

if such a solution could be brought about, would be about the worst thing that could happen to the human race. But if, by taking care of the bulk of the heavy work and the routine work, the machine will permit man to advance to new levels of effort and achievement, we can look forward to a new era that will really be worth living for.

It would be most unfortunate at this time and with this prospect before us to take any steps that would preclude the free access to the high schools of boys and girls from all social and economic strata—for if I am right and even partly right, secondary education is to be in the future even more than in the past the door to opportunity. Nay, further than this, if the situation that I have described eventuates as it well may within a relatively short time to shut the doors of the high schools to millions of pupils, as would be the case if tuition fees were charged as is proposed in many places, would leave us with a large group of young people who could not find work on the routine level and who would be unqualified for the opportunities on the stepped-up levels. But it would be most unfortunate if, in view of the function that the high schools must discharge, we did not take every possible step to insure upon their part the highest measure of efficiency. He cannot do without modifying fundamentally the theories that have governed the development of American education during the past thirty years.

*The Relationship of Regional Accrediting Agencies to Secondary Education During this Crisis* was presented by J. B. Edmonson, Dean of the School of Education, University of Michigan.

## THE RELATIONSHIP OF REGIONAL ACCREDITING AGENCIES TO SECONDARY EDUCATION DURING THIS CRISIS

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It is not surprising to find that the crisis in education has raised the question as to what contribution the regional accrediting agencies should make to the secondary-schools during such a period. Being a strong believer in the value of the work of these voluntary associations of secondary-schools and colleges, I am very glad to have an opportunity to comment on some problems they should attack as a part of their contribution.

May I remind you that there are five of these regional associations. In the order of their founding they are: the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary-Schools, the Association of the Middle States and Maryland, the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary-Schools, the Association of Colleges and Secondary-Schools of the Southern States, and the Northwest Association of Secondary and Higher Schools.

For the past few years I have had an unusual opportunity to become acquainted with the work of these regional agencies, and I have a great deal of confidence in them. It would be impossible to estimate the impetus they have given to high-schools. By setting up high standards for accrediting, by holding up ideals of educational achievement to local communities, and by encouraging and aiding significant studies of educational problems, these agencies have greatly improved the secondary-schools. They have also aided in the development of more reasonable college entrance requirements and have rendered important service in improving educational conditions through standardization of procedure and through wide dissemination of knowledge concerning practices in our better schools.

It is unnecessary to advocate before this Department of Secondary-School Principals that such organizations should play a large part in any consideration of American education during the present crisis. It is obvious that they have the organization, the personnel, the prestige, and the power to play an important part in the present period of educational readjustment. The question is not, **Shall** they take part? but, **How** shall they take part? During the present crisis I should like to see these regional agencies attacking problems that are of interest to large numbers of secondary-schools. The present evidences of a hostile public should be sufficiently alarming to warrant the scrapping of those policies and programs that are no longer of much significance, and the formulation of new programs that will insure that educational problems will be solved through the cooperation of leaders in education.

These are the days when everyone is concerned with proposals to restore financial and business stability. Concern is almost as keen in proposals to prevent the economic system from getting out of order in the future as in proposals to cure the present disorder. With business appraising its past and trying to read the future, it is not surprising that educators should be demanded to do likewise. It is quite certain that the growing need for better planning in the world of business will increase the demand for better planning in the field of education, especially at the secondary and college levels.

The present is an especially appropriate time for initiating a constructive program affecting our secondary-schools. The great changes in life which have been brought about by the ups and downs in the economic world have tended to increase demands for changes in education. At the same time a large amount of factual information concerning our secondary-schools is available in the reports of the National Survey of Secondary Education, which will be published within the next few months. These reports should be of great help in appraising our present program and in making plans for the future.

The regional associations will play an important part in the readjustment, but the precise nature of that part is still

to be determined. The rest of this paper presents a series of recommendations concerning problems and policies that must receive their attention if they are to make significant contributions to the secondary-schools during the present crisis.

My first recommendation is that the regional associations attempt to develop a better agreement as to the real philosophy of American secondary education and then make a determined effort to have this philosophy understood by teachers and laymen. Unless we can reach a better agreement on the scope and objectives of secondary education, we shall find it extremely difficult to evaluate present programs and to make plans for the future. It is doubtless unnecessary to remind this group that there is plenty of evidence of marked disagreement both among teachers and among laymen regarding the philosophy that should find expression in our secondary-schools. The conversations and public utterances, as well as the acts, of many persons show a sincere belief in the older philosophy of secondary education. This older philosophy assumes that secondary education is a privilege to which only those of proved capacity are entitled. This philosophy calls for a system of secondary education for the intellectually and socially elite. It is the older European point of view. It implies that the secondary-school must be progressively selective by eliminating all students who cannot maintain a high standard of performance.

In contrast with this older philosophy there is the newer point of view that has found expression in many new activities and programs in our secondary-schools, some of which are resented by the advocates of the older theory. The newer philosophy demands that secondary education be open to all the children of adolescent age. It implies that the secondary-school must provide types of education as varied as may be demanded by the varied interests of secondary-school pupils. The older philosophy and the newer philosophy are incompatible. As long as there is such marked disagreement regarding the valid objectives of American secondary education, our teachers will find it difficult to attack problems involving the curriculum, instructional procedures, and related matters. It will also be

impossible to meet certain current criticisms until we have more substantial agreement concerning the underlying philosophy of our program of secondary-school training. It is gratifying to find that the Carnegie Foundation has made a grant of money to the Department of Secondary-School Principals for an intensive study of the objectives of American secondary education. Such a study will be of great value as a basis for long time planning. In the meantime there is an immediate need for some authoritative pronouncements regarding the valid objectives of secondary-school education, and our regional associations should meet the demand for help and guidance.

My second recommendation is that the regional agencies become more aggressive in attacking the problem of effective articulation between the colleges and the secondary-schools. Too long the secondary-schools and the colleges have been friendly enemies. The time has come when there are so many common enemies of both secondary and higher education that we must eliminate any unnecessary feuds within the profession. Possibly we need to cease talking about cooperation between colleges and secondary-schools and devote our attention to a discussion of a vigorous defense of education by united forces. Our secondary-schools cannot hold the confidence of the public unless more adequate provision is made for the training of large groups of young people who cannot with profit attend the higher institutions as they are now organized. Some provision must be made for this group. It is the belief of some high-school principals that the definition of entrance requirements in terms of certain patterns of work constitutes a real obstacle to any program of reorganization of the curriculum. On the other hand, scores of studies indicate that the colleges do not need to hold to their traditional practice in the matter of entrance requirements in terms of certain units. There has been enough experimentation in this field to indicate the existence of better procedures for the selection of students for college.

It is my personal opinion that under present plans of college admission as found in the North Central territory the secondary-schools have a very great degree of freedom to work

out their own instructional problems—greater, I sometimes feel, than many of the secondary-school principals desire to exercise. It is my candid opinion, moreover, that the colleges are carrying an unnecessary burden of criticism by continuing to use an obsolete method of selecting students for entrance. There is plenty of evidence to show that colleges should select students by other methods that are more effective than that of admission in terms of certain patterns of units. I refer to the use of general scholarship tests, measures of ability, and records made in high-schools in a variety of fields of work. The use of these results would free the colleges from many of the criticisms now voiced by the secondary-schools. Furthermore, the colleges have so many problems to face, in matters of public relations and financial support, that they can ill afford to carry the charge of attempting to dominate the program of the secondary-schools. This charge has been overworked, but among the general public the colleges are not making friends by allowing the indictment to go unchallenged. The best interests of the secondary-schools and colleges would be served by the development of policies of articulation that would free both units from the criticisms that irritate the public and cause a decrease of faith in both units. The regional accrediting agencies should attack this problem without delay.

My third recommendation to the regional agencies is that the problem of the curriculum of the secondary-school should be re-attacked in the light of the social and economic developments of the last few years. The teaching profession has dabbled in curriculum revision, but it is my guess that much of the instruction in many schools is comparable to that of a quarter of a century ago. In other words, the vast social and economic changes in American life have not brought about comparable changes in our programs of instruction except in relatively few centers. In the present period of social unrest an increasing number of persons have grave doubts regarding the value of the present curriculum of our secondary-schools. We have had many national committees at work on curriculum problems and we have had numerous reports from groups of experts, but it would appear that these reports have not greatly influenced the instructional programs of our schools.

The fact that laymen are talking so much about the fads and frills in our secondary-schools furnishes some evidence that we have not succeeded in building a well integrated program of instruction. There should be no fads and frills in our schools, and it is my judgment that much of the talk about fads and frills is either sheer nonsense or an expression of traditional prejudices. It must be granted, however, that a well integrated curriculum would not be likely to be so much misunderstood by critics of our schools. It is my prediction that the next few years will bring rapid progress in the reconstruction of the curriculum. It may be that one of the good results of the present financial strain will be a re-evaluation of the program of instruction. The regional accrediting agencies should give immediate attention to the new curriculum problems created by recent trends.

My fourth recommendation is that the regional associations should be lenient in the application of standards for accrediting in those cases where the school authorities and the communities are making an honest and determined effort to meet the requirements. There are scores of cases where schools deserve a marked degree of leniency. In all probability there are some cases where alibis and flimsy excuses are offered for failure to meet reasonable requirements; even in periods of prosperity such evasions and excuses were offered by some school authorities and some communities. But the regional associations can render a real service by protecting the educational interests of pupils and demanding the real facts in any case where there is an appeal for lenience. This is the time to go behind paper reports and to treat each application in terms of the real facts.

It has been proposed that the regional agencies should suspend their standards during this period. I have no sympathy with any such proposal unless it is agreed that the standards have possessed no degree of validity during the past decade. If the regional associations were to declare a moratorium, the secondary-schools in many communities would be at the mercy of persons who have no interest in providing an adequate program of secondary-school instruction. In such a period as this

the standardizing agencies can be of great help to secondary-schools by being lenient in deserving cases and by being severe in treating bogus claims. If, however, the accrediting agencies are to be discriminating in the matter of leniency, these agencies must have the active cooperation of secondary-school principals. Too few principals attend the meetings of the regional associations, and therefore too few principals exercise any influence in shaping the policies and programs of the associations. It is my opinion that for a high-school principal there is no more important professional meeting than the meeting of the regional association to which his high-school belongs. During the present crisis high-school principals should take a renewed interest in the work of the accrediting agencies and should help to develop a constructive and sympathetic attitude on the part of these agencies towards the problems of individual schools.

My fifth recommendation is that the regional associations should encourage a greater amount of experimentation in our secondary-schools. In spite of the fact that the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary-Schools has in its constitution a provision whereby schools may be granted the right to try an educational experiment, there appears to be the feeling that all regional associations are opposed to any departure from well established practices. As a matter of fact our high-schools are going to find it difficult to make needed readjustments unless a greater amount of experimentation is carried on. In this period when we must practice economies, more of our schools should try the experiment of teaching pupils in large classes. We have some evidence that large classes yield results that are as good as those secured from small classes. On the other hand, the common opinion of teachers is that the interests of pupils are certain to be sacrificed when classes are increased beyond a certain point. We need more study of the question as to the most efficient size of class as well as the problem of the instructional procedures that are best adapted to larger classes. We also need much experimentation with curriculum materials, especially with materials prepared for pupils of relatively low ability. We need more experimentation with the activities program which in some schools has become



quite completely divorced from the regular instructional program of the schools. We also need more experimentation to discover the possibilities of organizing our schools in such a way as to avoid the numerous criticisms of formalism that have recently been made against the typical secondary-school. Numerous other problems could be mentioned that cannot be solved satisfactorily until more schools experiment with possible solutions. Our regional associations need to encourage such experimentation, and it is my belief that they will be quite willing to do so wherever secondary-school principals exhibit a desire to try some practice that is a real departure from the traditional.

I am convinced that we are going to improve American education during the next few years. We are going to do it in part because of the stimulation that comes from criticism and opposition. It is my prediction that more thought is going to be given to planning for American education in the next few years than has ever been given to any similar problem in the past few decades. We must be alert and ready to make such changes in education as a changing economic order may demand.

In conclusion I want to emphasize the responsibility resting upon the regional associations for developing plans to meet new problems that will arise in the field of secondary education. As I stated in an earlier paragraph, the idea of planning is receiving much consideration in the field of business and there is a growing demand that educational bodies give more attention to the appraisal of the past and planning of the future. Such a responsibility clearly rests on all organizations as well organized and as effective as these regional associations. If our associations are to furnish this leadership they must have the sympathetic and loyal support of the secondary-school principals, especially those who have faith in the possibility of building a greater secondary-school out of the depressing and threatening conditions of the present period. I hope, therefore, that the coming years will find the regional associations even stronger than at present and far more active than they have been during the past decade in their role as pace-makers for our secondary-schools.