

ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT (ASCD)
Annual Conference, Chicago, Illinois

March 18, 1994

Chapter 1 Study

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss with you the study of Chapter 1 that I directed at RAND in consultation with staff of the House Committee on Education and Labor. The study was designed to provide options for the reauthorization of Chapter 1.

In my remarks today, I will give a brief overview of:

- o the Chapter 1 program.
- o the major data sources used in the study.
- o the rationale for the recommendations.
- o the recommendations.
- o the extent to which our recommendations are consistent with the Administration proposal.
- o Congressional action to date.

The Chapter 1 Program

- o Funds allocation (including a discussion of the political decision to spread federal money to virtually every Congressional district. For example, Chapter 1 funds go to almost half of the elementary schools in the country with as few as 10 percent poor children.
- o Programs.
- o Testing.

Major Data Sources

- o Review of evaluation and research data.
- o Invited commentaries from leading educators, researchers, and association representatives.
- o Commissioned report by Steve Barro on federal incentives for school finance equalization.

Rationale for Recommendations

- o Increases in poverty. Moreover, Chapter 1 was never sufficient

to meet the needs of low-income communities. It is a remedial program for the lowest-achieving children, rich and poor alike.

o The problem is magnified when Chapter 1 is considered in the context of state and local funding differentials--among states, among districts, and among schools within a district. Texas--100 poorest districts: \$3,000 per student/100 richest districts: \$7,200 per student. Illinois spends between \$2,400 and \$8,300 per student. Differences among states: Mississippi and Alabama, for example, spend less than \$2,000 in some districts. Example of differences within districts: Los Angeles (Rodriguez case). These differentials, in combination, can result in some schools receiving three to four times as much funding per pupil as others. The expenditure disparities make a real difference in the services provided to children--e.g., teacher expertise, class size, etc. A judge in a school finance case put it this way: "If money is inadequate to improve education, the residents of poor districts should at least have an equal chance to be disappointed by its failure." The result is that many Chapter 1 students receive less--even with the addition of Chapter 1 funds--than do children in affluent districts (contrary to a popular myth).

o No magic bullet. Reforms and rhetoric won't make a difference without attention to the overwhelming problems of poverty and the underfunding of low-income schools. Marginal attempts to address either of these problems will leave the problem essentially unchanged.

Modest Proposal to Begin to Address the Problem of Underfunding

o Substantially increase funding to low-income communities to give schools in these communities the critical mass of resources needed to make fundamental changes in their educational programs. Cost estimates: \$3 billion additional funding to serve schools with 75 percent or more poor children (9,300 or 20 percent of schools) and \$6 billion additional funding to serve schools with 60 percent or more poor children (16,700 or 35 percent of schools) while continuing to serve other schools at same level. You might ask, in response to this recommendation, whether we have heard about the budget deficit. We have, but we are also aware of the fact that our budget this year is about \$1.5 trillion. As a nation, we set priorities. If we choose to continue to underfund education in low-income communities, we should be realistic about what we can and cannot accomplish by our proposed reforms--whether they are vouchers, school-based management, restructuring, national standards, or national tests.

o If sufficient resources are available, encourage schoolwide improvement.

o Our third recommendation, which deals with school finance more generally, is given with some reluctance because I am reminded of a quote from a recent school finance article: " School finance reform is like a Russian novel--it's long, it's tedious, and

everyone dies in the end." With that caveat, our proposal, very briefly, is to use a federal general aid program (Chapter 2) to provide incentives to equalize funding among districts. Begin with a demonstration program of approximately \$1 to \$2 billion.

Similarities with Administration Program

- o Increases in poverty/emphasis on concentration of funds/use of poverty as criterion to distribute funds to schools.
- o Emphasis on schoolwide improvement.
- o Recommendation to abolish special Chapter 1 testing. Commentaries.

Differences from Administration Program

o Higher levels of funding/concentration needed to begin to make a dent in the problem; much more emphasis on structural problem of unequal funding: (1) Under the Administration's proposed legislation, for example, Chapter 1 funding would increase from the current 43 percent for the highest-poverty quartile counties to 47 percent and eventually to 50 percent. The RAND proposal would double the funding for the poorest communities. (2) The Administration proposes a total of about \$700 million increased funding for poor communities; the RAND proposal, \$3 to \$6 billion in additional resources. If the \$700 million proposed by the Administration went, say, only to schools with 60 percent or more poor children, each school would receive about \$40,000 additional Chapter 1 dollars. How can we accomplish all the good things the legislation describes with a level of funding that would permit schools to hire, at best, one additional aide or a part-time teacher? (The RAND proposal assumes approximately \$500,000 extra for a school with 500 students.) (3) In addition, the RAND study recommends a separate general aid program to provide incentives for school finance equalization.

o Formula differences: (1) funds allocation from states to school districts; (2) the basic grant and concentration grant would be combined; (3) use of weighted formula or sliding scale.

o Avoids problem of reducing funding to higher-income communities--both educational and political advantages.

o More conservative about moving to schoolwide programs. Problems of (1) limited resources, and (2) knowing whether or not programs "work" nationwide. After all, most schools give remedial reading services, with or without Chapter 1 funds.

o Does not link Chapter 1 program to national standards and testing. Several concerns: (1) the new accountability requirements would continue to incur the same problems as current testing and accountability regulations, e.g., rote learning,

teaching to the test, difficulty in interpreting findings; (2) new and improved tests do not yet exist for large-scale testing and accountability purposes; (3) the requirements would add to bureaucracy, paperwork, and costs--without leading to improvements in education. We all know that it is not difficult to raise test scores if we spend a lot of time teaching to the test, or if we exclude more students from taking the test. We know as well that the higher scores under those circumstances do not reflect improved education.

The evidence for these conclusions comes from a long history of attempts to initiate similar accountability requirements in the United States and, recently, in England. Perhaps the best example of what happens when standardized testing is carried to an extreme comes from England. In 1988, Parliament mandated national curricula and assessments. In the first year of assessing 7-year-olds, the assessments took two to four weeks out of the school year. For the 1993 assessment of 14-year-olds, the marking and reporting form for math was 112 pages long. I would like to quote from a description in the press of what happened in the Summer of 1993:

"Citing a range of concerns such as overwork, bureaucracy, disruption to regular schooling, flawed tests, use of scores to compare schools, and opposition to national curriculum and testing, all but one of Britain's teacher unions joined in a boycott against administering and reporting tests for 14-year-olds and reporting test scores for 7-year-olds. . . .

"Schools made substantial efforts to inform parents of the reasons for the boycott. The government responded by publishing the tests to persuade parents that the boycott was not worth the trouble. However, independent polls and a government report all indicated strong parental support for the teachers.

"The boycott was initiated in April by the National Association of Teachers of English. They viewed the reading and writing tests for 14-year-olds as particularly narrow and flawed. Other unions quickly joined.

"As opposition to the test for 14-year-olds grew, the teachers also decided to boycott the test for 7-year-olds. Since most of that assessment had already been administered, a decision was made to refuse to report the scores to the government. . . .

"The 1993 assessments of 7-year-olds were to have been the first reported nationally and were to include comparisons among schools in a region. The boycott . . . eliminated that possibility. The government reportedly spent 35 million pounds (about \$55 million) to conduct the now-useless 1993 exams."

The result is that at least for the present, the British testing program has been abandoned.

Congressional Action

- o Schedule: House and Senate.
- o House and Senate action so far. Political realities.
- o Analogy to health care.

Conclusion

I would like to return to the major theme of our report--the underfunding of low-income schools--and conclude with a quote from Harold Howe's new book, Thinking about Our Kids, (second paragraph page 111, to page 112):

"Our system for supporting the education of young Americans comes close to modeling the attributes of our economic system. It gives the best schooling to the children who already have the advantage of parents who had such schooling and the worst schooling to children whose parents are poor and ill-schooled. In effect, it is a system for throwing money at the rich to make their kids richer. And these characteristics are undergirded by the high percentage of its support from state and local taxes, which are much more regressive than federal taxes, so that the costs of schools fall more heavily on the lower income groups in America, even as their children are less well served than those in wealthier districts. In this we are consistent: we provide the least fortunate among us with second-rate police protection and limited health services in addition to inadequate schools, and we do the opposite for the fortunate. It is difficult to understand why the rich are so opposed to throwing money at the poor when they throw so much of it at themselves."

Thank you.

QUALITY EDUCATION FOR MINORITIES NETWORK
Brown Bag Discussion Series

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Thank you.

AMERICA'S DEFENSE MONITOR

Interview, April 1, 1994

1. What are the major problems confronting America's primary and secondary educational system?

The major problem is the low amount of money spent on poor schools. Per-pupil expenditures in affluent schools are often two to three times higher than in low-income schools. For example, the 100 poorest districts in Texas spend an average of about \$3,000 per student, while the 100 wealthiest districts spend an average of about \$7,200. Illinois school districts spend between \$2,400 and \$8,300 per student. What those differences mean is that poor schools are more likely to have overcrowded classrooms, inexperienced teachers, shortages of counselors, science laboratories that lack even rudimentary equipment, decaying facilities, and obsolete instructional materials. (In some school districts, textbooks are still being used that were written before a man landed on the moon.) These conditions will continue to block the attending children from participation in the economy. And they are denied that chance for their lifetimes.

The problem is not, as we are often told, that our education system as a whole has declined. By any measure--test scores, graduation rates, college attendance--our education system is performing as well as in previous years and in many cases a lot better. But it has always been and continues to be highly unequal.

2. Over the past 12 years, what happened to federal government funding used to assist schools with low-income and disadvantaged kids?

Chapter 1, which is the major federal program for disadvantaged children, is only three percent of overall expenditures for elementary and secondary education so it's a drop in the bucket compared to total expenditures.

Chapter 1 funding was flat in real terms for most of the 1980's. In recent years, funding has exceeded the inflation rate, although it is still well below what is needed to make a critical difference in low-income schools. One of the low points in funding in the 1980's was in 1983, the year the government issued A Nation at Risk, which argued that U.S. education needs to be strengthened.

3. Has President Clinton increased funding for low-income and disadvantaged kids?

The Clinton Administration has proposed a \$700 million increase for the Chapter 1 program. However, even if that increase makes it through the appropriations process, only a portion of those funds will reach the lowest-income schools because of the wide distribution of Chapter 1 funds among rich and poor school districts.

4. I know from reading your testimony that there are problems with the formulas and process which determine how much schools get in federal assistance. But if changes were made as you saw fit, how much money in federal assistance would be needed so that all schools which have low-income and disadvantaged kids could be adequately funded?

In a recent study I directed at the RAND Corporation, we recommended a \$6 billion increase in the Chapter 1 program--we call it a modest proposal--to begin to provide the resources to make significant improvements in schools with 60 percent or more poor students (16,000 schools) while still continuing to fund other Chapter 1 schools at current levels. But even with this increase, students in many Chapter 1 schools would still have less spent on their education than their more affluent peers (contrary to the popular myth that the federal government "throws money" at poor schools). It would cost many billions of dollars more to begin to address the problem of unequal school expenditures.

You might ask, in response to this recommendation, whether we have heard about the budget deficit. We have, but we are also aware of the fact that our budget this year is about \$1.5 trillion. As a nation, we set priorities. If we continue to underfund low-income schools, we should not expect our proposed reforms--whether these are national standards, national tests, or school choice--to be the magic bullet that solves our educational problems.

5. What do you say to those who say that throwing money at America's educational system shortcomings will not solve the problems?

If money doesn't matter, why do affluent parents spend so much on their children's education? Or as a judge in a school finance case put it: "If money is inadequate to improve education, the residents of poor districts should at least have an equal chance to be disappointed by its failure."

Clearly, money won't solve all the problems. But without it, students in poor schools do not have a fighting chance. Schools in our poorest communities cannot deliver a decent education if they do not have the resources to do a job.

6. Do other countries spend more on educating their young than we do in America?

Some countries spend more, some less. But these are very difficult comparisons to make because different countries set different priorities as to where they will allocate their educational resources. For example, we put a lot into higher education which has paid off in terms of access for a broad range of the population. But again the main point in elementary and secondary education is how the money is distributed, and we have much wider gaps in per-pupil expenditures than do many other industrialized countries.

7. Despite the difficulties in comparing educational systems in different countries, are there differences between the knowledge level of American kids and kids in other countries which spend more?

We have more low-income students than many other industrialized countries--and we have more disparities in school expenditures. So we typically give our poorest children the lowest-quality education (in contrast to Sweden, for example, which spends two to three times as much on its neediest children). Certainly, the poverty and the low level of educational resources, in combination, have an adverse affect on our students' academic achievement.