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ABSTRACT

From January through March 1988, 31 teachers and administrators from the Capital Region (Albany, New York) met with professors from the State University of New York at Albany in five full-day sessions to discuss education in New York State in the 1990's and to write a report on the results of their deliberations, including observations and recommendations related to topics selected for discussion. This report consists of four essays that reflect the thinking of teachers and administrators at the time of the discussions. In the first essay, seminar participants view the school in a social context and grapple with the problems of role and responsibility. Participants were concerned about the duality of roles: protecting the academic mission and serving the social needs of students. The second essay confronts "head-on" the disjuncture between what students are taught and what they come to discover about the world. A detailed design is presented for an innovative school to meet the needs of the learner in the 1990's. The third essay addresses the issues involved in restructuring for that "ideal" school: empowerment, defining a mission, organizational structure, and allowing both students and teachers to reach their potential. The final essay returns to a socially contextual topic: the balance between local control and maintaining state standards of excellence. (TE)

A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE:

EDUCATION IN THE 1990s

REPORT OF THE SELECT SEMINAR ON EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

The Capital Area School Development Association
School of Education, The University at Albany
State University of New York

The Golub Corporation

Copies of this report are available ($10.00 per copy - including postage) from The Capital Area School Development Association, Husted 211, University at Albany, State University of New York 135 Western Avenue, Albany, New York 12222.

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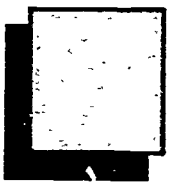

Report of the
Select Seminar on
Excellence in Education

October 1988

Sponsored by:
The Capital Area School Development Association
School of Education, The University at Albany
State University of New York

Funding for this Seminar was provided by
The Golub Corporation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

Beginning in January, 1988, and continuing through March, thirty-one teachers and administrators in the Capital Region together with professors from the University at Albany, State University of New York, met in a series of five full-day sessions to have a conversation about the education of children in New York State in the 1990s and to write a report on the results of their deliberations including observations and recommendations related to themes and topics selected for discussion. It is our observation that practicing teachers and administrators are given at best a perfunctory role in shaping educational policy at state and national levels. It is our belief and conviction that their voices must be heard—their observations and recommendations heeded—if changes encouraged by the reform movement are to be more than cosmetic.

This seminar, which was funded by the Golub Corporation, provided an occasion for a significant group of teachers and administrators and University professors to actively participate in discussions about the education of children in the 1990s. This report of the work of the seminar will be broadly distributed to federal and state policy makers, institutions of higher education and colleagues in elementary and secondary schools. We believe its significance will rest not only on the lucid and well-reasoned discussion embodied in its content, but on the fact that it comes primarily from those, who on a daily basis, experience the reality of schools and classrooms.

In addition to this seminar, the Golub Corporation with CASDA and the School of Education sponsors a Scholarship Recognition Program which celebrates students' excellence by honoring high school seniors from across the Capital District for academic performance, leadership and service to their communities. The students, in turn, nominate teachers who have had a profound effect on their learning. Those teachers nominated by the 1987 scholars made up the group of teachers selected for this seminar.

The support of the Golub Corporation and in particular, Mr. Lewis Golub, for this seminar and the larger enterprise it represents, is a testimony not only to their generosity, but to their recognition of our mutual interdependence.

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INTRODUCTION

Key words in the literature today are *reform* and *renaissance*. The first indicates attempts to restructure or reshape *what is*; the second generates excitement and creates hope that cooperative efforts could lead to the birth of *what might be*. Both terms imply a need for change—a real change that goes beyond buzz words and lip-service, that produces more than a new vocabulary or an add-on program—a change in thinking about current practices and standards, about time and needs, about people in our rapidly changing world.

Recognizing that changes in thinking are often sparked by interaction between educators, the Capital Area School Development Association (CASDA), invited a group of teachers, administrators and University professors to meet and talk about their concerns and hopes for reform in schools. (The teachers were nominated by the 1987 Price Choppers' Senior Scholars as having had the most significant and beneficial influence on them and their education.) The select seminar on Excellence in Education participants discussed several issues over a period of months and each of four seminar groups wrote an essay, sharing some of the ideas resulting from their conversations. One participant wrote, "I found great satisfaction in working through a process which started with the germ of an idea and developed into a well-defined and refined position."

The report that follows illustrates the process at work. Each of the four essays reflects the thinking of teachers and administrators at the time of the discussions and should be recognized as both group and individual ideas—ideas in a fluid state of development. The purpose of each essay is to let the reader "listen in" on the participants' discussions. It is hoped the reader will use some of the ideas expressed to begin thinking about change and to initiate a conversation with another educator.

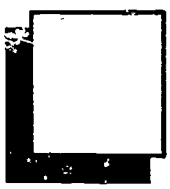
In the first essay, seminar participants view the school in a social context and grapple with the problems of role and responsibility. Participants were very concerned with the duality of roles...protecting the academic mission *and* serving the ever increasing social needs of students.

The second essay confronts "head-on" the problem in today's schools: ". . .the resulting disjuncture between what students are taught and what they come to discover about the world is leading to schools rapidly approaching a stalemate at the

most fundamental level—the learning process." The seminar participants don't shrink from attacking the problem and produce a detailed design for an innovative school to meet the needs of the learner of the 1990s.

Restructuring for that "ideal" school concerns the third group of discussants. Tough issues of empowerment, defining a mission, structuring a tiered staff, and finding time for both students and teachers to reach their potential are faced in the third essay.

The final essay returns to a socially contextual topic, the balance between local control and centralized interests. Mandated Regents' curriculum and examinations, the Regents' scholarship process, and methods of assessing district performance are targets for spirited discussion.



THE PROCESS

The CASDA select seminars follow a very simple structure based upon a set of guiding principles:

1. ***Participants need to commit adequate time—to work, to reflect, and to write.***
Most seminars have been conducted for five full days spread about two weeks apart over the first two months with the final session being a two-day overnight retreat in the middle to the end of the third month.

2. A conducive working environment is very important.
The seminars have been conducted in "protected environments"—away from the work site, in quiet and aesthetically pleasing surroundings with special care being given to the quality of food and refreshments. We believe this clearly is a first step in communicating to participants that the seminar is special and there are high expectations that the deliberations of its members will have an important result. The first three days of this seminar were conducted at the Rockefeller Institute in Albany. The final two-day retreat was held at the Rensselaerville Institute.

3. The seminar participants are the experts.
We believe these select seminars have been highly successful in part because of the high degree of personal and professional respect afforded participants and the central belief on which the seminar series was founded: "that consciously competent teachers and administrators are the best arbiters of educational practice." While participants do extensive reading during the seminars, visiting experts and lecturers are not a part of this experience. The thirty-one teachers, administrators and University professors who participated in this seminar represented many years of classroom experience. They themselves constituted the body of experts.

4. Roles are "checked at the door."
One's ideas must stand on their own, be debated, accepted or discarded without reference to one's position, prior experience, or education. This seminar included school superintendents, principals, supervisors, teachers, and University professors.

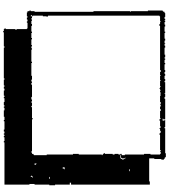
5. Seminars are self-governing entities with organizers serving the group.
The coordination of the seminar was managed by a University professor and the director and associate director of CASDA. After providing the initial structure and on-going logistical support, they worked to transfer the governance and direction from themselves to the participants. By the end of the seminar, it is fair to say that it was self-governed with the coordinators taking direction from the seminar group.

6. The experience is at least as important as the product.

All seminar participants agree that the process, the experience, is most important; in fact, the report might be quite different if the process had continued over time, this representing but one point in an ongoing process when, although there was much agreement on important issues, there was strong disagreement as well. Even so, the report provides an important documentation of the experience and serves to validate for each of the participants the energy and effort they expended.

It is also hoped that this report will provide inspiration and help to those who read it and may assist in a modest way to continue what has become a very important national conversation on teaching and schools. We firmly believe such an ongoing conversation can only result in better education for all of our children.

CONCLUSIONS



Select Seminar Participants agree:

- the primary function of the school is to accomplish the academic mission.
- the academic mission for each school should be designed to meet the diverse needs of its student population, each student's academic program determined by state and local requirements, staff and parent recommendations, and student needs and interests.
- the academic program should be isolated in time, and, if possible, space, from all other school functions.
- an inherent role of the school is to provide for the social/emotional/physical dimension of the student.
- schools have a responsibility to address social problems that interfere with this role or with the academic mission.
- the school should be the coordinating agency for all services available to the child because it is the community institution that has the best opportunity for contact with students, families, businesses and outside agencies.

THE SCHOOL IN A SOCIAL CONTEXT

Must the school assume the role of parent when the parent cannot or will not provide guidance?

What do we want our schools to accomplish? Are they to focus on academic concerns, leaving social problems to other agencies? Is it possible to achieve academic goals without addressing social factors, like changes in family structure or widespread substance abuse, affecting student's lives today? How much responsibility should the schools take? *Must the school assume the role of parent when the parent cannot or will not provide guidance?* Should we define the school's function narrowly or broadly? These questions were considered by one group of select seminar participants.

Given the complex nature of the modern world and the variety of skills needed to function in such a world, the importance of a formal education cannot be too strongly emphasized, but what should each school's academic program include? Do we provide one course of study for all, the very specific classical curriculum proposed by former Secretary of Education William Bennett, or the generalist curriculum mandated by the Regents' Action Plan? Do we teach to particular student abilities and needs?

Educators throughout the country are currently focusing attention on ways to strengthen academic programs in secondary schools and to emphasize excellence and high standards of academic achievement. In the past, it seems, schools did a better job preparing students for both higher education and the work force. What has changed?

...what is contributing most to weakening academic programs is the intrusion of non-academic elements into course instructional time.

It was the consensus of this group that *what is contributing most to weakening academic programs is the intrusion of non-academic elements into course instructional time.* Students are regularly excused from classes for extracurricular activities, field trips, athletic contests, meetings with counselors or social service representatives, and disciplinary actions. Programs mandated by the New York State Education Department to address societal problems like substance abuse or AIDS further reduce instructional time. Not only do these interruptions limit the quality and quantity of academic instruction, but they also diminish the importance of academics in the minds of the students. As a consequence, students feel less compelled to meet course commitments or to maintain good attendance.

When schools were first established in this country, it was to meet the needs of the society of the day; the needs today grow more numerous and more complex. In addition, given changes in family structure and the proliferation of social and economic woes among the adult population, many parents are less able to provide the support and guidance that their children need. Students, distracted by serious problems in other aspects of their lives, are not likely to take interest in the ideas presented in the classroom.

How should this secondary responsibility be met? To what extent should schools be involved? Teachers who have daily contact with students are in a good position to recognize problems and may have a better chance of effecting behavior changes than some outside agency. However, few teachers feel comfortable in this role, and few have been trained to deal with really serious problems. Furthermore, many parents do not want schools to assume what they consider family responsibilities.

The instructional course block would be limited to academic course offerings and during this time no interruptions would be allowed.

Protecting the Academic Mission

One group of discussants recommends the school day be divided into two blocks of time: one an instructional course block and one an activity service block. *The instructional course block would be limited to academic course offerings and during this time no interruptions would be allowed.* The activity service block would include those programs that are now considered "after school" activities, all the "interruptions" that currently fragment the school day, and new programs designed cooperatively with social service agencies and the business community to provide new sources of help and opportunity for students. The duration of each block and the specific types of programs offered would depend on the needs of the students served. Academic time would be fixed, inviolate, and scheduled before the beginning of the school year. Activity service time would be scheduled to allow for both anticipated and emergent programs.

In discussing what courses the instructional block should include, we agree that a "return to the classics," as proposed by William Bennett, is not the answer to improving school curricula. To enhance current academic programs, we suggest including in-depth studies of cultures represented by student populations and vocational courses directed toward actual needs of business and industry. *Course content, however, is not as much a problem in today's schools, we feel, as the lack of student commitment to the learning process.* By separating the academic part of the day from other school activities, and by allowing no alternatives to class attendance, we hope to emphasize the importance of the learning process.

Course content, however, is not as much a problem in today's schools, we feel, as the lack of student commitment to the learning process.

Serving Social Needs

The activity service block we envision would extend beyond the current school day and would include a broad spectrum of programs, services, and activities. Participation in state-mandated health programs, assemblies, and activities related to specific courses would be required. We recommend the activity service block include:

- extracurricular activities, including intramural and interscholastic sports
- community health services, AIDS education, substance abuse programs
- field trips and assemblies
- guidance, scheduling
- programs coordinating school and social service
- programs coordinating school and business
- alternative education (including adult ed)
- minicourses
- library time
- after school care and activities for younger children
- staff planning and meeting time
- staff support services

...we need help supplying services to meet the individual needs of all students.

Most of the items listed above are already available in many school districts, but they have been patched into the school day with no overall plan and at the expense of academics. Care needs to be taken with selection of state and federally funded programs to be certain they meet local needs and benefit a cross-section of the student population.

Schools need to determine the qualities of a healthy environment for children and provide a means for all children to succeed in this environment. If this means serving meals or supervising younger children while parents work, then such should be done. We often exempt students from academic rigor because other aspects of their lives make it difficult for them to complete required work. We must do everything we can to see that all children reach full potential. This is an ideal time for educators to re-emphasize the importance of high academic standards. In order to be effective, *we need help supplying services to meet the individual needs of all students.* Schools must focus on the whole individual by offering a rigorous academic program and by coordinating school/community resources. Given cooperative funding, agency and business partnerships with schools, and commitment on the part of all to quality education, students will be better served and more productive; and teachers will be able to focus on teaching/learning outcomes.

THE IDEAL PUBLIC SCHOOL

The Stalemate

One of the answers to what the schools of the 1990s should look like is to offer a school which might serve as a model for how schools should operate in order to produce the kinds of involved citizens the twenty-first century will demand. Schools have been created, for the most part, in the image of what society has sought. It is not news, however, that the social order is changing dramatically from the demands imposed by an industrial model to a cooperative, interdisciplinary model. No longer in need of as many factory workers and practical laborers who are controlled hierarchically, the emerging social order cries out for workers and managers who can communicate at a sophisticated level and who can cooperate in enterprises demanding complex thinking and computational ability as well as language and technological skills. More importantly, the democracy itself is being threatened by a growing recognition that our educational institutions do not reflect the demands of the modern workplace.

The most commonly heard critiques among students (not to mention adults) is that schools are not preparing our children for the roles they must play in the social order. There has also been a corresponding loss of faith in the democratic models in the educational system. More and more citizens and young people seem to be hostile or to have lost faith in the voting process which elects people to office who either do not know what their constituents think, or who ignore their interests except during periods when they are running for election. Many have lost confidence in their leaders, but what may be the underlying truth about their alienation from those in power may be misdirected. The figureheads at the top of our institutions are merely the lightning rods for a much stormier disaffection for a system which calls itself democratic, but seems to ignore or to overlook the desires and interests of those it serves.

Schools, unfortunately, have been among the worst offenders. Never very democratic, they have proceeded blithely on as if "business as usual" should continue at the same old stand in the face of an evolving social revolution. Rooted in tradition and the "way things have always been done," the schools have become the immediate symbols of inertia to the younger generation. Disengaged and "turned off" from their rigid environments, students may actually be responding with their actions (or lack thereof) to the fact that their education is deeply fractured and fragmented, but most of their work environments probably will not be. Meanwhile, most educators

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As students become increasingly alienated by their treatment as learning objects who have few if any meaningful ideas to be heard, their teachers become increasingly frustrated with their charges' balking.

are acutely aware that a majority of students are involved and intrigued by a wide variety of interests outside of school, but that too often their behavior in class is passive at best, hostile and intransigent at worst. *We have compartmentalized their learning and separated it so completely from the world that too few of them recognize any connection between the classroom and what goes on in the world, however limited that knowledge may be.* Consequently, we have teachers (for the most part knowledgeable in their disciplines) acting as classical maestros to a group of rock musicians. As academic content is increased yearly, the idea (consciously or unconsciously) is that legislating more facts is better. Students are viewed as expandable suitcases who need more stuffing in order to succeed in the modern world. Meanwhile, little time is spent on learning how to learn, critical thinking, or creative ways to deal with the larger social fabric by making use of what has been learned in school. Nor has there been an awareness fostered that the world will be quite a different place from what anyone anticipated by the time any group of students graduates.

The resulting disjuncture between what students are taught and what they come to discover about the world is leading to schools which are rapidly approaching a stalemate at the most fundamental level: the teaching-learning process. *As students become increasingly alienated by their treatment as learning objects who have few if any meaningful ideas to be heard, their teachers become increasingly frustrated with their charges' balking.* What is clear to most professional educators is that the Regents' "solution" entombed in the Regents' Action Plan is doomed to fail. Demanding more of what students already cannot or will not do will only create a greater crisis. Our "ideal" school, which we firmly believe is feasible in the world as we know and understand it, is one attempt to offer a viable alternative to what many of us know in our hearts is not working well.

Reaching for the Ideal

At the most practical level our school would be composed of approximately 320 students.

Composition—*At the most practical level our school would be composed of approximately 320 students.* For every 80 students there would be six teachers functioning as a team who would have complete control of their students for the entire day. The educators would also have an aide and a secretary for each team, responsible for the implementation of the curriculum, discipline, and physical education. Since this seminar has focused on high schools, our school would concern itself with students from the 9th through the 12th grade, although we would be happier if this school dealt with students from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Governance—*This school will be run with the cooperation of all of the constituencies in the school.* Each group of 80 students will have a representative group of parents, students, and teachers who formulate the matters of daily governance. A similar body will be formed for the school as a whole and the same constituencies will democratically determine the governance policies for the school. Decisions will be made by one member-one vote, and the governance system will provide a working model of a representative democracy in action. It will make clear to most participants that cooperation requires compromise, communication, persuasion, and the ability to help others to see the world from differing points of view as well as their own.

This school will be run with the cooperation of all of the constituencies in the school.

The whole school will be run by a coordinator who is recognized as an outstanding teacher. This officer will continue to teach (at least minimally) and will continue in office at the request and approval of the governance committee for the school. The coordinator will be assisted by a team coordinator elected from each team. Although the coordinator will be appointed for an agreed upon period of time, there will be no tenure as a coordinator, and this officer may be asked to return to the full-time faculty.

Curriculum—*The curriculum for the school will be set by a committee of teachers convened by the coordinator.* This group will decide what items must be covered at each grade level in each subject. The implementation of that curriculum, including the number of periods spent on each subject, will be determined by each team of teachers. No matter which team is involved, however, certain basic principles will be paramount. There will be only one curriculum for all students; there will be no dumbing down so that some students are offered the "best" materials and others are offered "lesser" material. All material will be team taught using a variety of teaching strategies. Every effort will be made to integrate the basic subject matter of English, social studies, mathematics, foreign language, fine arts, and science. The emphasis will be on forming good intellectual habits while dealing with challenging academic subjects. There will be a great deal of student-to-student interaction and instruction.

The curriculum for the school will be set by a committee of teachers convened by the coordinator.

Community Integration

This school will also emphasize basic principles of connecting classroom learning with the outside world and social responsibility to the school community as well as to the larger communities beyond the school. Each year each student will complete a project which integrates the student's school work with some larger community. One such project might be a photographic essay about the life of senior citizens in the community. Another might be a brochure to advertise the historic attractions in the nearby area. Another

This school will also emphasize basic principles of connecting classroom learning with the outside world and social responsibility to the school community as well as to the larger communities beyond the school.

The school will also advocate a strong work ethic among its students.

student might establish a computer program which would quickly provide a list of overlapping books for two local libraries. The idea is to clearly establish in each student's mind that what is learned in school has application and meaning in the larger world, and to indicate that action in the world often involves communication, critical thinking, decision making, and cooperative skills that are important in a democracy.

Every week there will be school-wide Socratic seminars in which small groups will discuss specific selections from a school-wide reading list. These groups will cross age lines and proceed according to several assumptions. One idea is that all students should be exposed to important ideas and human themes and that all have something important to contribute to a discussion. Moreover, the notion that an ability to say something important is not a function of the age of the speaker will be promoted.

Shared Responsibility

The school will also advocate a strong work ethic among its students. Homework will be a regular feature of the school, and it will be read and used in classes rather than handed in to a teacher and employed as a private contribution between the teacher and the student. Students will also be evaluated on the basis of regular essays (which may be for any subject since writing across the curriculum will be stressed), oral examinations, problem-solving exercises in which theoretical material is applied to practical situations, and lab practicums. Although our teaching staff will use a conventional grading system of A, B, C, D, and F, there was a strong minority sentiment for no grades. Whether the school used conventional letter or number grades or no grades, all agreed that each student would produce a portfolio at the end of each year which demonstrated the student's mastery of each subject as well as the student's ability to integrate subjects. The portfolio or exhibition would be a public display of the student's accomplishment. There will be extensive faculty comment and criticism (positive as well as negative) about the student's performance. Self-evaluation will also be built into the system from early in each student's career. Given the demands of the curriculum and the recognition of individual differences and curricular differences, our students would take selected Regents examinations. They would also take many of the conventional standardized tests (SAT, Achievement Tests, AP exams, etc.) and generally score better than those students in more traditional schools.

Students will also be given responsibilities depending upon their ability to handle them as assessed by the staff. Internships, mentoring activities, instructional modules, and tutorials will be offered to all students given their individual strengths and abilities. *All students will be asked to participate in maintaining facilities in an effort to engender a*

sense of belonging and responsibility for their environment. Every student will also engage in at least one community service activity each year in addition to the project already described. This school will try to foster the idea that the school is definitely a part of the community, and the community has an active interest in the school as well. The activities could be of an individual or a group nature, but they must be recognized as promoting a positive interaction between the school and the community.

Professionalism—This institution will protect the professionalism of its faculty. Each teacher will have a lunch period, a prep period, and team meeting time each day. There will be either a large number of independent learning centers for students during these periods or else there will be scheduled times for mentoring and internships which will free teachers for other sorts of professional interactions.

All students will be asked to participate in maintaining facilities in an effort to engender a sense of belonging and responsibility for their environment.

Since discipline will be handled by each team of teachers for its students, there will be no need to hire extra personnel to handle it for them. Also, all teachers will be involved in physical education for their students. This might involve some unconventional activities and some unconventional arrangements, but it could also lead to more exposure to lifelong physical fitness activities than students are exposed to in conventional schools. For example, it might lead to walking, hiking, cross country skiing, cycling, or even many of the more conventional sports like swimming, tennis, or baseball. All of these activities would be set by the team or by the whole school staff meeting together.

Communication—*Since this school will promote self-initiative, participation, cooperation, and active commitment to learning and to living, the staff will need to be committed to these ideas as well.* Therefore, all new teachers will be interviewed and selected by the faculty as a whole with a dominant voice being reserved for the team which the new staff member will join. Teachers and administrators will have to show an active commitment to the same types of activities in which the students are involved, and those activities must be made public as well. There will be faculty self-evaluations and goal setting each year. Governance groups will seek regular information from students, parents and graduates about what parts of their education were of the most value and which could be improved. This information would not be sought with the idea of negativism or disciplinary action but (at least initially) with the idea of improving the education of students as much as possible. Because most of the teaching will be team teaching, there will also be a great deal more professional, first-hand information about how colleagues teach and work with students. This sort of knowledge should lead to cooperative enterprises to improve instructors' weaknesses while maximizing the possibility of taking advantage of individual strengths.

Since this school will promote self-initiative, participation, cooperation, and active commitment to learning and to living, the staff will need to be committed to these ideas as well.

Organizational Models

We can envision three different ways to set up our model school, each one of which has its particular strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the whole staff would have to decide which model best represents its interests. Diagrams follow which clarify the mechanics of each model. Model One might be called the *Grade-Level Model.* Four interdisciplinary teams would be formed, one for each grade level. Each team would always deal with its grade level, and the students would pass each year from grade level team to grade level team. There are several advantages to this type of model. A grade-level team will develop, over time, considerable expertise in dealing with its level of student and in working out a curriculum which will work well. To make adjustments each year, which are necessary for a group of students, is less taxing on the faculty than trying to invent a new curriculum each year. That would leave considerable faculty energy free for adjustments and other professional activities.

No matter which model is established, however, there should always be responsibility put on each student and teacher to work up to the level of his or her individual capacity.

The second model might be called the *Nurture Model.* Four interdisciplinary teams would progress with their students over four years. The advantages in terms of getting to know the students, along with their strengths and weaknesses, are clear. For faculty who become inured by handling the same curriculum and level of student year after year, this type of arrangement can be stimulating. However, this type of model demands a greater range of expertise for each faculty member, and if there is a weak faculty member or even a team that is weak, then one group of students is "sentenced" to the same limitations for a longer period of time. Students also are exposed to fewer points of view in each subject matter, which might also impose some limitations.

The third model can be called the *Interage Model.* This model forms four groups of interdisciplinary teams, but includes 20 students at each age group. The advantage of this model is that it allows for a good deal of interage group mentoring, learning, and development as well as modeling. This model also requires a more broadly expert faculty than does Model One, and it requires more adept organizational abilities than Model Two, but it also opens up more possibilities for those who can make these adjustments.

A Democratic Community—In the hands of an able faculty and staff any of the models could work effectively. *No matter which model is established, however, there should always be responsibility put on each student and teacher to work up to the level of his or her individual capacity.* There should also be time to promote professional growth and development for each staff member just as there is a concerted effort made to promote the growth and development of each student. Underlying all of the school's activities is the fundamental idea that the school is part of a larger series of communities,

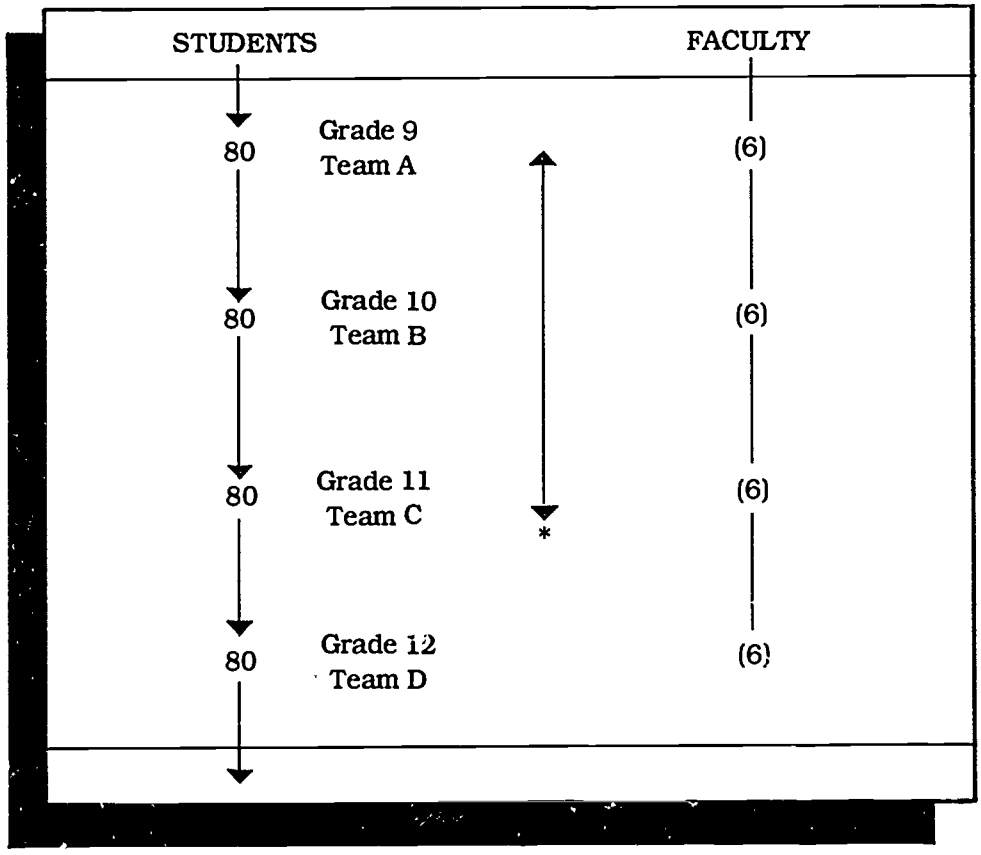
and that each individual should learn how to act responsibly to develop individual talents that are usable for the communal as well as the individual's well-being. All students should also have numerous opportunities to see that school knowledge is often useful in the larger world beyond the school. Everything learned in school may not have an immediate practical application, but many of the skills acquired in the classroom are essential for dealing with the world at large. *Moreover, each student should also have numerous experiences with a democracy in action to see the strengths and limitations of that form of government as it operates.* In that sense, this school will be a working democracy and all of its graduates ought to have a clear-cut sense of how a democracy functions, for better or worse.

Moreover, each student should also have numerous experiences with a democracy in action to see the strengths and limitations of that form of government as it operates.

Our school would be small enough to provide a community atmosphere in which learning is the primary function of all members of the community. It would provide an environment in which teachers and students came to recognize one another's strengths and limitations. The school would be large enough to offer a great deal of diversity for students and faculty alike. Such a concept is also expandable. The school could increase its size by factors of 20, but we would envision a viable community as no larger than 1000 students. The school must be small enough to foster close interaction between faculty, administration, and students. It must also be small enough so that economies of scale, which almost inevitably sacrifice individual and communal growth and development for the "good" of some abstract collective whole, do not become the norm.

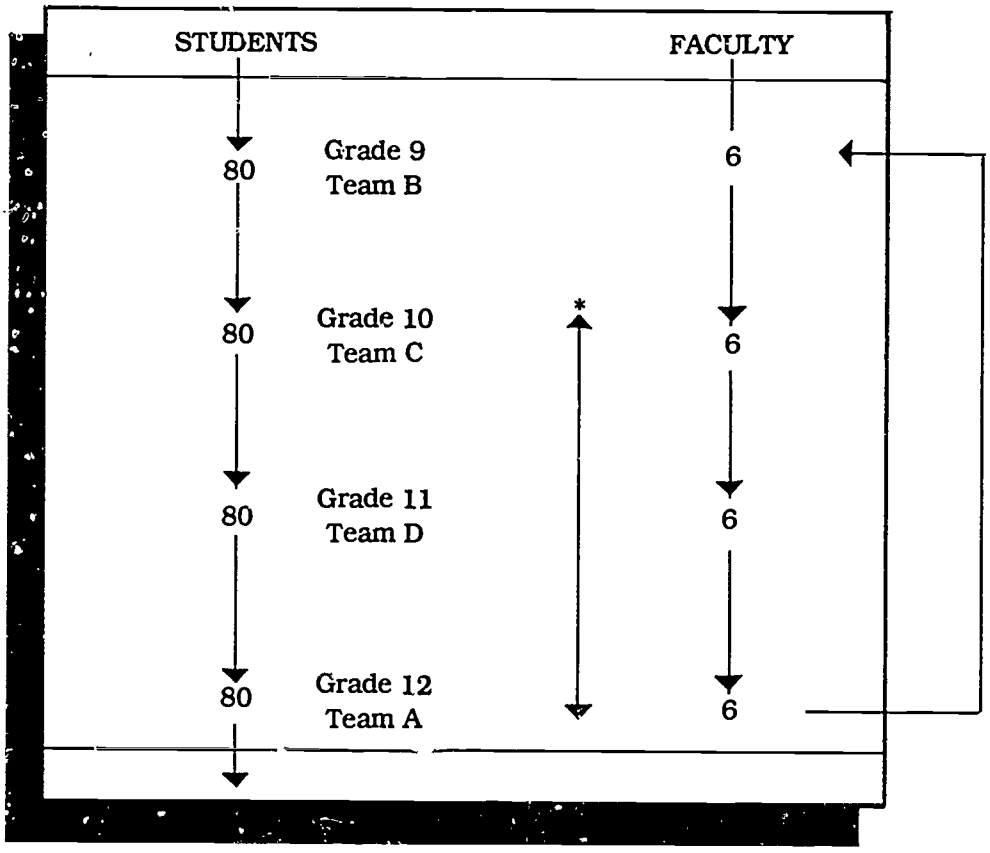
MODEL 1:

GRADE LEVEL MODEL



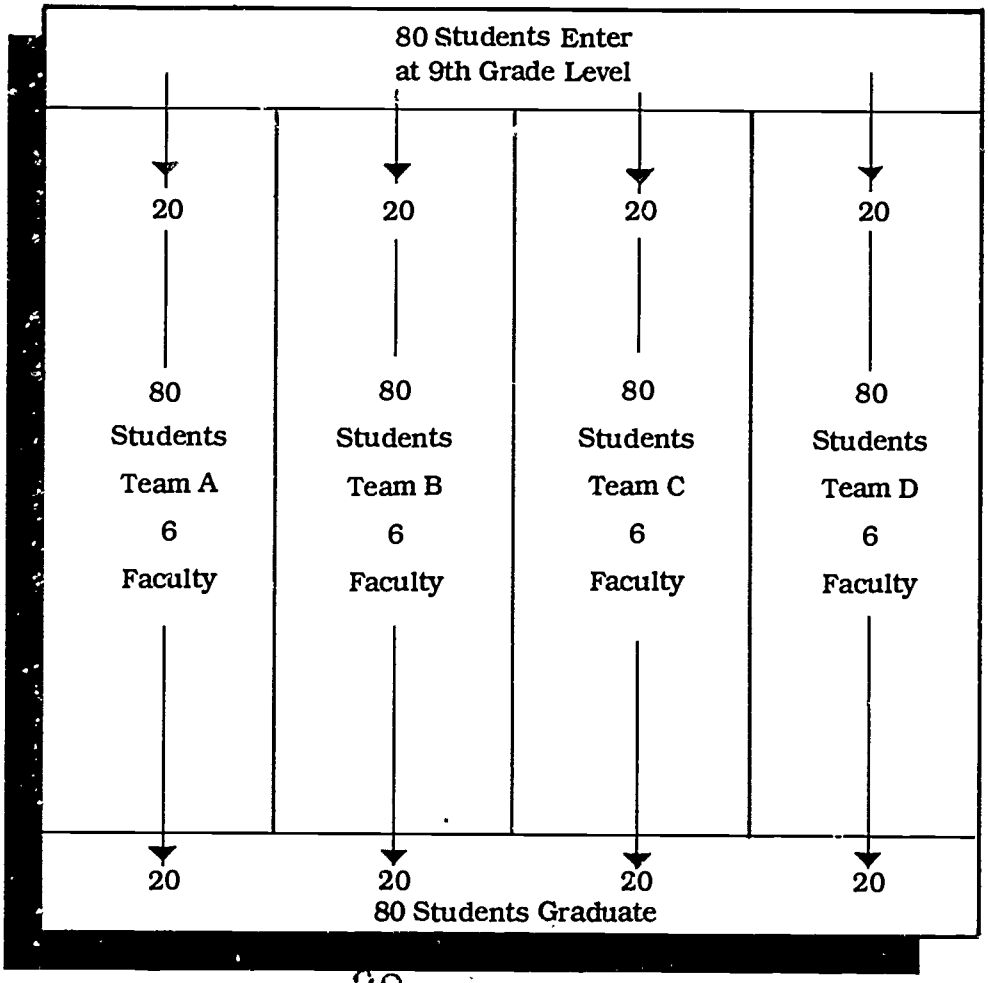
*arranged interage activity

MODEL 2:
NURTURE MODEL



*arranged interage activity

MODEL 3:
INTERAGE MODEL



RESTRUCTURING FOR THE IDEAL

The Empowerment Issue

It is almost impossible to read an education journal, an educators' union newspaper, or a current best-seller in educational non-fiction without meeting the word "empowerment." Does the word itself have an overtone of revolution, signalling unrest among the faculty and warning impending doom to the "head that wears the crown"? Is the hierarchical structure of the high school in danger of being overturned? And, if so, is that all bad?

In response to the issue of the roles of school personnel, conversation among the seminar participants—teachers, superintendents, principals, and department chairpersons—was directed first toward a definition of empowerment. *Empowerment, they agree, is an old word to cover a new issue: providing a structure for all members of the educational community to share decision-making responsibilities concerning the mission of the school.* We agreed that it is both realistic and educationally healthy to design a collegial environment in which teachers, community, students, and administrators can combine their special skills to make wise decisions for the benefit of the entire educational community.

Empowerment, they agreed, is an old word to cover a new issue: providing a structure for all members of the educational community to share decision-making responsibilities concerning the mission of the school.

Teachers need to be consulted on all aspects of educational policy. They not only need to be consulted often, but they need to be heard and reacted to. "Suggestions they make need to be acted upon," wrote a seminar participant.

Defining a Mission

In order to implement a program of empowerment (shared decision-making), it is essential that each participant has a thorough knowledge of the school's mission. Research has established that effective schools have a clear-cut mission statement; all personnel who share in decision-making will support the school's mission. The roles of all decision-makers will then become clear.

Moving Toward Autonomy

How can the public school of the 1990s match the successes of the best private schools? The seminar group, in addressing this question, identified some of the positive characteristics of excellent private schools:

- small class size
- individualized instruction
- opportunities to counsel students
- flexible settings and scheduling

- supportive parents with high expectations
- criterion-referenced testing and testing on an individualized basis
- extensive homework that must be completed
- high attendance and few discipline problems
- special interest areas (music, physical education, athletics, enrichment and remediation) scheduled after school
- decreased pressures of mandated external testing
- flexible scheduling that facilitates hiring specialized part-time instructors.

Most of the attributes of excellent private schools, the seminar group concluded, could be part of a public school system, if not in an 800-pupil public high school building, at least in a "mini-school" within that building. Mini-schools could be created to meet the specific needs of a building.

Each school building that chooses a shared decision-making model will be given its own resources and will create the school's program within those limits. The autonomous academic departments and a Principal's Cabinet will direct allocation of funds and use of the facility. The shared decisions of the two groups will determine staff structure, student assignments, equipment and materials purchased, instructional methods, staff development opportunities, and resource allocation. Accountability for the results is shared by the decision-makers.

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Organizing for Participation

A participatory format suggested by the study group would take advantage of the organizational structure currently existing in most high schools. Academic departments normally have regular meetings with their faculty members, usually led by department chairpersons. A representative would be selected from this group to serve on the Principal's Cabinet. The Principal's Cabinet is seen as a group of elected and selected students, community members, teachers, and support staff meeting regularly with the building principal and with other persons who have supervisory responsibilities for grade 7-12 students. The Principal's Cabinet differs from the academic department groups because it concerns itself with interdisciplinary and longitudinal policies and programs for that building. We envision that selected members of the Principal's Cabinet would serve on district-wide permanent and ad hoc committees, depending on the interests and expertise of the committee members.

A participatory format suggested by the study group would take advantage of the organizational structure currently existing in most high schools.

Academic departments will also experience increased autonomy in this seminar proposal. Within each department the decision-making scope will expand to include selecting leaders (department chairperson, subject-area consultant, meeting chairperson, inservice chairperson), selecting Principal's Cabinet representatives, hiring new staff, evaluating staff, evaluating programs, and selecting texts and curriculum

according to the State guidelines and the local district's needs. The academic department's role will include facilitating, sharing of effective teaching techniques, and peer coaching. Each academic department will be collectively accountable for that department.

Establishing a Career Ladder

In schools where decision-making is a shared responsibility, participants must meet regularly with a purposeful, planned agenda directed toward the school's mission. The seminar group recognized the problem of meetings during the school day, and the reluctance of teachers to leave their classrooms to serve on committees such as the Principal's Cabinet, or on district-wide curriculum and grade-level study groups. We propose a system that identifies levels of staff. Specifically, teachers would be hired on a three-tiered basis. The Tier I teacher would work the regular school day and school year. Tier II teachers would perform specific duties beyond instruction, such as being on the Principal's Cabinet, serving an advisorship or chairmanship, writing curriculum, or planning staff development programs. Tier III teachers would be year-round (12 months) employees, with a month's vacation. They would be considered full time professionals with virtually an unlimited commitment in terms of time and energy in all of the professional work that has to be done within a school. Their responsibilities could include district-wide program implementation, management of teacher mentor programs, public relations, and business and community partnerships.

In schools where decision-making is a shared responsibility, participants must meet regularly with a purposeful, planned agenda directed toward the school's mission.

A negotiated contract that recognizes three tiers or levels of work would need to include three levels of salary. Each tier would require a separate schedule, with starting salaries higher for Tier II than Tier I; and Tier III, higher than Tier II. The working environment for teachers on Tier III would be improved to include appropriate office facilities and support personnel at the workplace. Evaluation of performance would be directly related to the Tier-level job description, a mutually-agreed upon standard document, individualized according to the ongoing or temporary needs of the building or the district.

The seminar group recognizes the outstanding record of teachers in volunteering to serve on committees and to work on curriculum during the summer and during the school year. We also acknowledge that there are successful teachers who have no interest in additional school work that extends beyond the school day. We know, too, that many excellent teachers, in their search for leadership roles and increased pay, have left the classroom to become administrators. The proposed three-tier contract system would allow a teacher to continue to be a teacher, to assume leadership in curriculum, instruction or supervision, and to receive remuneration according to the level of selected participation.

The seminar group identified the need for differentiating teacher evaluation methods.

Differentiating Evaluation

The seminar group identified the need for differentiating teacher evaluation methods. Currently most school districts require at least three formal observations of the new, probationary teacher, at least one formal observation of the tenured teacher, and an annual evaluation of every teacher. We agreed that evaluation of teaching performance is directly related to the improvement of instruction and is an ongoing responsibility of participants in the shared decision-making model. The seminar group proposes an evaluation system for each category of teacher status, delegating supervisory time according to level or current need. For example, a tenured teacher not in need of help would meet with a supervisor on an occasional basis. The meeting, in an unstructured setting, would be a conversation—a dialogue between educators—that could result in a new teaching strategy or perhaps offer positive reinforcement to the successful teacher. It follows that time saved from formal observations, at least four hours per tenured faculty member, could now be spent with a new teacher or with a tenured teacher who needs help.

Finding Time

The seminar group recognized the increased demands placed on students and teachers in this era of RAPs, RCTs, SATs, Regents examinations, and college entrance vagaries. *In response to both academic skills/content and affective/career-start interests, we envisioned a longer school day and a longer school year.*

In response to both academic skills/content and affective/career-start interests, we envisioned a longer school day and a longer school year.

The lengthened school day could be a longer span of time, such as a ten-period day, with staggered starting and ending times. Students and staff would put in the same amount of required time as they do now, but the schedule would be more flexible and would provide more opportunities for students and teachers to meet the demands on their time.

In another form of lengthened school day, staff would be at work for an entire 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. day, with student programs scheduled all day. Staff would have specific duties; for example, five instructional periods and scheduled office hours to meet with students. To address this schedule realistically, teachers would be provided with appropriate work space, and meeting and counseling facilities.

The longer school year proposal is the group's response to concerns about the difficulties of maintaining instructional continuity with students who are repeatedly and regularly excused from class for counseling, special education, field trips, fund-raising and club commitments, athletic programs, assemblies and the like. Integral to the longer school year plan is the assumption that instructional periods would not be interrupted for the teacher or for the student.

Suggested as longer school-year plans were:

- *maintaining a calendar of 180 academic days, and adding 20-30 days.* The days could be added as four separate one-week sessions during the year, four to six weeks in the summer, or three two-week blocks throughout the year. These sessions could be used for special programs—interdisiciplinary units of study, field trips, health and physical education programs, instrumental and vocal music performing groups, community service seminars, remedi ion, enrichment in academics, cultural and artistic pro ms.
- *adding 20-30 days to the present alendar*, extending the current time to cover material.
- *running a 230 day school year* with time blocks set up to serve the needs of different students. Some courses would run 230 days. Others would be shorter with enrichment and remediation components.

The seminar group concurred that the school-within-a-school is an expeditious way to initiate change to improve instruction. A mini-school could be implemented as a model, with the rest of the school staff and the community as interested observers, welcomed visitors, and planners for future mini-schools. A school district with more than one high school could meet the need for change by setting in motion a comprehensive, district-wide committee to design plans for one or more of the district's buildings to house a model school or schools incorporating:

- parental involvement and support
- a staff, having chosen to work in the mini-school, dedicated to the agreed-upon concept
- class sizes appropriate for both individualized and seminar sessions
- teachers able to assume greater responsibility for their students' social and emotional needs
- flexible scheduling within the school day, including time for teachers to plan together for interdisciplinary units of study directed toward the school's central theme or magnet concept
- a shared decision making team approach, empowering team members to make decisions about student class assignments, curriculum, schedules, evaluation, parent and community involvement, teaching techniques, inservice, evaluation, and accountability.

The seminar group concurred that the school-within-a-school is an expeditious way to initiate change to improve instruction.

MANDATES—A HELP OR A HINDRANCE—PROGRAM ENHANCERS OR INHIBITORS

The Concern

For two hundred years, Americans have experimented with a system of government which seeks to maintain a balance between local and centralized interests. We have adhered to this "republican" system because, on the one hand, to give all power to centralized authorities would remove the decision-making process beyond the grasp of those whom it is meant to affect, thus violating our notion of democracy. To leave all decisions to local authorities, on the other hand, is equally unfair because, as Madison pointed out in *The Federalist, #10,* the smaller the political decision-making unit, the more likely it is to be dominated by a single faction or interest group. In the name of both efficiency and democracy, a balance between local and central interests must be struck so that all relevant interests can play a role in shaping and executing policy.

Over the years, our educational system has moved more emphatically toward being directed from above, with a concomitant loss of local control.

Over the years, our educational system has moved more emphatically toward being directed from above, with a concomitant loss of local control. The net result of this move has been positive, permitting, for instance, our nation to begin to implement a policy of racial integration in our school system, and permitting students in all school districts to aspire to achieve facility with the tools of academic and cultural literacy which would enable them to function in the larger society within which they live and work. The question arises, however, has the pendulum swung so far in the direction of centralized control in our state that dynamism, diversity, and creativity have been stultified at the local level, the level at which education in the final analysis must take place if our children are to become literate? We believe that it has.

Much of what occurs in our schools takes place because of decisions made at the state level. We are not prepared to say categorically that this is wrong; what we are prepared to say is that this issue should be scrutinized closely. Our point becomes clearer if we focus on the Regents' Curriculum and Examination process, the Regents' Scholarship process, the use of standardized tests like PEP scores to evaluate district-wide performance and school rankings, and the impact of state mandates on school program and philosophy.

The Regents' Curriculum and Examination Process

Has the Regents' Curriculum and Examination process become the tail that wags the dog? There are pros and cons which need to be examined before an answer can be given.

Has the Regents' Curriculum and Examination process become the tail that wags the dog?

On the plus side, the Regents' Curriculum/Examination process:

- provides a good target baseline for students
- provides a state-wide baseline encouraging uniformity across all districts
- permits easy transfer of students from district to district in our highly mobile society
- provides a useful tool to measure teaching effectiveness
- is economical and efficient
- keeps teachers "honest," preventing them from skewing curriculum toward what they like to teach while avoiding topics they do not like to teach
- helps college admissions personnel evaluate students from different districts, permitting "fairer" admissions' decisions
- permits self-evaluation by teachers
- provides a sound basis for ranking students by a uniform standard of academic achievement
- uses curricula and tests prepared by teaching practitioners.

Counter-points on the debit side of the Regents' Curriculum and Examination process include:

- a baseline too low for many students as a private school educator noted, *"Most of our students are in the middle range and come to our school because they find nothing offered to challenge middle range students in public schools."*
- failing to acknowledge the diversity of student populations in different districts. A local math teacher expressed this point well when he reported, *"When a group from the Education Ministry of Japan visiting a local school was asked what they felt was our greatest weakness, they said there was no individualization at the secondary level. They felt it was impossible for everyone to learn the same amount of material in the same time period."*
- promoting mediocrity by stifling teachers' creativity and making enrichment difficult. Another teacher remarked that he did not consider himself a mathematics teacher anymore *"because I teach the new sequential math. I feel I only have time to tell students that this is how you do this problem...now we'll have a test. We have to cut the discussion because we must move to the next topic to get ready for the Regents' exam."*

- compelling teachers to teach to the exam, not the curriculum, and promoting student attrition by preventing "weak" students from taking the exam to make schools' exam results look good. As one teacher remarked, *"Most of the curriculum that we have is tests...so tests define what it means to be knowledgeable in particular disciplines."*
- efficient but educationally weak and unimaginative curricula and examinations. A veteran social studies teacher remarked, *"The State of New York seems determined to push everybody to the middle...good schools are being dragged down by the Regents' Action Plan."*
- limitations in admissions use because of a more mobile student population. A school administrator who once served as a college admissions representative remarked, *"Admissions personnel are probably the least adept interpreters of high school transcripts in the whole field of education. They're salespeople anyway, not educators."*
- falsely lulling teachers into feeling satisfied with their performance based on student exam scores. A teacher's comment germane to this point: *"We have created a nation of students and teachers that equates responsibility with being able to do what you are told...We have never equated responsibility with free choice."*
- a lack of objectivity as illustrated by as much as a 10 to 20 point alleged differential awarded from district to district for similar answers on a recent English Regents' exam.
- a need to select teachers for exam preparation from a wider base. *"Too much of the curriculum is state-driven from the top with too little input from a wide array of practitioners from the field."*

The Regents College Scholarships and newly created Byrd Scholarships were awarded this past year in a manner which sought to provide a sex and ethnic balance to the awardees.

The Regents' Scholarship Process

The Regents College Scholarships and newly created Byrd Scholarships were awarded this past year in a manner which sought to provide a sex and ethnic balance to the awardees. As has been well-documented in the media, this process is ludicrous for a number of reasons:

- The process created incentives for districts to "cheat" by inflating the grade point averages of their students to give their own students an advantage in the competition. In one case, it is alleged that a school district reported that *all* of the students who competed for Regents' and Byrd Scholarships had attained a cumulative average of 100% for their high school careers. Further evidence of

"cheating" is represented by the fact that in more than half of the Congressional districts in the State, the *lowest* possible grade point average needed to qualify for a Byrd Scholarship was 1.00%.

- The process penalized students from schools which used tougher (and more realistic) grading systems.
- The process, created by succumbing to political pressure, is an object-lesson in what educators should avoid letting happen to the education system.
- The process appears to reveal a lack of philosophical perspective on why different levels of scholarships should be awarded and further, there appears to be little reconciliation of the scholarship programs with the aims of the tuition aid program.

There are a number of possible solutions which could be used to avoid the recent fiasco:

- Scholarships could be awarded on the basis of a separate, State-generated exam, as was the case prior to 1976.
- The SAT or ACT scores could be used exclusively, but with a "quota system" imposed to guarantee sex and racial balance among awardees.
- Regents' course examination scores—not school averages—could become the basis of awards.
- All scholarships could be abolished and the entire program administration reviewed from the ground up... direction should come from the educators, not legislators.

District Performance and School Rankings

The issue of ranking school districts as "failing or in jeopardy" by using PEP scores as the primary evaluation tool and the issue of mandates are intimately linked and inseparable.

In 1975, a new category was created to label certain students as "Pupils with Special Education Needs (PSEN)," and aid which had previously been supplemental grants became categorical aid. One school administrator challenged the effectiveness of this change: *"What we do in schools with the categorical aid system is create a huge pork barrel that drives the system toward money but not toward what is good for teaching and the learning process."*

Currently, systems must submit a comprehensive improvement plan to justify this categorical aid. While such a requirement may make sense from the point of view of SED personnel, it exacerbates the feeling among local school administrators that they are merely functionaries of a distant bureaucracy. As one superintendent put it: *"I feel inundated by all kinds of standardized tests and CAR reports from above. I am not sure what kind of philosophy this is setting for the individual classroom teacher."*

What we do in schools with the categorical aid system is create a huge pork barrel that drives the system toward money but not toward what is good for teaching and the learning process.

There is something of a "Catch-22" in all of this for local administrators. They must file reports to qualify for aid, and then these reports become the basis for brow-beating "districts in jeopardy" by publicizing poor achievement on PEP tests administered at the beginning of third and sixth grades. Another superintendent believes the cart is being put before the horse. He noted, *"The categorical aid situation causes us to continue to build a 50-year-old car and try to make it a high-performance vehicle...We're still putting new bolts on a rusty chassis. There is patchwork here and patchwork there...and categorical aid encourages that kind of thing rather than saying, 'let's disenthrall ourselves and look at new ways to organize the system.' "*

We are not trained specifically to deal with all those factors that influence kids. Kids don't drop problems of alcoholism, child abuse, or peer pressure to 'do drugs' at the school door and come in ready to learn.

The current system assumes that entire districts can be accurately evaluated on the basis of PEP scores alone, and beyond this, implies that school districts are the primary agents responsible for the achievement of their students, as measured at the beginning of third and sixth grades. We find a number of fallacies underlying this kind of logic. To begin with, many students enter the school system with a number of deficits:

- they come from families which are functionally illiterate
- many children are victims of poverty and come from single-parent homes
- they enter the system with little if any readiness training
- the home environment fails to support the goals established by the school while the educational system is held responsible for the problems created by the larger society.

In this last regard, an exasperated teacher said, *"We are not trained specifically to deal with all those factors that influence kids. Kids don't drop problems of alcoholism, child abuse, or peer pressure to 'do drugs' at the school door and come in ready to learn."*

To publicize entire districts as "failing" does nothing to enhance the self-image and boost morale of either the professionals or the students in such systems.

To publicize entire districts as "failing" does nothing to enhance the self-image and boost morale of either the professionals or the students in such systems. It simply reinforces a sense of negativity and failure and, indeed, blames the victim for his or her plight. Finger-pointing corrodes public support for education rather than rallying the public to the side of systems with large numbers of at-risk students. PEP scores should be used as they were originally intended—as a diagnostic tool to help educators organize programs, not label districts.

If districts are to be ranked, more meaningful criteria must be used as a standard. Such factors as Weighted Average Daily Attendance (WADA), drop-out rates, SAT scores, college and job placements, Regents' exam performance, and many other factors should be combined to give a full measure of a district's achievements and failures rather than the single yardstick of the PEP scores.

The Impact of State Mandates

How can an appropriate balance be struck between local and state control of the education process? Can *any* balance be maintained if mandates increasingly dictate the parameters of what local educators may or may not do? *With the growing perception among educators that schools are becoming the focal points for various interest groups seeking to solve society's problems, are we trying—are we compelled by mandates—to become all things to all people?*

Drug awareness, fire prevention, AIDS education, music, drama, health—the list goes on and on—of programs which must be incorporated into the school day because of mandates or political pressures, leaving less and less time for academic programs. Is anyone in charge here? Do we realize where this is heading? From the point of view of the classroom teacher, probably not. As one of them commented, *"We are in the position in schools of being pushed into instituting programs and into involvement with community agencies...I don't think we've thought carefully enough about the impact of these programs..."*

With the growing perception among educators that schools are becoming the focal points for various interest groups seeking to solve society's problems, are we trying—are we compelled by mandates—to become all things to all people?

AFTERWORD

A report such as this report on *Education in the 1990s* is the culmination of discussion, give and take, and, in most cases, consensus. The quality of the report derives from the quality of discussion. There were many, many high points of discussion in this seminar, and those ideals and dreams are reflected in the report which really captures the essence of the discussions which concluded on Tuesday, March 15, 1988, with presentations to a number of invited guests at The Rensselaerville Institute.

The process of synthesizing the discussions and recommendations was assumed by Patrick Allen, Paul Loatman, Helen Martin, and Carolyn Nardolillo. We are grateful to them for their work. In addition, we express our thanks to Dee Warner, Mentor Teacher, for assuming the responsibility as overall editor and for the introduction. The success of the report is augmented by their efforts.