtually uniform statewide curriculum. Actual course content (what, how much, and when material is taught) is being determined at the state level. This sharp curtailment of teachers' professional latitude not only restricts a teacher's ability to adjust the curriculum to allow for students' differences, but it limits the exercise of teachers' professional judgment.

When teachers do not have some discretionary rights to determine content, the fit between student and curriculum suffers, the professional status of teaching endures yet another body blow, and the prospects for teacher success diminishes.[9] In a time of impending teacher shortages, actions that make teaching an increasingly frustrating career will surely complicate the recruitment of qualified teachers.

Q. In what ways will increased academic requirements for students change the work of assignments of teachers?

Basic academic subject area teachers may find that they will be expected to teach certain topics and skills specified in a curriculum document prepared by their state or district, regardless of whether listed topics and skills best advance the learning of the particular students at hand. The "basics" departments may expand as extra sections of core subjects are added to the master schedule. Teachers in all academic fields may have to adjust to more reluctant, or at least unenthusiastic, students.

The surplus of teachers in elective fields coupled with the increased demand for basic teachers in an era of ensuing national teacher shortage engenders a need for more teachers to instruct in subjects outside their areas of specialty, at least temporarily. This dynamic is in fact already under way. Teachers of fine arts, vocational subjects, or other electives are being assigned to teach mathematics, English, or science if they have a minor in one of these subjects and are therefore technically qualified. If they are not qualified, they are being encouraged to obtain credentials in one of the academic subjects. Some may elect to abandon teaching rather than retrain in a field of secondary interest; others will simply lose their jobs.

Q. Will new requirements encourage teachers to contribute their insight into educational reform?

Real curriculum improvement at the school site level, we know, occurs only in an environment of commitment, understanding, and reasonably high morale. Teachers who are overworked and undervalued, whose judgment is ignored or discredited, and whose job security is in some cases threatened, are unlikely to throw their wholehearted support behind reform initiatives. Enlisting their willing cooperation in implementing reforms requires that they be supported in ways in which they do not now feel supported. A future wave of disenchantment with reforms and with schooling in general may be inevitable if reformers persistently fail to attend to the circumstances that frustrate teachers' chances for success, that stymie their professional growth, and that denigrate the worth of their insight.

Were more states and school districts to channel substantial sums to staff development, released time, and professional growth, not only would the quality of classroom teaching improve, but staff morale would be boosted. Initiatives focusing on such matters might promise more solid gains in student achievement than would adding a fourth year of English or another week or two in the school year.[10]

A lesson to be learned from our response to the crisis mentality launched along with Sputnik I is that a free nation should not design its public education system to pursue narrow, nationalistic interests. Apparently a vocal section of the public is still grappling with this lesson, because from time to time, the dangerous impulse to define the schools' role too narrowly recurs.

If we attempt to aim education like a laser beam at certain targets, the stage is set for swings between polar goals. For example, the post-Sputnik priority of capitalizing on the abilities of the gifted and talented was followed by an antithetical shift favoring the disadvantaged learner. We undermine our principles as a free democracy if we purport to treat all citizens equally under the law and at the same time advance the case of one need at the expense of other equally important and honorable needs.

Proponents of one view or another constantly exert forces that threaten to throw the curriculum out of balance. In the 1980s, advocates of increased academic requirements for graduation have asserted that:

o The academic side of the curriculum must be advanced at the expense of nonacademic studies.

o Science and mathematics should be stressed over the arts and humanities.

o The "basics" should take precedence over other studies.

o "Cultural" studies are more important than "practical" studies.

o The development of the gifted and talented is more important than offsetting the handicaps of the disadvantaged.

o Higher standards should be demanded even at the expense of more student failure.

Such false dichotomies hamper the function of the schools as the fairest and most altruistic guarantor of opportunity for all students.

Another mistake we have made before, and are making again in some sections of the country, is locating change in the wrong building--in the statehouse instead of the schoolhouse. In response to "exaggerated and anxiety--provoking rhetoric surrounding school problems,"[11] some politicians have rapidly drawn up and passed laws that seem more likely to depress morale and actually hinder reform than to tap the latent power in school people.

Increased academic requirements for all students, while well-intended, may turn out to have been one of these simplistic responses. On the other hand, if resources are directed toward helping every school to create a strong, well-balanced curriculum for all students, and if latitude is allowed for different schools to achieve this goal in different ways--in other words, if the complexity of students and schools is taken into account--we might expect some truly significant changes in education.

If we are to make a positive force of reform, we must all guard against superficiality in identifying problems and proposing solutions. We must look to a vision of education reform grounded in accurate information and good sense. We must not allow the thrust of reform to fade away into another short-lived social cause that produces a spate of critical salvos and some cosmetic reshuffling, but no real solutions.

We need to expose, too, the bogus rigor of stern pronouncements that on close examination have little substance. One symptom of bogus rigor is the tendency to provide quantitative answers to qualitative questions. To count up the number of hours spent in a classroom each day and then add a few more, for example, while ignoring impediments to successful instruction in the hours already available gives the illusion of reform, and little else.

Suggestion 1: Monitor, Document, and Evaluate the Impact of Reform Measures.

It would be helpful to know if reforms were propelling us toward better schools. If that were the case, our resolve would be reinforced and continuance of our present course would be jusitifed. Knowing that reforms are ineffective or counterproductive would be useful, too, as it would counsel us to abandon our present course and to try other measures.

Consequently, everything about these reform efforts should be carefully monitored at every level. In the local school, teachers and support staff ought to document the effects of increased academic course requirements and work together with the building principal and guidance staff to make sure all this information is passed along to the district office and the board of education. Districts should, in turn, keep state and departments of education and relevant legislative committees fully informed.

As we chart the progress of reform, we should be wary of statistics used as evidence of the reforms' effects. It is conceivable, for instance, that rising test scores may be due largely to such questionable gains as substantial increases in the dropout rate of marginal students.

Suggestion 2: Recognize the Legitimacy of Different Paths to the Same Goal.

Careful evaluation of the change process is apt to provide further clear evidence that more than one path can lead successfully to a goal. Probably we will rediscover what we have known all along--that excellence in education does not grow best in a centralized location. It cannot be ordered to report by command from above, but appears in hospitable climates created at the grassroot level.

Some state departments of education have expressed willingness to consider unusual curriculum designs tailored to meet both local school needs and state mandates. Schools and districts, however, should take the initiative in designing such programs. In this process, teachers could play especially important roles.

Suggestion 3: Empower Teachers with Responsibility for Curriculum Development.

Rather than seeking simply to comply with mandates for increased academic requirements, school faculties and other members of the professional staff should share fully in the responsibility for interpreting the mandates. More than mere consultation will be required. Communication must flow both vertically and laterally. A standing schoolwide and districtwide curriculum committee or council, provided with the necessary time and resources, could meet this vital need.

Suggestion 4: Communicate with the Public.

Especially now that education is in a state of flux, the school people at every level have the responsibility to add to the public's understanding of the realities of education. School and district professional staffs must evaluate reform effects critically and constructively and must communicate their findings to parents and others in the general public. In far too many instances, data have been distorted to support unfair attacks that have gone unchallenged; we must resist such dissembling and speak up in our own behalf.

Conclusion

The time is propitious for the schools in our nation to convert public awareness and legislative attention to dramatic improvements in the quality of education. As we observe and participate in change, educators must never forget that there are always pressures to obliterate diversity and balance in the education system, and that the American principle of unity through diversity must not be annulled by the latest trend of the moment. Neither should we delude ourselves that simply spending more time on specific subjects will automatically animate those studies for all students. And, in the interest of preserving one of our most fundamental democratic strengths in education, we dare never permit a pattern to persist that by intent or effect works to the advantage of some students, but to the great detriment of others.

Endnotes

[1]Daniel Tanner, "The American High School at the Crossroads," Educational Leadership (March 1984): 4-13.

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[4]Daniel Bell, The Reforming of General Education (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1968), p. 181.

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[9]Linda Darling-Hammond, The Coming Crisis In Teaching (Washington, D.C.: Rand Corporation, 1985).

[10]Tye, pp. 273-282.

[11]Mary Anne Raywid and others, Pride and Promise: Schools of Excellence for All the People (Akron, Ohio: American Educational Studies Association, 1984), pp. 1-7.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
225 North Washington Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314