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EDUCATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

I

The term "educational accountability" brings to mind the oft-told parable of the blind men and the elephant. Depending on which part they touched, the descriptions of the beast varied considerably. Accountability means many different things depending upon the perspective of various participants in the educational process.

It is possible to identify three movements, groupings or directions within this thing called educational accountability. The first group can be characterized as "educational engineers" represented by the educational divisions of such industries as IBM, Xerox and Borg-Warner. These are people who have offered, over the past several years, to accept certain educational goals for a student group and to guarantee the achievement of those goals within a set time. If the goals are not achieved, the company will lose money and if they are, they make money. This is also known as performance contracting. The spokesman for this view has been Dr. Leon Lessinger. Close allies of this view have been taxpayer associations and others interested in holding down taxes. Its manifestations are such things as the Stull Act in California and the pilot project in Gary, Indiana, in which private industry took over the public schools for a period to demonstrate educational engineering.

At the opposite pole are most professional teachers' groups, most notably the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA). These groups view accountability in some of its forms as a code word for pinning the failures of the educational system on the classroom teacher. The spokesmen for these groups claim that accountability ignores the difference between training and education. Training is teaching skills and facts. Education is imparting the ability to think creatively and independently. Accountability's detractors claim that there are no sound methods of measuring education and that the educational engineers therefore ignore it and concentrate on training where they can demonstrate achievement based on test scores. The detractors also claim that an emphasis on accountability in terms of standard test scores always results in teaching tests, not educating.

As in most great debates about fundamental institutions, such as education, the actual movement toward educational accountability in the states doesn't look much like either of the previous views. This does not mean that there is not the potential for these views to be realized. Rather it means that there was an awareness in the early 1970's that our educational system was not all that it could be, that it had tended to grow complacent and that a great many products of the system did not possess the basic skills to get along in an urbanized, technological society. This realization, coupled with an increasing tendency from the late 1960's to question the efficacy of all institutions, led to pressures on school systems to give an accounting of themselves. During this same period, teacher salaries began to approach what could be called professional wages, the post-war baby boom had filled schools to overflowing and school taxes rose rapidly.

Many people began to attack the schools in the late 60's. The young said schools were "not relevant." The older taxpayer said they were inefficient. Minorities claimed they had no voice in the education of their children. In short, everyone had some sort of complaint about the schools. All of these groups came together, albeit for different reasons, in the accountability movement.

Legislators in every state have been pressed to make the schools accountable. The questions of "for what" and "to whom" have never been clearly answered. In order to try to answer these questions and to make accountability beneficial to education, a number of groups have attempted to accomodate the justifiable and understandable call for greater responsiveness of the schools to community demands with the equally justifiable position of professional educators that they be included in determining what students should be taught and how it is to be done.

The main focus of the attempt to structure, define and implement accountability since 1972 has been the Cooperative Accountability Project (CAP) administered under a U.S. Office of Education grant by the Colorado Department of Education. There are six other states that are a part of the project. Within each cooperating state, the departments of education carry out the project programs. This is a reflection of the position that state departments of education have been put in by the accountability movement. Various segments of the public as reflected in legislatures brought about the demand for accountability. Educators at the local level have generally resisted most legislatively mandated accountability programs seeing them as searches for scapegoats. State

education departments have been in the middle, being given the responsibility for accountability by legislatures but having to be responsive to the professional educators that make up their systems.

CAP has attempted to convert accountability from its somewhat vindictive and unidirectional early development into a much broader conception of responsibilities for educating our youth. Basic to this is the recognition of the fact that the responsibility for education does not rest at any one stage in the process. Very definitely, it does not rest only with the classroom teachers. In addition, every stage of the process is two-way. The superintendent of education is responsible to the legislature as the representative of the people but the legislature is responsible to the superintendent to provide adequate funds and proper legislation to accomplish the educational goals. These two-way relationships run from the legislature down to the student who has responsibilities to his teacher as well as the other way around.

Implicit in the work of CAP is the fact that the accountability movement has forced an in-depth analysis of the educational process. Teachers' colleges would claim that this is nothing new. Perhaps not, but the scope and the public awareness of the current analysis spurred by accountability is definitely new. The concept that initiated the whole question of accountability has been the desire to show the relationship between costs for school programs and the benefits resulting from those programs in terms of student performance. Following from this is the idea that every member of society should acquire the highest quality education possible for the money spent.

II

Accountability legislation in the states varies considerably from comprehensive statutes embodying several key components of accountability to broad, generalized authorizations for an accountability program. Colorado is an example of the former and Massachusetts of the latter.

Based upon a review of accountability statutes and administrative regulations throughout the nation, CAP has produced four model accountability statutes depending upon how detailed a particular state thinks they should be. There are several things in common among the models. They all provide for a state assessment of student and educational performance and provisions for a management information system. None contains provisions for teacher evaluation, performance contracting or legislatively identified goals. None would provide only for student testing.

CAP has gone beyond suggested legislation to comprehensive proposals for implementation of accountability legislation. At the implementation stage, there are several components suggested. First, there is the development of goals and objectives. At this stage, there should be included as many segments of the public as possible. Goals are long-term and broad, such as the goal that every person graduate from high school with basic skills necessary to make a living. Objectives are shorter ranged and more specific, such as the ability to write cursively and add and subtract carrying numbers upon completion of third grade.

Second is assessment of current abilities of the student population. You cannot tell how close goals are unless you know where you are. With that knowledge the resources needed to reach the goals can be estimated and objectives can be developed to deal with the weaknesses that are identified.

Third is evaluation. Programs developed to reach goals and objectives, based upon needs assessment, must be evaluated at regular intervals to see if they are properly related to the goals and objectives. This would include in-service training for teachers in order to impart new techniques and methods.

Fourth is cost-effectiveness. The public must be informed as to what various school programs cost, what their outcome is supposed to be and the success in terms of achieving the outcome. In short, the public has a right to know how much money goes for what and what benefits result.

III

In 1971, the Nevada legislature appropriated \$30,000 for an in-depth study of the status of the state's public school system. The governor appointed a committee for this purpose and it issued a report in August 1972. The report made nine recommendations. Senate Concurrent Resolution 15 in 1973 directed local school districts to implement the recommendations. Three of them dealt with accountability:

No. 1. Identification and clarification of the significant and realistic educational goals and objectives;

No. 2. Accountability and wise use of educational resources.

No. 5. Evaluation of teachers, supervisory staff, principals and superintendents.

A report on implementation was to go to the department of education by June 1974.

Also before the 1973 legislature was ACR 62, directing a legislative commission study of educational accountability. A.B. 381 and A.B. 510 would have set up educational accountability programs for elementary and secondary schools and the university system respectively. All died in committee.

Senate Concurrent Resolution 15 has no effect beyond the report directed in June 1974. There is nothing preventing the department of education from proceeding to set up an ongoing accountability program. Neither is there any requirement that it do so in the absence of legislation.

SUGGESTED READING

(The following, in addition to other material too numerous to list, are available in the Research Library.)

American Federation of Teachers; QUEST Paper 12 on "A Paradigm for Accountability," Washington, August 1970.

American Federation of Teachers; (various articles from American Teacher Magazine).

Bell, Terrell H.; "Management by Objectives: Planning Where to Go and How to Get There," CAP Commentary, Vol. 1, No. 2, June 1974.

Bhaerman, Robert; "Accountability: The Great Day of Judgment," Educational Technology, January 1971.

Brademas, John; "Accountability: A Rationale," CAP Commentary, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 1974.

Cooperative Accountability Project;

Characteristics of and Proposed Models for State Accountability Legislation

Developing a Large Scale Assessment Program

Keeping the Public Informed: Accent on Accountability

Legislation by the States: Accountability and Assessment in Education

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