

Education

A NATION, A STATE, AT RISK...

Reprinted from TACT
(Teachers and Community Together)
A Publication of the Clark County Classroom
Teachers Association

"America's position in the world may have once been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally well-trained men and women. It is no longer," This statement is quoted from *A Nation at Risk: The Report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education*.

The report notes that the Japanese make automobiles more effectively than Americans and have government subsidies for development

and export, the South Koreans recently built the world's most efficient steel mill, and that the Germans are making machine tools that displace the same product in America. Such developments, according to the report, signify that trained capability has been distributed around the world. The new raw materials of international commerce... knowledge, information, and skilled intelli-

gence... are spreading throughout the world as rapidly as miracle drugs and designer blue jeans.

"Learning," the report continues, "is the indispensable investment required for success in the information age we are entering."

Some 23 million Americans are functionally illiterate. About 13 percent of all 17-year-olds are in the same category while functional illiteracy among minorities may be as high as 40 percent. Student achievement is lower than it was 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched. The list goes on.

Words like homogenized, diluted, and diffused were used by the Commission to describe secondary school's curricula. They compared it to a cafeteria where students are allowed to pick and choose courses that are "appetizers and desserts," courses that fulfill graduation requirements but lack substance. Only 60 percent of the nation's high schools offer calculus and about 6 percent of the students complete the course.

Two-thirds of the nation's high school seniors report of having to do less than an hour's worth of homework a night, yet grades have risen while achievement has declined. Requirements for graduation have been diluted all over the country.

American students attend classes for six hours a day, five days a week, 180 days per year. In England and other industrialized nations the norm appears to be eight hours of classwork for five days a week, 220 days per year. In such countries math (other than arithmetic or general math), biology, chemistry, physics, and geography start in grade 6 and are required for all students.

Another reason given are poor textbooks. Few

are written by experienced teachers or scholars and most of the content of texts has been watered down to easier and easier reading levels.

Expenditure by school districts for textbooks and other instructional materials has decreased by some 50 percent in the last 17 years. Some experts suggest that 5 to 10 percent of a school district budget be spent in this area but only about .7 percent is actually spent.

Few academically able students are attracted to teaching careers for several reasons. Teacher preparation courses are heavily weighed with so-called methods courses. (The report does not address that such classes are usually taught by instructors who have little public classroom experience or if they have, it has been so long ago they are out of touch with problems in today's classrooms.)

Salaries offered to beginning teachers don't attract the bright young graduate. The average teacher's salary after 13 years of teaching is only \$17,000 per year. U.S. News and World Report, Oct. 3 notes graduates from Harvard with a master's degree in business administration start at \$25,000 per year. Degrees earned at prestigious universities command a greater starting salary than those earned at state institutions. When a student lays out the tuition such schools demand, plus room and board, he is not likely to be satisfied with a starting salary that is equal to or less than his yearly college expense. As a result there are shortages in the fields of mathematics, science, and foreign languages and for specialists who teach the gifted and the handicapped.

Many ideas for correcting the current educational dilemma in the nation were advanced.

Education Is Power

By THOMAS E.
WILSON, PH.D



Now that all of the turkey has been eaten and the leftovers have been thrown out, most of us are beginning to look forward to the Christmas holiday season and the two weeks vacation that accompanies it.

Those young people who use the vacation time to catch up on their previously neglected reading and their other homework will be far ahead of those who take to the streets for the entire two weeks.

Although we may want some time to relax our tired minds, too much relaxation may cause us to become complacent about our studies and forget much of that which we have already learned.

Holidays are good times for reflections. Reflections upon our past lives, our goals, our personal desires, our environment, and our educational experiences. They are times when we tend to resolve to improve ourselves in many ways.

However, we soon forget our resolves when the holidays are over, and again lapse into our former complacency.

Educational excellence seems to be the order of the day during these times. If this is true, and we believe it is, then we must spend our time in educational pursuits. What better way to spend some part of our holiday time than at the library catching up on our studies? We must begin promoting excellence among our Black students and make every effort to assist those students who are striving for excellence.

As we approach the new year, our resolve must be that we will put forth every effort to overcome all obstacles and secure the best possible education. Education is, or should be an integral part of our lives. Education should become a way of life for those who desire to improve their lot in our American society.

Aside from celebrating the sacred meanings attached to the holiday season, we must also reflect and learn from our past, and plunge forward into the future with determination to improve ourselves through education.

These include:

- Graduation requirements and course content be strengthened.

- Time spent in class

each day should be longer and the school year extended.

- Tough attendance policies need to be enforced.

- Promotions must be allowed on performance, not age.

- Tough discipline policies must be enforced to cope with disruptive students.

- Changes in teacher training programs are essential

- Students admitted to a teaching major must be able to pass tests which demonstrate competence in the teaching major selected.

- Layers of bureaucratic administration must be pared while administrators in areas above the site administrators need to examine cost efficiency within their own ranks. (A fact the report did not address.)

- Education must be adequately funded and funding must reach the classroom teacher in the form of adequate salaries and proper, carefully selected materials for the student.



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