

The Once and Future

K-12

We cannot afford decades of waiting to recognize that America's children are the nation's future and a national responsibility, Ms. Hufstedler points out. While the whole village may be all that is needed to rear a single child, the whole nation is needed to educate all our children.

**PAPERS FROM THE
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- *D. T. Stallings*
- *Shirley M. Hufstedler*
- *Lauro F. Cavazos*
- *Lamar Alexander*
- *Richard W. Riley*
- *Rod Paige*
- *James B. Hunt, Jr.*

WHEN I WAS appointed the nation's first secretary of education by President Carter, I did not know what would be entailed by my moving from the cloister of the federal appellate court to the maelstrom of Washington, D.C. I quickly found out.



The immediate tasks were formidable. Despite chronic shortages of office space in the District, room for the department had to be found. More than a hundred educational programs had to be moved from other departments and agencies, together with some of the program staff members. Fewer employees were to be transferred to the new department than had managed the programs in their original homes, and, because a federal hiring freeze was in place, intense negotiations were required to obtain existing employee vacancies from other departments and agencies. Those vacancies were necessary to staff the essential offices for any Cabinet-level department. Simultaneously, potential candidates for Presidential appointments had to be identified and interviewed for each of the offices

SHIRLEY M. HUFSTEDLER was the first U.S. secretary of education, appointed by President Jimmy Carter in 1979. She served until 1981 and is now in private law practice in southern California.

and program areas established by the legislation that created the department. Every nominee had to be first-rate; collectively, the nominees had to reflect the diversity of America as far as practicable.

It was necessary to call upon the good offices of seasoned public servants to assist in the transition. The department received help from the personnel office of the White House and from temporary staff members from other departments. But we needed even more assistance, so I turned to those outside of Washington who had long experience with the federal government and a deep commitment to public service. Former secretaries of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) and former commissioners of education gave very helpful information and suggestions. They also described a number of the pitfalls — pit by pit.

Richard Beattie, former general counsel for HEW, was persuaded to return to Washington from New York to be a key leader in the transition process, despite disruptions to his family life and his career. Richard Gilman, president of Occidental College, took a leave of absence to become my interim special assistant. Liz Carpenter, formerly Lady Bird Johnson's press secretary and a 30-year veteran of the Washington press corps, left the Johnson library and returned to Washington to take on the public affairs tasks for the department. (Thereafter she received a Presidential appointment to undertake those and other broader duties for the department.) Even while the department was being formed, all the education programs and the other tasks allotted to it still had to be managed, even before the nominees for Presidential appointments had been confirmed and before personnel from other departments could be transferred.

The budgetary issues had to be addressed immediately because the organization of the department had occurred at the "pass back," i.e., the time in the federal budget cycle when the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) gives each department and agency the budget targets that OMB recommends to the President. Those budget recommendations were very detailed, encompassing each program and office under the department's jurisdiction. If a department head wanted to change some of the recommended targets, he or she had to appeal through the OMB hierarchy to revise the targets. Any subsequent dissatisfaction with the outcome of the appeals to OMB had to be addressed by further appeals to the President and Vice President. Because the department was still being formed, it was incumbent on me to carry those appeals through

OMB and to the President and Vice President.

To complete these tasks, I needed a teacher who was thoroughly familiar with the details of the budget process and with all the programs being transferred to the department. Cora Beebe, a career budget expert with a thorough knowledge of all the educational programs, led me through each step of the federal budget process and, with the aid of hefty briefing books, taught me the programs and procedures during a grueling three-day weekend.

The next step in the budget process was defending the President's budget for the department before the various committees of the Congress. Because the new department's programs fell within the jurisdiction of multiple committees, I had to testify before all of them and had to meet personally with key committee members to discuss their priorities and concerns.

Almost all K-12 systems and institutions wanted federal money — especially without many federal strings attached. The great research universities needed money. School districts that were serving the most impoverished children had to have high priority. School districts serving significant numbers of youngsters with special needs badly needed help. Schools located within some of the federal enclaves, such as reservations, had dilapidated and even dangerous facilities. At the same time, many schools had little or nothing to offer gifted youngsters whose talents needed to be nurtured. Budget constraints foreclosed meeting more than a fraction of those needs, but the department modestly improved the funding for the highest K-12 priorities. The federal strings, however, were not detachable.

With the indispensable assistance of temporary staff and outside volunteers, the department was fully formed with outstanding professionals. It was operating effectively, and it was under budget and ahead of the congressional deadline for completing its formation.

Nevertheless, there were always surprises. I had been accustomed to debating serious legal issues with other judges and my law clerks in complete confidence. I soon discovered that my discussion of education issues under circumstances that I had believed were almost as confidential turned out to be not at all confidential. I was often dismayed to find that a question that I had been debating was turned into the secretary's decision by the following morning's education press.

Vice President Mondale also gave me a shock by telling me that he had invited a group of Chinese educators and administrators to visit the United States and that he expected the new department to take care

of their visit. Because the department was still in formation, it had no staff with which to arrange a complex schedule for a delegation of foreign visitors and no money to finance any of the travel expenses. The dilemma was resolved through the good offices of then Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who was able to find the personnel and the funding within the State Department to accommodate the Chinese visitors.

Each of the billions of dollars of program monies that Congress appropriated to the department had very precise legislative restrictions on its use. Any attempt to move any money from one program or purpose to another without explicit congressional consent would bring the department under congressional oversight almost immediately.

That issue came into sharp focus when the President asked me to find money in the department to educate almost 100,000 refugees from Cuba who were about to land in Florida. The situation was urgent because Florida had no funds with which to educate them, and the refugees were entering the country shortly before teachers would be leaving for their summer vacations. The department's budget personnel excavated \$1 million in funding left over from an appropriation for the benefit of Vietnamese refugees. To be able to move the money from those refugees to the Cuban refugees, however, necessitated my calling on members of the Senate and House committees in whose jurisdiction the original funding program lay to explain the situation and to obtain their consent to transfer the program money. The educational tasks were accomplished with the aid of key members of Congress; Florida's chief state school officer, Ralph Turlington; and Florida's own dedicated teachers.

ROOTS OF TODAY'S CHALLENGES

"Accountability" was not a buzz word in governmental and educational circles in Washington during my tenure. Instead, the fighting words were primarily busing, Title IX, bilingual education, and sex education. "Accountability," like "responsibility," has an assuring ring about it. But it is difficult to ascertain who is supposed to be accounting to whom for what, unless one knows the speaker's agenda, either overt or covert.

In recent years "accountability" has often been used as shorthand for students' scores on standardized tests. Test scores are useful for the same reason that a ther-

момeter is useful: each can detect a symptom. However, neither discloses the causes of the symptom. Children may score poorly on tests for reasons that have little or nothing to do with the quality of teaching — among them dangerous school environments, abuse at home, difficulties in learning a second or third language, vision or hearing impairments or other disabilities, to name just a few. Of course, test scores can also be the result of poor teaching by unqualified teachers in overcrowded classrooms, of burdensome non-teaching duties, of inadequate school administration, and of poor allocation of financial resources by state and local bureaucrats — again, to name a few.

Providing each child with the opportunity for high-quality education is a national goal, but reaching it is neither simple nor cheap. One of the obstacles is a misrecollection of American history. Americans seem to love nostalgia, but history is not a national favorite.

From the turn of the last century until after World War II, education beyond the eighth grade was not common outside America's larger cities. In rural areas and smaller towns, formal education often concluded with graduation from the eighth grade. The economy did not then require a more sophisticated labor force; in the Great Depression a better-educated labor force could not have been absorbed. Even by 1940, fewer than half of the adult citizens of the U.S. had completed high school. A high school diploma was then the ticket for upward mobility, and the parents of teenagers knew it. Accordingly, high school teachers were highly esteemed members of their communities. Although their earnings were not commensurate with their contributions, they were paid enough to maintain a middle-class standard of living.

Four events following World War II had profound effects on education: the GI Bill, low-cost financing for veterans' home purchases, the civil rights and the women's movements, and extraordinary advances in science, medicine, engineering, and technology.

The educational benefits provided by the GI Bill gave millions of men and some women an opportunity to seek baccalaureate and advanced degrees. Millions of veterans responded, with great benefit to the country. The success of the GI Bill later generated the political will to adopt such federal programs as Pell grants and guaranteed student loans, which improved the opportunities for other young people to enter universities and colleges of their choice. The baccalaureate degree thus took the place of the high school diploma as the principal credential for later advancement.

Private home building came to a standstill during World War II. At the end of that war, a combination of pent-up demand for housing and veterans' opportunities for very low-cost loans to finance home building generated a building boom in the suburbs. Unfortunately, those suburbs were then segregated — not only racially, but also by age and income. The suburban growth required very rapid expansion of all kinds of public facilities and services, including schools. Because of a combination of factors, children who were born to suburban parents in the 1950s and early 1960s usually had excellent child care and very good schools.

Infant and child care in those days was not a necessity in the suburban middle-income environment. Thousands of women who had entered paid employment during WW II thereafter obeyed the dominant social dictates by leaving those jobs and becoming wives and mothers. Elementary school students either walked or were driven by mom or her carpool back and forth to school. Those suburban families usually had no idea about what school and home were like for children in the inner cities. Those suburban schools cannot be recreated because conditions have vastly changed.

We can no longer blind ourselves to the reality that today an overwhelming majority of mothers with young children are in the paid labor force — by choice, by financial necessity, or by governmental compulsion. The nuclear families of the past are a small percentage of our families today.

Property taxes were the historical means of financing K-12 education, in part because real property used to be the principal source of wealth. The suburbs had adequate revenue from property taxes to sustain good public schools. However, when property values in the inner cities declined, the revenue from property taxes was insufficient to meet the educational and other needs of youngsters and their families who had to stay where they were. The largest percentage of youngsters then and now who need help live in areas that have the poorest tax bases and the least political influence.

Title I was designed to give the neediest children help by improving the funding available to schools serving the largest percentage of financially disadvantaged students. Unfortunately, Title I funding has frequently not been used to improve the education of those children. It has too often been used instead to give jobs to adults by hiring unqualified individuals as teachers or teacher aides. "Accountability" has rarely been applied to the officials administering Title I funds. Recently, however, a number of outstanding school su-

perintendents have effectively used Title I money to improve classroom instruction, despite contrary political pressures. Those school administrators need to be emulated as well as applauded.

During the past quarter century, the suburbs in many areas began developing problems of their own because suburban property values skyrocketed, thereby increasing property taxes and limiting the ability of many people to retain their homes, especially after they reached retirement age. Tax protesters in several states successfully lobbied to impose caps on property valuations. Where it succeeded, this movement had some unanticipated results. Because property taxes were and are deductible from state and federal income taxes, the result was a huge transfer to federal and state governments of what would have been property tax revenues that would once have been available to local school districts. This change significantly reduced local control of K-12 finance.

The civil rights and women's movements profoundly affected American education. The Supreme Court ended racial apartheid not only in public schools but also in almost all places of public accommodation and in public services. Restrictive covenants in real property transactions were also struck down. Although toppling the ghetto walls was essential for the country, it had some unanticipated consequences that worsened the plight of many inner-city youngsters. While the ghetto walls were intact, racially and ethnically segregated neighborhoods had professionals and prosperous businessmen available as role models for the local children. As more of these successful people left their former neighborhoods, political power, money, and jobs decreased. Those losses hurt the children left behind.

The civil rights movement rekindled the women's movement that had sputtered and died with the advent of suffrage and the impact of the Great Depression. Women working in the civil rights movement discovered that invidious discrimination was not confined to men of color but extended to women of every race and ethnic hue. As did their suffragette forebears, women organized themselves to open the doors of schools, professions, and businesses that had been either closed or barely ajar for women.

When the only socially acceptable employment for college-educated women was nursing, teaching, or social work (which was largely true before the resurrection of the women's movement), the country had a steady supply of talented women who entered those profes-

sions. Schoolmarms (who were expected to remain single) had largely replaced schoolmasters in elementary education; they were a thrifty choice because they were paid less than men. Men at that time still dominated secondary education.

When new opportunities opened, many women who would once have chosen the traditional “women’s occupations” chose instead to pursue careers that gave them better working environments, higher incomes, and more opportunities for advancement. Teacher training institutions, with some notable exceptions, did not respond by revising curricula to be more challenging and to be more relevant to teaching students who came from backgrounds very different from the teachers’ own. With some exceptions, preservice training was inadequate and inservice training was uninspired and often irrelevant. Both needed significant revitalization — and still do.

By the 1970s American women were choosing to have smaller families than they did in the Baby Boom years. Middle-income women increasingly entered paid employment either by inclination or by necessity as their life situations changed. They quickly discovered, as poor women had known for decades, that high-quality infant and child care was scarce and often very expensive. Even today, day-care workers are generally poorly paid, inadequately trained, and unappreciated — even when they are skilled. As compared with most European countries (and even many developing countries), infant and child care here are grossly insufficient. The situation is dire for mothers who are compelled to enter the paid labor market as part of “welfare reform.”

In the last quarter of the 20th century, the U.S. received more immigrants (legal and illegal) than it had in nearly 100 years. As has been true since the founding of the Republic, these new Americans often have to start at the bottom of the economic ladder because they speak languages other than English, come from different cultures, and often have little formal education. Like many of their predecessors, the bulk of these new immigrants settled in towns or cities in which they had relatives or friends. As essential as these new Americans are to the future of the nation, their entry has stretched the K-12 resources of border cities and those of many inner cities.

TODAY’S CHALLENGES

Advances in science and medicine have prolonged

the productive lives of Americans. Science, engineering, and technology have revolutionized the way we work and live. Computer technology alone has transformed the way we communicate with one another and how we enter, receive, store, and transmit fantastic amounts of data. Digital technology is rapidly supplanting earlier technologies.

All these developments have had a profound effect on the nation’s economy and on job opportunities for individuals. Computer literacy is as important today as the three R’s were in days gone by. Middle-income youngsters begin learning to use computers when they are little more than toddlers. Financially disadvantaged children have little access to computers unless and until they enter schools that are adequately equipped with the machines and that have trained staff to teach the youngsters how to use them. The Internet has made resources readily accessible that once would have been available only in the largest libraries in the world. These developments are transforming how students learn and when they learn. The combination of all these developments means that more and better education is necessary to enable our youngsters to succeed in a world of work. We have to build educational bridges across the deepening divide of learning opportunities for the children of the poor and the children of richer Americans.

We not only can meet the educational challenges of the country for all our children, we *must* meet them. We need to remember history, but we should not try to repeat it. To obtain the necessary financing and to build the necessary political will, we need to reconceptualize K-12 schools. Public schools for this century should become community centers serving multiple functions for the whole community and financed from multiple federal and state sources, not solely from education budgets.

The millions of children now entering K-12 schools necessitate the building of thousands of new schools and the remodeling of older schools. New school designs should include day-care centers serving the needs of school staff members and some of the parents in the community. These centers should also be sites for educating boys and girls about human development and parenting. These same centers could become sites for educating neighborhood girls and women to enable them to become certified day-care workers with a potential for later becoming licensed day-care specialists. Their own infants and small children could also be enrolled at the centers. Such centers should not be sole-

ly financed with education funds. Instead, users should be charged fees, or, in the case of day-care trainees, funds could be provided from welfare-to-work stipends and from other government sources.

Each new K-12 school should have an outpatient facility that would serve the students' health-care needs during the school day. After school and during school holidays, the same facility could serve such needs for senior citizens and others, using a different medical staff. The outpatient facility could be funded from private user fees, from social security benefits, and from other governmental funding sources.

Teacher "lounges" should likewise be designed as multipurpose facilities. They should include cubicles for teachers' offices to give teachers some private working space. Accredited teachers deserve to be treated as the professionals they are. Adequate space is needed for the common room, which should be equipped with modern digital technology. That space would be suitable for inservice training sessions and for after-school adult education classes. The facilities could be financed using multiple financial resources, such as education funding, other government-financed programs, contributions, and user fees.

We can no longer afford to think about education in the traditional preschool, K-12, and higher education divisions. Human education is a continuum from birth through each step of the formal education process and beyond. The first recognition that child care was

not simply a family responsibility was Head Start. That program has been successful, but it was never given enough financial resources to meet more than a fraction of the needs of youngsters who were qualified to receive the services.

None of these ideas is revolutionary. Successful examples of these concepts can be found all over the country and abroad. The difficulty of such successful models is in trying to ascertain how they can be "scaled up" to be emulated nationally. School transformation cannot be solely a responsibility of educators, although they are an indispensable ingredient in the transformation process. Each school district would be well advised to appoint a task force to design an "educational business plan." In order to transform public schools into multipurpose community centers, membership on the task force should include principals, school administrators, teachers, businesspeople, and community representatives.

School reform, like legal reform, is not for the short-winded. As a nation, we must insist that the task be done as efficiently, effectively, and quickly as possible. It took us many decades to understand that care of seniors was not solely a family responsibility. We cannot afford decades of waiting to recognize that America's children are the nation's future and a national responsibility. While the whole village may be all that is needed to rear a single child, the whole nation is needed to educate all our children. **K**

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