

PUBLIC CONFIDENCE CONFERENCE

1000 0000 0725

Ernest L. Boyer

U.S. Commissioner of Education

When Henry Barnard was named the first U.S. Commissioner of Education 112 years ago he had just one assignment to fulfill. His job according to the law was to report to Congress on the condition of Education in America. They say it took him 18 months and 700 pages to prepare his first report. And as I understand it, Congress concluded that they were being told much too much, much too late.

This evening I shall spare you my own 700 page statement. However, I would like to comment on my own impressions and tell you why I have great confidence and tell you also why I have great concern.

First, since becoming Commissioner 2 1/2 years ago I've deepened my convictions that Federal help to educate can make a major difference.

Education

(July 7)

Second I've also gained great confidence because of the people I have met.

Since 1977 I've visited dozens of classrooms from coast to coast and I've been reminded once again that teaching is one of the toughest assignments in the world.

Keeping 25 to 35 children attentive and well focused is not easy -- as any parent should clearly understand.

But to help each one move intellectually ahead is a task which is enormously complex. And I'm convinced we should give the classroom teachers of this country much more backing and support.

Students also build my confidence. For years I've met with students on campus after campus and I've been enormously impressed. Just three weeks ago I met with junior and senior high school students in my office to talk about their education. That day-long session was one of the most rewarding I have had. Those students were bright, articulate, and demanding of themselves; and we do an enormous disservice to millions of our children by describing them as ignorant and hedonistic. They are in many ways as strong or stronger than the adults who criticize.

I've been encouraged by my colleagues in OE. Federal service has its weaknesses to be sure. I've found the rigidity of personnel transactions a source of special irrita-

tion. ^{but} but overall, the formality of the system is no greater than other structures -- a college faculty for example -- and we do a massive disservice to government in this country to refer to public employment in derisive terms and to make the label "bureaucrat" a term of ridicule.

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I'm also encouraged by the renewed public interest in our schools. Polls reveal that while the confidence in schools has gone down, our belief in public education remains high. And most importantly we still have confidence in the particular school of which we are a part.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES

- o Gallup's annual poll on public attitudes on education revealed in 1978 that only 36% of the American people rate their schools as satisfactory compared to 48% in 1974.
- o A 1978 CBS News Poll revealed that 41% of all adults today feel that education is worse now than when they were in school; 35% believe the quality is better.
- o However, public confidence in the individuals who run education, whether it be public elementary, secondary, or postsecondary institutions, is very

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high (83.4 %). In fact, it ranks higher in confidence than for individuals running organized labor (57.1%), television (66.9%), major corporations (79.3%), Congress (75.7%) and the Executive branch of the Federal government (71.7%). This confidence is similar to that for Supreme Court members (80.6%) and those responsible for banks and financial institutions (86.6%). This confidence in educational leaders has been consistent since the poll was first taken in 1973.

- o In addition, a recent Gallup survey asked the following question: "In recent years has your overall attitude toward the public schools in your community become more favorable or less favorable?"

-- Replies to this question, and analysis of the reasons why respondents feel more favorably or less favorably toward the schools, reveal a basic fact: The more respondents know at firsthand about the public schools, the more favorable are their views; the less interested and less well informed the less

favorable. Most important is the fact that persons who depend on the media for their information are most critical of the schools.

-- Parents with children now in the public schools say they have become more favorable in their views of the public schools in recent years; those who have no children in school hold the reverse opinion.

- o The same Gallup survey found solid agreement registered by all groups on the question of whether children today get a better education than their parents did. The answer is "better" by a substantial margin. Those who are in a position to be best informed -- those parents who have one or more children in the public schools -- vote more than 3 to 1 that schools are better today than in their time. Even those who report that in recent years their attitudes have become less favorable are still inclined to say that the schools are better than they were when they attended.
- o The 1976 Gallup Poll questioned respondents on local responsibility for education. It found that the American public is greatly opposed to giving up

local responsibility for the public schools, no matter what the encroachments of the state and federal governments. The public still holds to the principle that local school policies should be set by local school boards.

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It's especially encouraging that so many ordinary citizens want to help the public schools. In fact, volunteerism -- in many regions -- has become a landslide movement.

VOLUNTEERISM

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- o Most recent statistics on volunteerism in the U.S. indicate that approximately 37 million Americans are involved in volunteer work (at an average of 6 hours a week).
-- Of the 37 million, 15% volunteer in educational activities.
- o Longitudinal data on volunteerism in large cities show a marked increase in actual number participating in school volunteer activities. The number of school volunteers in New York City, for example, grew from 2,690 in June 1974 to 5,120 in June 1978.

Last year - while in Schnectady, N.Y., I saw an older man and a young boy in the Martin Luther King school library. When I asked what was going on, the man replied that he had recently retired from OE, and rather than meditate beside the lake he decided to use his brain and reading skill to help young students learn to read. He now tutors 5 hours every day and has recruited 35 other retirees to help.

Finally, my confidence in education has gone up because many schools are making solid academic gains.

- o Specifically, I believe the downward drift of test scores has been turned around. Schools are putting renewed emphasis on the fundamentals, especially in languages and mathematics.

THE EARLY GRADES

- o Today's first-graders enter school with more developed skills, as measured by readiness tests, than their counterparts of the mid-1960s. Definitely, children now enter first grade with more knowledge of letter names and word meaning, and also more knowledge about numbers.

- o Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress show significant increases in reading ability among nine year olds. From 1971 to 1975 the increase in literal and inferential skills rose 1.2 percentage points nationally and 2.8 percentage points in the Southeast.

{ The increases among black nine year olds are even greater: 4.8 percentage points nationally and 7.7 percentage points in the Southeast.

- o According to the National Assessment, nine-year olds, i.e., 3rd and 4th graders, also improved in writing between 1970 and 1974.
- o The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, between 1968 and 1973, provides evidence of improved student achievement in reading and mathematics for second, third, and fourth grade students.
- o The statewide Iowa testing program demonstrates similar gains in the early years.

MOVE
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P. 1

(o NIE's study of compensatory programs -- the most comprehensive study of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary education Act completed to date -- demonstrated the effectiveness of concentrated instruction for low-achieving children in grades one and three.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

- o American 10 year olds rank fourth in science among 14 of the most advanced countries of the world.
- o American 14 year olds rank third in reading comprehension among 13 of the most advanced countries of the world.
- o An International Education Assessment in the late 1960^s and early 1970^s shows that --
-- only the 14-year-olds of New Zealand and Finland outperform American 14-year-olds in reading; England, Sweden, Japan, Australia, Hungary, Scotland and Italy do less well;
-- and, at the time of the assessment, the United States was retaining nearly 80% of the age group through the final year of secondary school; only Japan which retained 70% of the age group, came close to this figure -- most of the other countries retained about one-third of the proportion retained here.
- o This week we are signing an agreement with THE STATES ^{IN} ~~and~~ an unprecedented partnership to promote the basic skills.

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BASIC SKILLS TITLE II

I support this renewed commitment to the fundamentals, not out of reactionary inclinations, but simply because no student can succeed if he or she cannot read or write or speak effectively or accurately compute.

This Nation's commitment to public education is the most advanced and ambitious in the world. Because of this commitment this Nation leads the world, not because of ignorance but because of education.

- o And any talk of deschooling our society, or closing up our schools, or not funding public education
- o Is to reject one of the Nation's most essential social institutions.

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These are some of the reasons why I am confident about public education. But I am concerned as well. The most fundamental problem we now face is how to pay for public education.

- o In 1647 the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law requiring every town of 50 or more citizens to have a schoolmaster to teach the children to read and write.

o From that time on the policy has been local support for local schools.

Clearly that pattern now has broken down. The joint push for local tax reduction and social equity has shifted school finance increasingly to the state, with Federal support for compensatory help.

California Proposition 13: Local support dropped from 52% to 28%. 25 States provide 50% or more of school aid.
Bond issues: 1978 - 53% passed - 47% of \$ approved
1977 - 57% passed - 61% of \$ approved

Many school districts are financially up against the wall, and I suspect the next 10 years will bring more turmoil as school districts all across the country are caught in the crisis of transition as traditional tax support continues to erode.

Most ominous are the moves in several states to withdraw direct school support and give money to the parents. I believe the stability of the school structure will seriously erode and disadvantaged students will be the victims of such schemes.

The financing of public education must be reshaped, but the alternatives proposed must strengthen, not erode this Nation's commitment to the public schools.

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I have a second deep concern. Frankly, I believe the so-called comprehensive high school in this country is largely obsolete. I also believe the 4 year lockstep needs to be reshaped.

The dropout rate is still a national disgrace. Even though attrition has decreased, 25% of our high school students leave before they graduate -- in some city schools it's 40 - 50% -- and many do not return. Equally shocking is the climate in many of our urban schools.

CRIME

- o 20% of all senior high schools have 5 or more reported incidents of crime each month as compared to 3% of the elementary schools (43)

VIOLENCE

- o About 89% of the nation's schools have serious crime problems according to 1977 statistics, and -- -- 11% (2.4 million) secondary school students have something stolen from them every month and about 1.3% (282,800) are attacked. (A typical junior high school student has a 1 in 50 chance of being attacked in a month's time.);

-- 12% (125,000) of the nation's secondary school teachers have something stolen each month; 5,200 are attacked violently; 1,000 are injured seriously enough to require medical attention; and it is estimated that 400 teachers are raped each month.

VANDALISM

- o 600 million dollars a year is spent on repairing vandalism damage in schools, particularly among junior and senior high schools. NYC alone spends \$5 million a year to repair vandal damages; Los Angeles nearly \$4 million.

STUDENT APATHY

- o 41% of all high school principals surveyed indicated that student apathy is a serious or very serious problem. The only other issue that a larger percentage of principals (42%) considered a serious or very serious problem was too much paperwork in complying with Federal requirements.

HIGH SCHOOLS ARE OVER CROWDED

- o 1950 - 24,500 high schools
6.1M population
- 1975 - 13,800 high schools
14.3M population

INABILITY OF HIGH SCHOOL GUIDANCE COUNSELORS TO DO
AN ADEQUATE JOB BECAUSE OF WORK LOAD

- o 631/1 ratio in Columbus, 942/1 in N.Y.C., 627/1 in Detroit, 539/1 in Minneapolis, 856/1 in Baltimore.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

- Births to unmarried teens is up nearly 400% since 1960
- 1 in every 10-17-year-old girls in the U.S. is a mother
- In 1974 - 220,000 girls aged 17 or less gave birth, 15% of them for the second or third time
- 3/4 of all teenage first pregnancies are conceived before marriage

TRUANCY AND ABSENTEEISM

- o In many large cities, on a given day, over half of the enrolled students may be absent. Some of the averages reported are: Newark 62%, Boston 67%, New York 71%. This is particularly true among urban secondary schools in poverty areas where the absentee rate runs consistently high over a period of time.

I believe the ^{URBAN} high schools of this country are in trouble, and it is urgently important that we develop a strategy to reform this institution and prepare students academically and also equip them for productive work. Specifically I believe the time has come to do a post Connant study on the American High School.

Third, I am most concerned about the gap between what we teach in school and what students need to know. Most of what goes on in school is relevant -- but much is not.

- o Our global interdependence has grown dramatically in recent years and yet our knowledge remains very, very small.

ETS

- o 12%

10% Thought U.S.S.R with China

50% Golda Meir ^{WAS}

^{of} President of Egypt

- o A whole new vocabulary has emerged -- one which relates to life itself, and yet for most of us it's still a foreign language. We are awash in a sea of ignorance.

During the Three Mile Island crisis we were told about

(insert technical terms)

REMS, MELTDOWNS, (CONTAINMENT STRUCTURES),
and most of us were in complete confusion. ^{AND COLD SHUTDOWNS,}

In fact, if Three Mile Island told us anything at all, it told us how ignorant we are. And it reminded us, once again, that PR spokesmen are more concerned with "image" than with truth.

Archibald MacLeish, in his recent book Riders in the Sky, described this world which we seem neither to fully comprehend or fully govern. We have, he said, begun "to see science as beyond our reach, beyond our understanding even, known, if it is known at all, through proxies who, like priests in other centuries, could not tell us what they know."

And he concludes by saying that "we no longer believe in man." The answer he says lies in education which focuses not just on subjects, but on social purpose.

Dr. Rene Dubos, one of the world's greatest living scientists, said at an international convention of scientists that:

We must not ask where science and technology are taking us, but rather how we can manage science and technology so that they can help us get where we want to go.

Impact of Technology

TV OHIO - model A TV Teachers in the

Finally, the issue here is leadership. Those who are most concerned about our schools are most preoccupied. It's tragic that for many years the education issues have been defined not by education's advocates, but by its critics.

Year after year the public is told what is wrong, and rarely told about what is right -- and we are at best defensive. Those who run the schools seem so caught up in confrontation that vision and leadership are lost.

Here I must underscore an essential point. Public respect for education must be earned. And if we do not have creative solutions to our problems, then it is inevitable that others will. And in spite of budget cuts I still believe our problem is not the lack of money, but the lack of vision and ideas.

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In the 2½ years I have been Commissioner I have become more confident than when I began. I believe this nation will find ways to serve effectively the coming generation.

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