

THE STANDARDS STUDY COMMITTEE

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The six regional accrediting associations, covering the entire territory of the United States, including the Canal Zone and a few secondary schools in other countries, have placed the names of approximately 4600 secondary schools on their membership lists and have thus given them the stamp of approval. Who can say whether these are the best public and private schools in the United States? How many of the 4600 are actually rather weak and inefficient schools? How many of the non-members are better secondary schools than the poorest 500 or 1000 of the members? Who knows? Or, to put it another way, what are the elements which go to make up a good high school?

The commissions on secondary schools of the six regional accrediting associations have set up a *Standards Study Committee* with the task of finding an answer to the question, What is a good high school? These associations have voted funds for use in getting this work started. The Commissioner of Education has rendered valuable assistance in getting the study started.

Each regional association has a set of standards for use in selecting schools to be approved as members. Yet the standards are for the most part quantitative in nature and quite detailed. These have been built up piece by piece, standard by standard, over a long period of time, and, as some claim, possibly without due regard to changing social conditions. In other days when schools lacked buildings, equipment, trained staffs, and many other advantages now provided, it may have been necessary to require a certain length of class period, a certain number of days in the school year and other supposed quantitative guarantees of good educational production in order to obtain the desired result.

Quantity is still of great importance and quality of output is of still greater importance. In the course of time and in the midst of considerable educational progress, it may be that a good quality of production is possible without the necessity of meeting all of the carefully developed, specially prescribed, quantitative measures. At least there are a goodly number of schoolmen interested in secondary education both in college and in secondary schools who believe that this question of standards is well worth studying. This is the first and most important reason for launching the study.

A second reason for this undertaking is to try to see if there can be found some way whereby the regional associations may come to be considered somewhat less as police and somewhat more as helpful, stimulating, encouraging friends. At present it appears that too large a part of the work of the accrediting agencies is that of checking up on member schools to see that they do not violate any of the sacred rules and regulations. Some of this will doubtless always be necessary, but the chances are that a thoughtful, careful sympathetic study of conditions may reveal a way whereby the main emphasis may be shifted over to the helpful assistance of growing, dynamic schools which are anxious to render the best kinds of service to the boys and girls. These schools are in need of and anxious to receive help. The regional associations ought to be in the most favored positions for helping such schools.

The idea of a coöperative attack on the problem is not new, but it is being worked a little harder at present than it has been for some time. The impact of the six associations, thinking and hammering on the one problem at the same time throughout the nation ought to be immensely better than any association working alone. As the work progresses and tentative conclusions are reached, it is the expectation that each association will analyze the findings and that each will adopt and adapt those portions which may be found to be suitable and beneficial in their respective parts of the United States. It is not thought that uniform standards or criteria could or should be developed for the accrediting of all secondary schools throughout the country.

The present appears to be a very suitable time for the inauguration of such a study. First, the twenty-eight volumes of the National Survey of Secondary Education are just being received from the press. A large amount of useful information and carefully organized data is thus made available for the use of the Standards Study Committee. These volumes are in handy, usable form. The data which they contain ought to be of very great assistance in making this proposed study. At the same time this research work being carried on throughout the country ought to furnish a good channel out through which the information, collected by the Office of Education at a large expense, may flow to the secondary commissions and the numerous membership schools of the associations. The members of the research staff will also be able to help departments of secondary education in colleges and universities to get a better idea of the material published in this National Survey. The hope is that this Survey may not be just another collection of figures to be published and filed away for future reference. It is hoped that at least some of the volumes, and whatever is of worth in all of the volumes, may be taken from the shelves and actually tried out in progressive secondary schools. This Standards Study Committee ought to be of help in disseminating this useful material.

(1) What constitutes a good secondary school? We do not know.

(2) By what standards should it be evaluated? We do not have a satisfactory answer to this question.

Since the accrediting agencies cannot answer these two questions in a manner satisfactory to themselves decision has been reached to stop talking and do some acting. We are undertaking a carefully planned, nation-wide study of secondary schools and of the criteria by which they should be evaluated.