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FEDERAL POLICY ISSUES IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Iris C. Rotberg*

Introduction

The change in administrations, as well as Federal budget constraints, make this a particularly appropriate time to discuss Federal education policy for elementary and secondary education. During the next few years, there is likely to be a reexamination of the assumptions and structure of Federal aid to education. This reexamination will come at a time when there is optimism, on the one hand, about the effectiveness of some of the programs and growing concern, on the other, about the regulatory, fiscal, and coordination problems they create for state and local governments.

This paper considers accomplishments and problems. Generally, our experience during the past 15 years suggests that Federal education programs can be effectively designed and implemented and that they can make a significant contribution. More important, there is greater realism about what programs can and cannot accomplish. A considerable amount is known about effective program designs, about problems and limitations, and about possible improvements.

Our expectations and assessments of Federal financial aid have

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changed substantially since the programs began in 1965. These programs at first were oversold. Many expected—perhaps hoped is a fairer word—that the programs would substantially reduce poverty and remove the constraints on political and social access by dramatically raising children's achievement and subsequent success in higher education and employment. Not unexpectedly, the early evaluations produced negative findings—in part because, at the time the research was conducted, the programs were not yet fully operational, and in part because the measures of effectiveness were based upon unrealistic standards for the success of the program. Current expectations are more realistic. Federal programs cannot change a child's overall educational experience. They cannot, by themselves, solve educational problems whose fundamental causes are rooted in basic social and economic disparities within the country. They can, however, if well designed, provide educational experiences which can produce measurable educational achievement gains.

Objectives and Scope

The Federal Government contributes about 9.5% of total educational expenditures in the United States.¹ Most Federal programs are designed to respond to the fact that there are large differences in proportions of low-income families both among and within states and that certain groups of children—either because of poverty, low-achievement, past racial discrimination, limited English-speaking ability or handicaps—require supplemental educational services which cannot be adequately provided for by state and local funds. It should be noted that some of these groups are defined by educational performance—that is, by low achievement. Other categories are defined by their economic level or, in the case of bilingual children, in ethnic terms. Although there is considerable variation among programs in the criteria used to distribute funds, in general programs are designed to direct funds to school districts with a high proportion of low-income families. Within these districts, services are provided to target population groups.

The influence of Federal aid is considerably greater than its 9.5% share of the educational budget would suggest. Some states receive as much as 15% to 25% of their elementary and secondary school expenditures from the Federal Government. A number of school districts within states receive 25% to 30% of their instructional expenses from Federal aid.²

The great majority of school districts in the country rely on Federal funds to provide supplementary educational services to special population groups. Both for financial and political reasons, many school districts could not do the job they believe is necessary if Federal aid were not available. The problem has become especially acute in recent years, as school districts have faced increased financial pressures resulting from a combination of several factors—declining school enrollments, tax and bond issue limitations, inflation, increased energy costs, and increased proportions of students requiring special services including, for example, students from non-English speaking backgrounds. In this connection, it is estimated that by the end of the 1980's, Hispanics will constitute the largest minority group in the nation. Other groups, particularly Asians, also will require specialized language programs and increased expenditures.

Many school districts, therefore, find it difficult to support even their basic instructional program and are even less able than in previous years to pay for specialized education services. Moreover, needy students are often concentrated in large cities or in remote rural areas, where the financial burdens are most severe because of deteriorating tax bases.

Program Effectiveness

Federal education programs are too diverse to permit a general statement about their effectiveness. The programs vary along a number of dimensions. First, there are large differences in funding levels. Title I ESEA, the largest elementary and secondary program, was funded at \$3.216 billion in Fiscal Year 1980. Other programs such as Bilingual Education, Emergency School Aid, Vocational Education, and Programs for Handicapped Students were funded at between \$167 million and \$1.049 billion. Finally, there are a large number of very small or specialized programs including, for example, Ethnic Heritage Studies (\$3 million), Alcohol and Drug Abuse Education (\$3 million), Consumer Education (\$3.6 million) and Metric Education (\$1.8 million).

In addition to differences in funding levels, programs vary in purpose and design, in regulations and administration, and in the quality and comprehensiveness of the evaluations that have been conducted. In some cases, the perceived quality of a program reflects more the quality of the evaluation design and the fairness and appropriateness of the outcome measures than anything else. In others—for example, Bilingual Education and Vocational Education—

evaluation results are inconclusive primarily because the characteristics of the services provided are so unclear that even the most careful study cannot tell whether the target groups are better off and if so whether the program is the reason. Further, Federal funds account for only a small proportion of total expenditures in these areas and are not clearly used to provide supplemental services. These programs, therefore, are not easily distinguishable from the basic school program—the program the students would have received if Federal funding were not available. Program objectives, instructional approaches and participants vary greatly among school districts, even for the same Federal program, and it is difficult therefore to assess the effectiveness of these programs nationwide.

However, other programs like Title I ESEA, the largest elementary and secondary program, have been thoroughly and carefully studied and have produced clear—and positive—results. Title I provides funds to most of the nation's school districts for basic skills programs which serve low-achieving children in schools with a large proportion of children from low-income families. The NIE evaluation of Title I indicated that the program has been highly successful in meeting the purposes intended by Congress.³

First, Title I directs substantial Federal aid to areas with the highest proportions of low-income children. Title I is also "additional," that is, it is designed so that it does not substitute for educational spending at the local level. For the most part, it does not replace what otherwise would have been spent by state and local governments. Its effectiveness in this regard is considerably greater than the effectiveness of other Federal programs—both in the field of education and in other areas.

In addition to increasing resources to low-income areas, care is taken to assure that the funds are used to provide special additional services to low-achieving children in the poorest schools. Thus, participating students spend more time in basic skills instruction than do their classmates who are not in Title I programs. Further, they are taught in smaller groups and often by specially trained staff.

Not unexpectedly, under these conditions, the program enhances the educational achievement of participating students. Thus, the NIE study found that first grade students made percentile gains of 12 to 15 points in reading and mathematics between fall and spring testing. Third grade students made percentile gains of between 7 and 15 points during the same time period. Both of these gains were

higher than would be expected without the special instruction provided by the program. While we cannot conclude from the results that all compensatory education students are gaining as much as those who participated in the study, the results indicate that school districts can and do create the conditions necessary to make compensatory instructional services effective.⁴

The NIE results are consistent with findings of other studies. For example, Arthur Wise noted in a recent RAND study that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has shown increases in reading scores for precisely those groups who have been the primary recipients of Federal education programs—the poor, the young and the Black.⁵

Design and Implementation Issues

The design of Title I—in particular, the fact that it has realistic goals and is clearly targeted to specific schools and students—has a lot to do with its success. The Federal Government can meet its funds allocation objectives effectively without inappropriate interference in how subject matter is taught. It can direct resources to specific school districts and schools. It can fund supplemental services for specific population groups. Given the difficulties faced by some Federal programs, getting funds to the right places and the right people is no small accomplishment.

However, even these objectives, which seem relatively straightforward, are not accomplished simply or automatically. For programs to be effective, the criteria for allocating resources must be clear and consistent. Title I has met its funds allocation objectives because a very specific set of income criteria are used to distribute funds to states, school districts and schools. In contrast, the Federal Vocational Education program, for example, uses a number of overlapping and sometimes contradictory criteria for allocating funds.⁶ Thus, funds are to be allocated to areas which meet the following criteria:

- They should be economically depressed, have high unemployment and inadequate financial resources;
- They should have low property wealth;
- They should contain large numbers of low-income families; and
- They should produce new programs to meet emerging manpower needs.

The contradictions in these criteria are obvious. For example,

areas with high property wealth may have large numbers of low-income families. Areas that have emerging manpower needs are more likely to have new technologies and less likely to be economically depressed or have high unemployment rates. As a result, during the past two years every single state has had a formula disapproved by the Federal Government for one reason or another. That finding tells us more about the ambiguity of the criteria than it does about the performance of the states or the need for the program. There is no way to assess whether the Vocational Education program is meeting its objectives. This is not to say that there is no need for vocational education in this country. It is only to suggest that consistent and unambiguous criteria are necessary if we are to assess the outcomes of a Federal program.

In addition to clear objectives, it is important that programs contain provisions to ensure that funds supplement and do not substitute for state and local expenditures. Local school districts, faced with recurrent fiscal problems, are under considerable pressure to use Federal funds to replace state or local resources. Without provisions requiring supplementation, there is little reason to believe that the Federal funds would add to total spending for education. Similarly, provisions are needed to ensure that Federal programs in fact provide extra services and that the target children receive them. These outcomes are not obvious results of statements of Federal intent. They require specific provisions and careful management.

The point is made by the local officials themselves. In interviews conducted by the NIE Compensatory Education Study to determine whether districts would direct funds and services to the target population if there were no restrictions in the form of the funds allocation requirements, two comments reflect the consensus among the administrators interviewed:⁷

"Historically, the educationally deprived in poor areas do not have the political clout to require the provision of equal resources, and certainly not extra services. Title I ensures that these children will not be ignored. Most LEAs (Local Education Agencies) in my state, if left to their own devices, would not use Federal funds for compensatory education in poor areas; they would be used to counter the current fiscal crisis, whatever that crisis might be." (State Title I Director)

Another put it this way:

"Without strong language in the Title I regulations (about the intended beneficiaries and the supplementary nature of the program)

there is no question that Title I dollars would be used essentially as general aid. I don't think the superintendent could avoid that."
(Local District Title I Director)

Although Federal programs can ensure that the intended beneficiaries receive supplemental educational services, it is not at all clear that the program should attempt to intervene in local decisions about instructional techniques or planning methods. I suggest that the failure to make a distinction between identifying target groups and ensuring supplemental services, on the one hand, and interfering with local planning or instructional methods, on the other, has resulted in cumbersome and time-consuming regulations that at best have limited positive effects on program quality and may in fact detract from more appropriate and reasonable Federal objectives. It is the Federal involvement in local planning or instructional methods which has overshadowed the fundamental gains which have been achieved by certain carefully designed programs. It has also weakened the basic political support of even high quality programs.

There has been considerable discussion about this topic in recent literature:

- Arthur Wise has argued that improvements in educational quality are a local responsibility and that Federal attempts to mandate these improvements are ineffective and simply increase the bureaucratic complexities of running an educational system,⁸
- The NIE Compensatory Education study found that the Title I program development requirements are not necessary in the same sense as the funds allocation requirements. Although local districts have many pressures to use funds more generally than the funds allocation regulations allow, they have little incentive to deliver inferior or ineffective services. Moreover, even if school districts follow the procedures established in the program development regulations, there is no guarantee that they will produce high-quality services. No regulations handed down from above can accomplish that.⁹
- The NIE study of Vocational Education programs found that the complex planning requirements for these programs are cumbersome, time consuming, and do not result in positive programmatic changes.¹⁰
- Research on Follow Through—a large Federal demonstration program designed to compare different teaching methods for

educating early elementary school students—found more variability in outcomes from site to site *within* models than there were variations *between* models. Thus, the particular educational theory upon which the model was based had a very limited effect on the actual program implemented in schools or on the outcomes.¹¹ (This finding is consistent with the results of other studies comparing different instructional methods—for example, comparisons of phonics vs. whole word approaches to teaching reading. Although many studies indicate a relationship between amount of instructional time and student achievement, very few studies demonstrate one theoretical teaching technique to be clearly superior to another.)

- Finally, the RAND Change Agent study and other studies of program implementation found that Federal program regulations have limited effects on the quality of services that are provided at the local level.¹² There is a wide gap between Federal expectations and local education programs as implemented. One of the best illustrations of this difference is found in *The Lawn Party: The Evolution of Federal Programs in Local Settings*. The article describes the implementation of the educational voucher study in Alum Rock, California, in the early seventies.

"The U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) sponsored the demonstration, hoping to discover whether competition for students would force schools to improve curricula and become more responsive to parents. But local participants had other priorities. . . . From the federal perspective, then, Alum Rock is a story of program plans and priorities foiled by unanticipated local obstacles that produced major changes in the voucher design. But from the local view, vouchers provided the opportunity to accomplish a variety of things. Principals obtained more power, more money, and little competition, all of which they wanted. Parents were guaranteed neighborhood schools and some choice among programs, both of which they wanted. Teachers received the resources and the freedom to innovate and to teach as they preferred, along with job security. The superintendent made some progress in his efforts to decentralize authority in the district, and the federal funds kept his school system solvent.

Few of the Alum Rock participants paid attention to the voucher blueprint or to OEO's formal assessments of its implementation. If they measured success at all, it was not against central plans and priorities but against their own differing needs and desires. These local needs and desires, in fact, changed and shaped the federal initiative, much as guests shape a lawn party."¹³

Problems of Federal Programs

The most significant problems stem from the multiplicity of programs. The combination of requirements from different programs—both Federal and state—often places trying administrative and financial burdens on school districts. These problems are summarized from a briefing given by Paul Hill describing research he conducted at RAND.¹⁴

The problem basically results from a lack of coordination and clarity in the current system. Students, teachers and principals must cope with the combined effects of programs that legislators and higher level administrators deal with separately and in a rather distant setting. The result is that the point of supplementary instruction—to give students extra help in specific areas without replacing the basic educational curriculum—is often lost when students are assigned to several special programs rather than to one or two which best meet their needs. For example, the research by RAND indicates that migrant Hispanic students in one district were involved in a minimum of 4–5 separate pullout programs daily (Title I Migrant, Title I reading and math, ESEA Title VII, and ESAA Bilingual). The instructional day was so fragmented that the students were out of class while the classroom teacher presented the state-required curriculum. By grade 5, most of the migrant Hispanic students in this district had never had a class in either science or social studies. It is one thing to provide supplemental instruction to students. It is another to isolate them from normal learning experiences.

Teachers, in turn, may have so many students pulled out of their classrooms for special programs that, in some schools, the classroom teacher has the whole class for only 1½ hours daily. In one classroom in the RAND study, 26 of 27 students were in pullout programs most of the day. For the brief time students spent in class, the teacher had to develop instructional strategies for children at 14 different achievement levels.

While these are extreme examples that do not occur in most schools, they do suggest some unintended and negative consequences of multiple and uncoordinated programs.

For school principals, multiple programs mean a great deal of administrative work and required meetings with various parent advisory groups. As a result, there is simply less time available to supervise instruction. The principal's responsibilities increase with

the number of Federal programs in the school. Principals in low-income and minority group schools carry the heaviest burden. However, principals in these schools in the RAND study unanimously reported that they could not serve their students' needs without the Federal resources. The RAND researchers concluded that eliminating Federal programs is not the solution. The key is to find ways to stop putting the greatest administrative burdens on the people and places that are already under the greatest stress, but to assure that the funds go where they are needed.

The RAND study also indicates that students in multiple programs might spend all, or a good part, of their day in segregated classes. Most districts implement Federal programs by providing services in separate pullout classes. Since use of standardized tests typically results in a correlation between ethnicity and achievement, low achieving minority students are often placed in segregated categorical program classes. In some instances, Black, or Black and Hispanic, students are segregated for Title I reading and math, for Special Education, and for ESAA remedial reading and math. Segregation was particularly pronounced in schools with large enrollments of Hispanic children. Hispanic children in the study were less likely to be returned to their regular classroom than Black or White children, and were more likely to spend more of the school day in bilingual or ESL (English as a Second Language) classes.

The multiplicity of program requirements has produced incongruous patterns of services. For example, the NIE Title I study indicated that one-fourth of all compensatory education students are separated from higher scoring students for the *entire* school day. That pattern is inconsistent with the intent of Title I and other Federal programs and would be unacceptable for all but the most severely handicapped children under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), an Act which requires that handicapped children be educated in the "least restrictive environment" possible.

Finally, school districts must respond to a large number of new Federal and state regulatory requirements that must be financed from local revenues rather than from categorical Federal or state funds. Since 1975, the Federal Government has published several major new sets of requirements in areas such as education for the handicapped, teacher training, students' rights to privacy and due

process, sex equity, and education for the gifted. One of these requirements—the Education for All Handicapped Children Act—provides Federal subsidies for only about 12% of the services it requires school districts to deliver. Requirements of the other Acts are totally without Federal financial support. Further, most state governments have added their own regulations. In California, school districts can be required to implement as many as 33 state categorical programs including the Educationally Disadvantaged Youth Program, Alcohol Education, American Indian Early Childhood Education, and Bilingual Education.

The combination of regulations which are not supported by funds for their implementation and decreased local fiscal capacity has created severe financial difficulties for school districts. Not unexpectedly, districts have responded by (1) reducing the level of the basic instructional program and (2) using grant funds intended for one purpose or beneficiary group to provide services for another beneficiary group. The temptation of course is to go one step further and to seek funding which is without any restriction and which may be used, in effect—particularly during periods of fiscal difficulties—completely outside the field of education.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act illustrates the problem. The Act increases special education costs tremendously—for example, by requiring teachers to prepare individualized lesson plans for each handicapped child and by encouraging mainstreaming—but the Federal financial contribution is relatively small. Everyone agrees that handicapped children should have equitable education, but states and school districts do not have the funds. During the next year, about \$3.5 billion in additional funds will be required to meet special education costs. It is unclear where these funds will come from.¹⁵

Alternatives for the Future

Ideally, any changes in the current system would build on the positive outcomes of existing programs. What we need is more clarity and simplicity in the current system, while ensuring that Federal funds are used to provide supplemental services for target populations.

There are a wide variety of alternative proposals which are being discussed by government and professional communities. Although several of these proposals may have some merit, there is insufficient information about their implications to advocate one over another.

It may be useful, however, to note a few examples of options which should be examined.

One set of suggestions propose incremental changes in the current system to make programs more efficient. For example, the RAND studies suggest that we recognize the permanence of multiple programs and improve their management.¹⁶ Under this proposal, both local and Federal action is needed. Local districts can limit the number of programs offered in each school, and give the responsibility for program coordination to district officials, who have more time to spend on administrative matters, rather than to principals and teachers. Federal officials can help by not adding new programs, by recognizing the problems resulting from requirements which do not provide funding, and by helping multi-program schools integrate their Federal programs.

Another suggestion for simplifying program management is to exempt from certain Federal regulations those states with high expenditures for disadvantaged children.

Finally, there are a set of proposals for various types of Federal program consolidation aimed at reducing administrative burdens. These include, for example, (1) consolidation of categorical programs with similar purposes into a single broad category serving the same target population; and (2) making block grants to states without regulations as to how the funds should be used.

Depending on how the programs are designed, it may be feasible to implement the first proposal for consolidation and continue to provide supplemental services for needy students. However the second proposal—the proposal for block grants—would threaten the considerable progress that has been achieved in designing effective Federal education programs. Programs without funding control typically provide general purpose government support rather than increasing overall education expenditures or providing extra services for the children who need them the most. If Federal subsidies are needed to relieve the financial problems of states, that issue should be argued on its merits. We should not assume, however, that under such circumstances the funds are likely to increase the quality of education or go to population groups that need them the most.

In short, experience during the past 15 years indicates that Federal programs can make an important contribution to educational achievement. The Federal Government can provide funds to needy areas of the country and to specific population groups. There are some unintended outcomes and problems of multiple programs; the

most significant problems stem from a lack of clarity and coordination in the current system and from requirements without financial support. There is a need to make the current system more efficient without changing the basic objectives of providing supplemental services to the neediest students.

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3. Reports of the NIE Compensatory Education Study: *Title I Funds Allocation: The Current Formula*, Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, September 1977; *Compensatory Education Services*, Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, July 1977; *Demonstration Studies of Funds Allocation within Districts*, Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, September 1977; and *The Effects of Services on Student Development*, Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, September 1977.
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5. Paul T. Hill, "Do Federal Education Programs Interfere with One Another?" Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation,

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6. *The Vocational Education Study: The Interim Report*, Report of the NIE Vocational Education Study, Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, September 1980, Chapter III.
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 8. Arthur E. Wise, "Quality and Equality: The Regulation of Public Schools," *Cross Reference*, July-August 1979; and Arthur E. Wise, *Legislated Learning: The Bureaucratization of the American Classroom*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.
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 11. See, for example, Mary M. Kennedy, "Findings from the Follow Through Planned Variation Study," *Educational Researcher*, June 1977.
 12. See, for example, *Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change*, Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, April 1975.
 13. Eleanor Farrar, John E. DeSanctis, and David K. Cohen, "The Lawn Party: The Evolution of Federal Programs in Local Settings," *Phi Delta Kappan*, November 1980.
 14. These findings will be reported in a forthcoming RAND publication entitled *Aggregate Effects of Federal Education Programs*. Related issues are discussed in: Paul T. Hill, *op. cit.*; and Paul T. Hill, Joanne Wuchitech, and Richard Williams, *The Effects of Federal Education Programs on School Principals*, Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, February 1980.
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 16. These issues will be discussed in the forthcoming RAND publication entitled *Aggregate Effects of Federal Education Programs*.

Comment

By Iris Rotberg

A Title I Researcher Talks About Reexamining Federal Education Programs

The following are excerpts from remarks by Iris Rotberg at the United States-Israeli Colloquium on Education of the Disadvantaged in Washington, D.C., Dec. 9, 1980.

Rotberg is director of the Office of Planning and Program Development of the National Institute of Education. She was deputy director of a recent NIE study of Title I.

The change in administrations, as well as federal budget constraints, make this a particularly appropriate time to discuss federal education policy for elementary and secondary education.

During the next few years, there is likely to be a reexamination of the assumptions and structure of federal aid to education. This reexamination will come at a time when there is optimism, on the one hand, about the effectiveness of some of the programs, and growing concern, on the other, about the regulatory, fiscal and coordination problems they create for state and local governments.

This article considers accomplishments and problems.

Generally, experience during the past 15 years suggests that federal education programs can be effectively designed and implemented and that they can make a significant contribution. More important, there is greater realism about what programs can and cannot accomplish. A considerable amount is known about effective program designs, about problems and limitations, and about possible improvements.

Our expectations and assessments of federal financial aid have changed substantially since the programs began in 1965.

These programs at first were oversold. Many expected—perhaps hoped is a fairer word—that the programs would substantially reduce poverty and remove the constraints on political and social access by dramatically raising children's achievement and subsequent success in higher education and employment.

Not unexpectedly, the early evaluations produced negative findings—in part because, at the time the research was conducted, the programs were not yet fully operational, and in part because the measures of effectiveness were based upon unrealistic standards for the success of the program.

Current expectations are more realistic.

Federal programs cannot change a child's overall educational experience. They cannot, by themselves,

solve educational problems whose fundamental causes are rooted in basic social and economic disparities within the country.

They can, however, if well designed, provide educational experiences which can produce measurable educational achievement gains.

Program Effectiveness

Federal education programs are too diverse to permit a general statement about their effectiveness.

Some programs are too small, or the control over funds is too weak, to make a significant improvement in the educational services children receive.

Evaluations of certain programs—for example, Bilingual Education and Vocational Education—are inconclusive primarily because the characteristics of the services provided are so unclear that even the most careful study cannot tell whether the target groups are better off and, if so, whether the program is the reason.

Further, federal funds account for only a small proportion of total expenditures in these areas and are not clearly used to provide supplemental services.

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While we cannot conclude from the results that all compensatory education students are gaining as much as those who participated in the study, the results indicate that school districts can and do create the con-

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Design And Implementation Issues

The design of Title I—in particular, the fact that it has realistic goals and is clearly targeted to specific schools and students—has a lot to do with its success.

The federal government can meet its funds allocation objectives effectively without inappropriate interference in how subject matter is taught. It can direct resources to specific school districts and schools. It can fund supplemental services for specific population groups.

Given the difficulties faced by some federal programs, getting funds to the right places and the right people is no small accomplishment.

In addition to meeting funding objectives, it is important that programs contain provisions to ensure that funds supplement and do not substitute for state and local expenditures.

Local school districts faced with recurrent fiscal problems are under considerable pressure to use federal funds to replace state or local resources. Without provisions requiring supplementation, there is little reason to believe that the federal funds would add to total spending for education.

Similarly, provisions are needed to ensure that federal programs in fact provide extra services and that the target children receive them.

These outcomes are not obvious results of statements of federal intent. They require specific provisions and careful management.

The point is made by the local officials themselves. In interviews conducted by NIE to determine whether districts would direct funds and services to the target population if there were no restrictions in the form of funds allocation requirements, two comments reflected a general consensus among the administrators interviewed:

"Historically," said one state Title I director, "the educationally deprived in poor areas do not have the political clout to require the provision of equal resources, and certainly not extra resources. Title I ensures

that these children will not be ignored. Most LEAs in my state, if left to their own devices, would not use federal funds for compensatory education in poor areas; they would be used to counter the current fiscal crisis, whatever the crisis might be."

A local district Title I director put it this way: "Without strong language in the Title I regulations (about intended beneficiaries and the supplementary nature of the program), there is no question that Title I dollars would be used essentially as general aid. I don't think the superintendent could avoid that."

Although federal programs can ensure that the intended beneficiaries receive supplemental educational services, it is not at all clear that the programs should attempt to intervene in local decisions about instructional techniques or planning methods.

I suggest that the failure to make a distinction between identifying target groups and ensuring supplemental services; on the one hand, and interfering with local planning or instructional methods, on the other, has resulted in cumbersome and time-consuming regulations that at best have limited positive effects on program quality and may in fact detract from more appropriate and reasonable federal objectives.

It is the federal involvement in local planning or instructional methods which has overshadowed the fundamental gains which have been achieved by certain carefully designed programs.

It has also weakened the basic political support of even high quality programs.

Problems Of Federal Programs

The most significant problems of federal programs stem from the lack of coordination among multiple programs.

The combination of requirements from different programs—both federal and state—often places trying administrative and financial burdens on school districts. These problems are summarized from a briefing given by Paul Hill describing research he conducted at RAND.

The problem basically results from a lack of coordination and clarity in the present system. Students, teachers and principals must cope with the combined effects of programs that legislators and higher level administrators deal with separately and in a rather distant setting.

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ents extra help in specific areas without replacing the basic educational curriculum—is often lost when students are assigned to several special programs rather than to one or two which best meet their needs.

In addition, school districts must respond to a large number of new federal and state regulatory requirements that must be financed from local revenues rather than from categorical federal or state funds.

Since 1975, the federal government has published several major new sets of requirements in areas such as education for the handicapped, teacher training, students' rights to privacy and due process, sex equity, and education for the gifted. One of these requirements—the Education for All Handicapped Children Act—provides federal subsidies for only about 12 percent of the services it requires school districts to deliver. Requirements of the other Acts are totally without federal financial support.

Further, most state governments have added their own regulations. In California, school districts can be required to implement as many as 33 state categorical programs.

The combination of regulations which are not supported by funds for their implementation and decreased local fiscal capacity has created severe financial difficulties for school districts.

Not unexpectedly, districts have responded by reducing the level of the basic instructional programs and by using grant funds intended for one purpose or beneficiary group to provide services for another beneficiary group.

The temptation of course is to go one step further and to seek funding which is without any restriction and which may be used, in effect—particularly during periods of fiscal difficulties—completely outside the field of education.

Alternatives For The Future

Ideally, any changes in the current system would build on the positive outcomes of existing programs.

What we need is more clarity and simplicity in the current system, while ensuring that federal funds are used to provide supplemental services for target populations.

There are a wide variety of alternative proposals which are being discussed by government and professional communities.

Although several of these proposals may have some merit, there is insufficient information about their implications to advocate one over another.

Options

It may be useful, however, to note a few examples of options which should be examined.

The simplest and probably most realistic suggestions propose incremental changes in the current system to make programs more efficient.

For example, the RAND studies suggest that we recognize the perma-

nence of multiple programs and improve their management.

Under this proposal, both local and federal action is needed.

Local districts can limit the number of programs offered in each school, and give the responsibility for program coordination to district officials, who have more time to spend on administrative matters, rather than to principals and teachers.

Federal officials can help by not adding new programs, by recognizing the problems resulting from requirements which do not provide funding, and by helping multi-program schools integrate their federal programs.

Another suggestion for simplifying program management is to exempt from certain federal regulations those states with high expenditures for disadvantaged children.

Finally, there are a set of proposals for various types of federal program consolidation aimed at reducing administrative burdens.

These include, for example, consolidation of categorical programs with similar purposes into a single broad category serving the same target population; and making block grants to states without regulations as to how the funds should be used.

Depending on how the programs are designed, it may be feasible to implement the first proposal for consolidation and continue to provide supplemental services for needy students.

However, the second proposal—the proposal for block grants—would threaten the considerable progress that has been achieved in designing

effective federal education programs.

Programs without funding control typically provide general purpose government support rather than increasing overall educational expenditures or providing extra services for the children who need them the most.

If federal subsidies are needed to relieve the financial problems of states, that issue should be argued on its merits.

We should not assume, however, that under such circumstances the funds are likely to increase the quality of education or to go to population groups that need them the most.

In short, experience during the past 15 years indicates that federal programs can make an important contribution to educational achievement. The federal government can provide funds to needy areas of the country and to specific population groups.

There are some unintended outcomes and a problem of multiple programs; the most significant problems stem from lack of clarity and coordination and from requirements without financial support.

There is a need to make the current system more efficient without changing the basic objectives of providing supplemental services to the neediest students.

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Views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NIE or the U.S. Department of Education.