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Complete Text of Education Task Force Report

The following is the complete text of a report issued this week by an Educational Task Force assigned the job of reviewing Vermont's educational needs. It begins with a summation of the general suggestions, and then goes into detail on each suggestion.

The report also contains a number of charts, graphs and exhibits, but the office of Gov. Philip H. Hoff said Thursday copies of these, forming sort of an appendix to the report, would not be ready for a while.

Oct. 15, 1963. Philip H. Hoff, governor; re: Report of Task Force Committee to study Vermont public educational system Dear Gov. Hoff:

Attached hereto is the report of the Task Force Committee appointed by you to study the Vermont public educational system.

The committee has had 12 meetings since its appointment in April. At these meetings we have conferred with representatives of various groups such as the Vermont Education Association, the Vermont State School Directors Association, the Parent-Teacher Association and the Free Public Library Service.

We have also conferred with several members of the Department of Education, including A. John Holden, commissioner of education, Max Barrows, Rupert Spencer, Harold Graeme and Newton Baker.

We also met with superintendent of schools Harry N. Montague and Robert D. Lull Jr., with R. V. Phillips and Anne Keppel of the University of Vermont and with Prof. Barry Ulanov of Columbia University.

The committee has examined materials in regard to the reorganization of school districts in Maine, New Hampshire and Wisconsin, and has made a careful examination of many reports and statistics made available to it by the Department of Education and others.

Our report is not a mere compilation of data, however. It is the report of five people who have been involved, in one way or another, in education for a number of years and who make the recommendations in this report as a result of their own experiences as supplemented by knowledge gained by work on this committee.

Respectfully submitted,
John Kristensen, chairman.

This is the report of five citizens of the state of Vermont who are convinced that:

A. Our public educational system is the most important single public function of the state of Vermont.

B. The continued improvement of our public educational system offers Vermont its greatest opportunity, not only for the sake of its children, but also for the state as a political and economic entity.

SECTION I
Formation of 12 Regional Districts

Legislation should be enacted to provide for the following:

The Vermont public school system should be reorganized to provide for 12 regional districts. The legislation establishing the regional districts should provide for the following organization:

1. Each regional district shall be administered by one school board.

2. Each regional district shall operate all public schools from kindergarten through Grade 12.

3. Each regional district shall have a professional leader called the "Regional Superintendent of Schools" who will be appointed by the state, with the approval of the regional district school board, and will be paid by the state.

4. Each regional district shall be a legal entity with all powers needed to adequately and efficiently discharge its responsibilities, which powers should include the power to tax, to hold property and equipment, to employ personnel (including supervisory assistants, master teachers, special teachers, librarians, clerks, business managers, vocational and guidance staffs and health staff) and to perform such functions as are necessary to provide for students' varied needs in regular and special academic and vocational education.

5. Comprehensive secondary schools shall be established of sufficient size to provide for a high school graduating class in each high school of at least 100 pupils.

6. Each regional district shall operate such special schools and facilities for retarded children and children with other handicaps as may be necessary.

7. Each regional district shall provide public school transportation.

SECTION II
Financial Support Of Schools

1. State financing of public education must be substantially increased.

2. All state aid should be distributed through the regional districts on an equitable basis.

3. The Legislature should provide 50 per cent matching state aid for new facilities, materials and equipment for the regional districts.

SECTION III
Educational Research Program

A State Educational Research Committee should be appointed by the governor.

1. The members of the Educational Research Committee must be selected solely on the basis of their desire and ability to make Vermont's public educational system one of the highest quality. These persons might include:

A. The commissioner of education.

B. A representative from each of the 12 regional districts.

C. A representative from such organizations as the state Board of Education, Vermont Education Association, Vermont State School Directors Association, trustees of the University of Vermont, trustees of the Vermont Colleges Board.

D. Such other interested and knowledgeable persons from Vermont or elsewhere as the governor selects.

2. The duties of the Educational Research Committee shall be the planning and establishment of research projects which will develop more effective ways of educating Vermont children and will produce patterns for education which are both educationally and economically sound.

3. The Legislature should make a substantial financial commitment of continuing support for this educational research program so that the committee will be able to retain and pay for services of such leading educators in this country as are selected.

4. The Educational Research Committee should actively seek grants from foundations and other sources to secure additional financial assistance for the program. The governor should undertake to assist in making presentations and requests to foundations and should encourage participation in the program by leading educators.

5. The committee should be expected to afford an opportunity to teachers, administrators and school boards of the state to keep in close touch with research and development programs and, to the extent possible, be given the opportunity to participate in carrying on such programs.

6. The committee should have authority to appoint subcommittees of interested laymen and educators to assist in carrying out the research and development program.

SECTION IV
Other Recommendations

1. State Department of Education:

A. There must be a complete implementation of the plan for the reorganization of the state Department of Education which plan has been prepared by the department to accomplish more efficient operation.

B. There must be a substantial increase in the salaries of key personnel in order to attract and hold educators of ability and imagination. This requires an increase in budget appropriation.

C. The state Department of Education must be given greater budgetary freedom to use funds as educational needs arise and not have its funds specifically allocated by the Legislature.

2. Teachers:

A. The state Department of Education should require that the following standards be met by every approved school and these standards should be rigorously enforced by the withholding of state aid from non-approved schools:

a. The average maximum pupil load in any elementary school shall be 25 pupils per classroom teacher.

b. The maximum work load for secondary school teachers shall be five classes per day and a pupil load of not more than 125 pupils per day.

c. Teachers should teach only those subjects for which they have been adequately prepared.

B. State - supported teacher improvement programs must be established to provide opportunities for advanced education and travel. Legislative scholarships and loans should be made available, which would not be repayable if the teacher remains in the public school system for a fixed period of years.

C. The Legislature should consider reorganizing the system of higher education in Vermont as it relates to teacher preparation in order to overcome the following deficiencies:

a. Inadequate preparation in subject area.

b. Low graduation standards as evidenced by teacher candidate transcripts.

As a part of this reorganization we recommend that Lyndon College and Johnson College be used only as two-year community colleges (possibly within the organization of the University of Vermont) with future teachers going on to other institutions for their last two or three years of preparation.

3. Vocational Education:

A. Each of the 12 regional districts must provide opportunities for vocational education to achieve the objectives of a good basic general education. This can best be accomplished through comprehensive high schools which will also be able to take advantage of existing federal aid and other programs.

B. One or two year technical programs should be added, as the need arises, at each of the four Vermont Colleges to meet the needs for vocational training.

C. Combination work - study programs should be developed. Such programs may prove useful in developing both academic and vocational skills and in reducing the rate of dropouts.

BRIEF STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR ABOVE RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTION I
Regional Districts

On the basis of statistics on public high school enrollment for the years 1962-1963 in Vermont, it appears that approximately 25 per cent of the public high schools in Vermont have less than 100 pupils enrolled. This is true in spite of the fact that the absolute minimum enrollment deemed adequate to provide reasonable educational opportunity is 300 for a public high school.

On the basis of statistics on the per pupil cost of educating high school students in high schools of various sizes in Vermont, the statistics being available for the year 1961-1962, it appears that the per pupil costs of educating children in high schools of under 100 school population averaged $402 per year, while the per pupil cost for students in high schools with an enrollment from 300 to 500 was $280.45 per year.

There appears to be a general feeling that children should be receiving a better education than they are now receiving. Many people feel that foreign languages should be taught to more children at the elementary level and that there should not be such a disparity between the quality of education in towns such as Brattleboro, Burlington and Springfield on the one hand and smaller agricultural communities in the state on the other.

We believe that the people of Vermont probably cannot afford to give Vermont children the education to which they are entitled if we continue to try to give them that education in our present town school system.

The only answer to this problem seems to be that Vermonters have got to face the fact that while the idea of town government is a good one and works very well in Vermont on most levels, when it is imposed upon the educational system it often results in a sacrifice of educational opportunities.

In order to give opportunities to our Vermont children to have the sort of education they deserve, with high quality teachers and small classes,with no more than one grade in any classroom, where libraries are available to them, where teaching aids are possible, where good teacher supervision is constantly available, and where children have the added stimulation of being with a fair size group of children of their own age and grade level, we must break away from the idea that schools are best operated on a town basis.

We must organize our public educational system on a regional district basis. This arrangement should make a substantially better primary and secondary program available to the Vermonter at a cost which he can better afford to pay.

Local Control

Whenever there is discussion about reorganizing school districts on a larger political unit, the objection is immediately raised that there will be a loss of local control.

We believe that while in the past it may have been economically practicable to operate our schools on a town basis, just as it was possible in the past to have our national defense handled by local units of militia, the time has come when education has become such a vast and vital part of our whole nation that we must organize it on a more effective basis.

Because the capability and knowledge of our children in the future may well determine whether or not this country and our way of life survive, the educational opportunities for all of the children in every community are of statewide and national importance and cannot be left to the decision and financial ability of individual townships to provide for any more than our state highway system can be dependent upon each town for state operating and paying for its own stretch of interstate highways.

Supervision

At the present time the state of Vermont is divided into 45 supervisory units with 45 superintendents of schools, each of whom is charged with the supervision of instructions and the carrying on of the general administrative duties of his district.

Since the establishment of these original districts the job of the superintendent has become very complex and the paper work required from him has increased substantially. As time goes on it becomes obvious that more and specialized services are being demanded of the superintendents.

It is very difficult for these men to do a proper job on all of the matters they now deal with.

In many cases excellent administrators are poor supervisors of teachers and excellent teacher supervisors are poor administrators. We believe that in most areas of the state, much better supervision and educational leadership will be available if the size of the supervisory districts are substantially increased.

We also believe that the 12 regional districts will enable us to get more highly trained supervisors of instruction into our classrooms for more hours each year.

The committee also believes that as a result of the fact that superintendents are presently elected to their position by the school directors of the local districts which they serve, there is a natural hesitancy on the part of the superintendents to provide the sort of educational leadership necessary.

Recommendations of necessary changes which will upset any substantial number of people are often not made. As a result there is a tendency on the part of many superintendents to stand pat and not use their office as a means for providing educational leadership in the community.

A study of reports made by superintendents in annual town reports is revealing in this regard. We believe that this situation can be corrected if the superintendents are hired by and made responsible to the state Department of Education as well as to the 12 regional district boards.

Teachers

At the present time because of the many individual school supervisory districts and town school districts there is competition between the small towns and the larger towns for good teachers.

Many of the smaller towns end up having new teachers for a few years and once they have become trained they are taken away by the larger towns. The larger towns, having more funds available to them, get the best teachers.

When we have regional districts with a superintendent and school board responsible not only for the larger schools in their area but also for the small rural schools, we are more likely to find a more equal distribution of good teachers throughout the schools. We will also be more likely to find that a teacher will receive a fairer wage no matter what type of school he or she may teach in.

As we join together to make more effective and efficient educational units with better schools and wider educational opportunities, we will also have the ability to draw better teachers from other areas of the country who are interested in teaching in their speciality in larger schools than are presently available in most Vermont areas.

Size of Schools

The regional district plan is not presented with the idea that all schools should be made larger.

Many schools, especially secondary schools, must be larger to give reasonable opportunities to the students. Insofar as elementary schools and many existing secondary schools are concerned, they could and often should continue as small schools serving a particular area.

These small schools must have the type of specialized assistance which will be available to them under the regional district plan, however. Without such an organization and such assistance the small schools, in

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