

Education

"THE REPORT CARD"



Yvonne Atkinson

Should We Limit The Role Of Vocational Education In High School?

The secondary schools are facing a paradox. On the one hand, the educational reform movement has called for a stronger emphasis on academic training for the nation's youth. The declining test scores which predict potential success at the university or college level began declining in 1969. State legislative houses observed this trend and called for a mandate that schools turn their attention to those subjects most important to college success — reading, mathematics, English, Science, and foreign language. A recent business-education panel, in like manner, suggested that vocational education should play a limited role in the

nation's high schools with students taking vocational education courses only after demonstrating an acceptable level of academic prowess.

Now if this were the only factor to be considered, there would be no dilemma because secondary schools could easily address greater academic requirements, stronger graduation standards, and eliminate the need for vocational training and a number of other important elective programs, but a second factor must be considered. Of those students who graduate in 1986, 70 percent will never complete a university or college degree program, and 50 percent of all students who graduate this year will never enter a postsecondary institution. The training they receive,

both at the academic and vocational level then must be offered in the high school setting. Thus, we face the paradox. A demand by our constituents to develop a stronger academic program with more rigorous standards, and a knowledge that two-thirds of all students who exit our schools this year must receive at least an exposure to the world of work or this part of their education will be lost forever.

When you merge these two thoughts and then review the dropout rate for most of our public schools, which today stands at over 25 percent, you suddenly get an appreciation for the difficulties which face our secondary schools in the next few years. While the paradox obviously presents itself, I have been intrigued by educational program possibilities which have been presented. Business leaders, educators, and government officials all may be saying the same thing and all may be advocating that we rethink our educational system. What has been a standard practice for the past five decades may no longer provide the kind of educational program needed by our students of today and our approach to training and learning may also have to undergo some modifications.

There are successful programs in a number of neighboring districts that have broken with tradition. The regular sixth period day, which is lock-step, has been modified. Meeting the same teacher in the same class everyday at the same hour has been our practice, and was in the past successful. Now there are programs

Agricultural Education

Agriculture may seem a distant, far removed vocational program for any student in the Clark County School District. Yet, a drive of 60 or 90 miles to Moapa Valley or to Mesquite, Nevada, will provide you with a view of agribusiness. Students at Moapa Valley

which modify such a system to allow the student to enroll in more classes per week. The number of minutes of instruction is approximately the same but the number of times that the students meet a particular class may be reduced.

Another exciting possibility has been brought to us through a consortium from the business education community. While they endorse the concept of higher academic standards, it is not proposed that a student have just another year of science because, as we have heard so many times, quantity does not necessarily produce quality. Mr. Ward Gubler, Director of Occupational Education, has informed me that since 1980, enrollment in the Clark County School District's occupational program has been declining. In just six years, we have witnessed a decline of almost 5000 students enrolled in vocational education in grades 9-12. Mr. Gubler cites the fact that one reason for this decline is the number of students who are required

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SCHOOL TALK

By Dr. Marshall C. Darnell

High School and Virgin Valley High School have an opportunity to enroll in classes designed to provide instruction in crop production, animal husbandry, and farm mechanics, to name but a few of the specialized courses.

Those of us who live in the Las Vegas valley and view the arid landscape around us consider agricultural education more appropriate to those regions where the climate may be more hospitable. Yet that is simply a perception on our part because agribusiness education today may be found in every section of the nation, and the semiarid desert is no exception. New technology with "trickle" irrigation practices are revolutionizing our approach to farm practices in the way in which we produce food stuffs. Agricultural education for the students at Moapa and Virgin Valleys may also take a new approach in desert landscaping and hydrology education, which is the study of underground water systems available to us. Animal husbandry may not be so surprising to us. It is reported that there are 46,000 horses stabled in the Las Vegas valley, and the careers that are associated with maintaining and providing food and care for these animals is expanding. To serve the 46,000 stabled horses, there are over 40 horseshoers who have a full-time schedule just maintaining this service. Veterinarian Science is another career option for our students. Aside from the equine population, the dairy cattle production, along with swine production at Moapa Valley, is increasing. Packaged meat processing outlets are another source of job opportunities for students. As can be observed, agriculture and agricultural education are not far removed from our locale.

When you add the number of occupational opportunities available in food distribution and sales for a leisure and hospitality economy, then remember that nearly all of our consumable food supplies are shipped into the

southern Nevada region. You have a vast number of new job possibilities for students who are enrolled in this vital vocational program. At the turn of the century, one person engaged in farming could produce food for three other individuals. By 1940, every farmer was producing food for six other individuals and by the turn of the century, through mechanization, modernization, and a new approach to farming practices, the nation's farm population will decrease because one farm could produce food for 20 other Americans and members of the world community.

Where once we were a purely agrarian economy, that situation has been modified; however, agriculture still remains as one of America's most important industries. We can produce food faster with better quality and quantity than ever before, and the number of diversified jobs in the agribusiness field is ever increasing. This facet of the American economy, while changing, has allowed the other segments of the industrial business community to expand through an available work force.

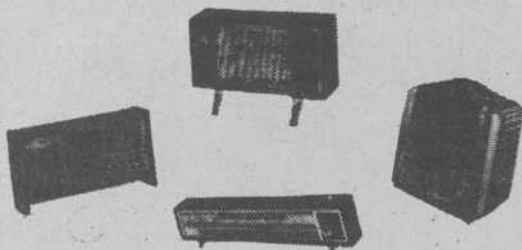
There will always be a need for well trained food producers. The program for agricultural education in the Clark County School District may not be as prominent as other vocational programs, but future years may show an increased demand for classes in this area. As the metropolitan population increases, and the use of water and water resources become vital to our economy, those students trained in landscaping and hydrology will have available employment opportunities. Agricultural education is not a program that is being eliminated in schools across this country, it is merely changing its face and its direction.



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