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Regional Districts, Better Teaching Conditions Recommended

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spite of their many good qualities, cannot survive.

Steps To Be Taken

What we have recommended in this report in regard to the establishment of 12 regional districts is not a new concept. In 1954 the commission appointed by the Legislature to study supervision of schools pointed out in its report many of the inadequacies which still exist. The union district laws have not been sufficient to meet the problem on a statewide basis.

We submit that Vermont has avoided the problem long enough. It is time to act and to act boldly.

We therefore recommend that the Vermont Legislature adopt legislation establishing the 12 districts and we suggest that this can be done in the same way it has been done by the Legislatures in 18 of the 44 states that have adopted school district reorganization laws in recent years, that is, by the passage of legislation which does not require the concurring vote of individual communities.

We must not be too hesitant to act when the future of our children and our state hang in the balance.

SECTION II

Financing Public Education

With few exceptions the town school districts of the state do not have financial resources adequate to support high quality schools.

Local town property taxes have reached their limit in many cases. The state of Vermont has a broader taxing power and base.

The state has substantial funds but too much is presently being diverted from education into less important public functions. More existing state revenue must be put into public education.

A. State financing of education must be substantially increased, from its approximate 21 per cent contribution to at least a 40 per cent contribution. This requires Legislative action.

In this state and country we have the financial capacity to carry on the finest public educational system in the world.

As long as there are private schools and institutions in our country which provide a better education than do our public schools, our public schools are not doing their job.

For us to say that we cannot afford to carry on a better program than we are now carrying on is merely to say that we are not willing to pay more for public education than we are now paying because we would rather spend our wealth on other things which have a greater value to us.

B. Support should be given to the new state aid formula developed by the Vermont State School Directors Association, which is a substantial improvement over the existing formula.

Under the regional district plan, state aid payments would be made to the regional districts and provide a greater opportunity to use the funds to improve the educational opportunities in the rural areas of the state where the need now is greatest.

State Aid For Facilities

Great steps have been taken in the past few years to improve the building facilities available to public school systems through our program of state aid for school construction. Facilities, however, mean more than buildings. It is equally important to a good educational facility that adequate libraries and instructional equipment be provided in the secondary and elementary schools being built in Vermont communities.

This state assistance for the purchase of instructional equipment and libraries should be made available whether or not a new school is being built.

In 1961 of the 84 approved public high schools in the state, 17 had no provision for a library. Of the remaining 67 schools, 25 have only shelving in a study hall and 15 have separate rooms seating four per cent or less of the enrollment. In addition to this, of the secondary schools, 21 have no librarian and 20 other schools have a "librarian" who teaches full time.

Of the 456 elementary schools in Vermont in 1962, all but 14 of which made a report to the Free Public Library Service, 258 reported that they had no library facilities available whatever.

It has also been pointed out to this committee that the proposed minimum standards for school library programs in Vermont secondary schools issued on May 15, 1962, by the state Department of Education are approximately one-half of the national standards recognized by most other states.

While the above statements indicate that there are a number of schools in Vermont which do not meet even minimum standard of approval for public high schools as adopted by the Board of Education on Aug. 14, 1958, the likelihood that the state Board of Education will enforce any of its minimum standards by withholding state aid or other sanctions in remote if past practice is indicative of what will happen in the future.

We wish therefore, to see incentives given to school districts to encourage improvement on a voluntary basis.

The need for larger comprehensive high schools is so great in some areas of the state that 50 per cent state aid should be given to assist the people of these areas to solve the problem. The areas where such schools are needed are often the areas where the least amount of money is available. The regional district plan will result in the location of such comprehensive high schools in rural areas where they will serve more of the children in the small towns.

Federal Aid For Education

It is advisable that there be additional financial support from the United States government for our educational system. At the present time there is a certain amount of money coming to the state from federal sources, but it is allocated to specific programs rather than being available for general educational purposes.

The United States government should carry on a program of financial aid to education without requiring that it be spent on specific types of education, this decision to be left to the states.

We recommend that the state Board of Education and the Legislature of Vermont adopt the same policy toward federal aid for education that was adopted by the Board of Regents of the state of New York.

SECTION III

Educational Research Program

Vermont, being a small state, has a unique opportunity to become a leading influence in public education in this country.

This opportunity is available to Vermont without the expenditure of large sums of money but it will require that a substantial number of Vermonters face our educational problems with an open mind and with a sincere desire to solve them by such means as are available even though it may result in some substantial changes in our public educational process.

If it is recognized in this country that Vermont has accepted this educational challenge, it is likely that help will be forthcoming from persons in other parts of the nation who are concerned about public education.

It is also reasonable to expect that financial assistance will come from foundations which are concerned with the problem of public education.

On the basis of reports already made to you and to your Planning Commission, it appears that Vermont's major problem is the fact that we Vermonters lack skills because of our low educational level. This makes it difficult to get the sort of industry into Vermont that we are interested in having and it also means that our young people who are interested in a productive future do not stay in Vermont.

If Vermont will take certain positive steps toward entering into a significant research and development program, principally at the elementary school level, by establishment of at least three elementary schools, with approximately 150 children in each, in areas of the state selected because of their average Vermont surroundings, and would undertake to provide financial support for such research and development programs for an eight-year period, we would be able to bring into this state a substantial number of high caliber men who could develop for us programs and patterns for use in Vermont schools which would be both educationally and economically sound.

Any undertaking of this sort would require a state commitment for at least an eight-year period, because the results of research and development program could not be truly tested in less than this time.

Such research and development programs should be principally carried out at an elementary school level since it is during these years of a child's education that the pattern is set for future development. If good progress can be established during the elementary school period, they will move into the secondary schools without too much effort.

A program of this sort must be undertaken by a committee outside of the Department of Education and state Board of Education. The state Board of Education is primarily an administrative board charged with the administration of the existing schools and with the large administrative duties imposed on it by practice and by acts of Legislature. It would be difficult for it to adequately operate a research and development program such as this committee has in mind.

The research and development program would, of course, need the cooperation of the state and must into the program at all possible levels.

Such a program should also encompass the training of teachers now in our school systems in such new methods as are found useful for our Vermont schools.

There are a number of interesting and able people who would like to live in Vermont if Vermont offered an opportunity for good public educations for their children.

It is this type of people who bring their own business to Vermont and who become the employers in high level business and industrial research and engineering companies which do not depend for their existence on their closeness to large centers of population.

Vermont already has a number of assets such as its natural beauty and recreational opportunities to attract these people but its limited educational facilities tend to cancel out these natural assets.

A concerted effort on the part of the governor of the state with the cooperation of the Legislature and by bipartisan support of our business and political leaders can result in Vermont receiving nationwide attention.

The investment which Vermont would make in such an undertaking would be repaid many times in the expanded opportunities for a healthy economic growth as well as in the expanded educational opportunities for our children.

Funds which might otherwise have been used to establish an educational television network for Vermont should be used to carry on this research and development program and a financial commitment of similar size is justified. While educational television may be of some benefit to Vermont, its benefit cannot compare with the potential benefit which will result from a properly carried out program for research and development.

SECTION IV

Other Recommendations

1. State Department of Education.

The state Department of Education has the greatest effect on the lives of Vermonters of any state agency. The state Department of Education has recently developed a plan for reorganization of the department.

An examination of the organization plan by this committee leads us to recommend that it be implemented as soon as possible so as to provide the key personnel necessary to adequately run the department on an efficient basis.

There must be a substantial increase in the salaries of key personnel in the department in order to attract and hold educators of ability and imagination.

There have been a number of resignations of personnel over the past year because the future of any competent person is extremely limited if they remain on the staff of the Department of Education.

Our Department of Education has also become somewhat of a training group for people who later eff up in responsible positions in other states. The main answer to this is to increase the salaries of the key personnel.

We have also found that, because of lack of personnel and inadequate financial support, the Department of Education has great difficulty in keeping in touch with new ideas or methods being developed in other parts of Vermont or other parts of the country.

The only time a member of a local school board has an opportunity to learn about such new ideas is when he happens to read them in national publications or hear about them indirectly from other sources.

If the department cannot perform the function of keeping school people in the state current on educational thoughts and procedures, it has ceased to perform one of its most important functions.

One other severe problem for the state Department of Education is the fact that it has apparently lost the confidence of the people of the state of Vermont, as reflected by the attitude of the Legislature in that funds allocated to the Department of Education are largely allocated for specific purposes instead of being allocated to the department for the general purpose of carrying on the educational program in the best way known to the professional educators and the private citizens appointed to the state Board of Education.

It is, therefore, possible for the governor and the Legislature to decide whether or not the Department of Education needs one type of personnel more than another type, or is more in need of a salary increase for a secretary than it is for a new consultant in the field of mathematics. While reasonable limitations on certain expenditures may be proper, in Vermont it has gotten to the point where a few elected politicians set the true course of the Vermont educational system and dedicated professional educators have lost the ability, and now even the desire, to combat this situation.

2. Teachers.

Our classroom teachers are the principal pipelines through which the knowledge and wisdom of the past flow to the children of today and the generations of the future. To the extent that we have poor and inadequately prepared teachers we are losing the benefit of our heritage.

Our teachers must be the best that we are able to provide.

We can better afford to have dead rate doctors, lawyers and dentists than we can afford to have second rate teachers for teachers affect the lives of all of us and of all who are to follow us.

To keep and to continue to get the best possible teachers into our classrooms we must continue efforts to raise the standing of the teaching profession in the community.

It is very difficult to know how to do this. Raising salaries alone does not suffice though there is no question but that the salaries paid to teachers must be commensurate with the standing that they must have in the community.

Many teachers who come into public education in Vermont and elsewhere leave the profession because of the working conditions which they are forced to put up with.

Such conditions include the fact that they are not allowed to teach full time in the field of their training and interest but are required to teach courses for which they do not feel and, in fact, are not adequately prepared.

This is especially the problem in the smaller secondary schools in Vermont where adequate funds are not available to provide a full staff of qualified teachers. Teachers in many schools are also required to carry on many extra-curricular activities which make it difficult or impossible for them to spend adequate time for the preparation and expansion of their course materials.

They are also required in many instances to teach so many children in their classrooms that they get no satisfaction of knowing that they have been able to adequately educate any of the children.

Circumstances such as this result in many people who are vitally interested in the educational system leaving our state and going elsewhere.

The state Department of Education must use whatever power it has to correct this situation by the improvement of state aid from those schools which permit such low standards to continue.

Teacher Certification and Teacher Education

There has been a great deal of dissatisfaction expressed in the teacher certification procedures. The area of teacher certification and teacher education must undergo a great deal of re-examination within the next two or three years. In this connection the committee wishes to call the recent report of James Conant on the education of American teachers to your attention.

The criticisms directed by Mr. Conant at the American Teacher Education apply to Vermont as they do to other states in this country.

This report indicates that teachers too often come from the bottom of the barrel instead of the top of the barrel and this situation is made more difficult by the fact that a majority of the local school boards are "scandalously remiss" in not providing new teachers with the proper help and opportunities to become expert practitioners. As a result 34 per cent of all 7th and 8th grade mathematics classes in this country are taught by teachers who have had less than two college courses on the subject.

We wish to call your attention to the statistics compiled in the state Department of Education which show that out of the 1962 graduates of Castleton State College, 64 applied for teaching positions in Vermont or made their transcripts available to the department.

Of the 64 graduates, two-thirds had received only a one-half year course in mathematics during their four years in college.

Furthermore, at Lyndon College, out of 41 graduates who applied for teaching positions, 36 of them spent between 21 and 40 semester hours (out of the approximately 125 needed for graduation) on so-called "education courses."

At Johnson State College the situation was much the same. Out of the 1962 graduates of the three state colleges who are now teaching in Vermont schools, between 20 and 30 per cent are teaching on emergency certificates.

This is not said to criticize the teachers who probably do as well as they can with the little they are given. We do severely criticize the continuance of this disgraceful situation.

How To Get Better Teachers

Those professions which tend to draw the highest quality persons are those professions which provide the greatest intellectual challenge and which provide the greatest opportunity for their members to grow in knowledge and experience through association with interesting men, women and ideas.

If we are to have the sort of teachers in our classrooms who will be able to stimulate our children to courageously and competently face the expanding horizons of the unknown, we must start thinking about creating the proper atmosphere which will draw them into the teaching field.

It is important that we make it possible for teachers to keep themselves current in their chosen field through subsidized advanced degree programs which will make it feasible for them to take time off from their regular work in the classroom and go away to colleges and universities periodically so as to broaden their own knowledge of their subject and of the world.

One of the difficulties which now exists is that the only way a good classroom teacher can advance in his or her profession is to get out of the classroom teaching field and to get into the administrative side of our school system.

Many excellent teachers have thus become inadequate administrators because this has been the only way they can advance themselves within the fields of their endeavor.

In the future we must see to it that teachers are encouraged to continue as teachers and we must make the financial and other rewards of teaching greater than the rewards of administration except at the high est levels.

We should make it possible for teachers to reach a level of competence and knowledge that they could be considered master teachers, equipped to teach in many areas of knowledge and, as such, receive special consideration from the public.

Teachers should also be given the opportunity for re-education within their own schools. This can best be accomplished by increasing the staff of the Vermont Department of Education sufficiently to enable qualified persons to visit local schools and local teacher organizations regularly for the purpose of discussing with them the purposes of the educational system, the way these purposes can best be accomplished by the individual teachers in their classroom work and ways in which teachers within the school can best cooperate with each other in the overall educational program of the school.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Vocational educational programs have developed in our public high schools because of the fact that it was realized that there were certain children who are not able to take the so-called academic courses in stride.

It was realized that certain children will lose interest in our educational programs unless we find ways to keep them interested in learning and show them the practical application of a broad and general knowledge.

Because of this, vocational agricultural programs and other vocational education programs were established. These programs were intended as teaching aids for general education in the usual fields of knowledge of reading, writing, mathematics, citizenship, etc.

To the extent that these programs are used in secondary schools for these purposes, they have become excellent tools and should be encouraged.

To the extent, however, that we use these programs as job training courses to teach a child a specific skill so that he can use that skill when he leaves high school to get a job in a specific industry, we may be taking away a child's last opportunity to get the general education necessary for his or her future life.

With our technology changing as rapidly as it is, the good workman is not trained to operate a specific machine or group of machines with the understanding that this knowledge will serve him for the rest of his life.

The good workman is able to adapt himself to operate varied machines and, as circumstances change, he is able to take manuals and training books and read and understand them so that he can adapt himself to new processes as they are developed.

He is also able, when the business in which he is engaged terminates its operations because of new inventions and new ideas, to adapt himself to the new inventions and ideas through his ability to read and inquire.

These tools for adaptability are going to be in greater need in the future as our civilization changes more rapidly. We are very short-sighted if we don't recognize this and educate every child to his utmost in the basic tools which he will need, the ability to read, the ability to express himself in writing and orally, the ability to handle basic mathematical problems and the ability to be an individual and valuable citizen in his community.

At the present time there seems to be too great a conflict between the so-called academic minded people and the vocational education minded people over whether one type of education is superior to the other.

Both types of education are important for the proper development of our young people and both academic and vocational tools must be used in our efforts to provide as good a basic education for our children as we can.

The important thing for all educators to do is to keep constantly aware of the fact that we must provide all of our school children with as good a basic education as we can and this can best be done by greater cooperation and communication. Such cooperation and communication is best accomplished in a comprehensive high school and in such a school more efficient means of generally educating the Vermont children can be developed.

Since vocational education is an educational tool to provide a better general education for pupils, it is necessary for teachers of the vocational education courses to be better teachers and be better educated than teachers of academic subjects. This is necessary because vocational education teachers must be competent in the skills of the vocational field and also well grounded in the basic courses of English, mathematics, science, languages and the arts if they are to give the students more than just job training.

Greater efforts should be directed toward providing vocational training at the post-secondary school level for those young people who wish to be trained in a particular trade or skill. This would be a proper area for our state colleges to become concerned with, especially if they become two - year community colleges as we have suggested previously.

Respectfully submitted by the members of the Education Task Force — John Kristensen, chairman, Brattleboro; Ellen McKibben, Burlington; William O. Moeser, Springfield; Harold Raynolds, Pomfret; Robert Wilson, Bennington.

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