

The Structure and Administration of Education in American Democracy



EDUCATIONAL POLICIES COMMISSION

*National Education Association of the United States
and the American Association of School Administrators*

The Structure and Administration of Education in American Democracy



Educational Policies Commission

*National Education Association of the United States
and the American Association of School Administrators,
1201 Sixteenth Street, Northwest, Washington, D. C.*

Copyright 1938
NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES
Washington, D. C.

Illustrations by
EDWARD SHENTON

First printing, June 1938
Second printing, October 1938

Acknowledgment

SINCE the Educational Policies Commission began its consideration of educational structure and administration, the work has been carried forward largely by one of its members, DR. GEORGE D. STRAYER. In the initial stages of the project, the Commission created a special subcommittee under his chairmanship. This subcommittee held two meetings at which general policies were discussed. Thereafter, the brunt of the work in writing this document was carried by Dr. Strayer without financial compensation. For this service, the members of the Commission individually and collectively take pleasure in acknowledging indebtedness to their distinguished colleague. The Commission is fortunate in numbering among its members a man superbly qualified for the task by breadth of knowledge concerning the problems of American public schools and by a long career of constructive study of the administrative procedures suitable for the conduct of a universal public school system in this democracy. The entire project has been considered by the Commission as a whole at three meetings. It was discussed, amended, and approved for publication by the Commission in April 1938.

The Educational Policies Commission

Appointed by the National Education Association of the United States
and the American Association of School Administrators

Appointed Members

ALEXANDER J. STODDARD, *Chairman*

CORNELIA S. ADAIR	JOHN K. NORTON
LOTUS D. COFFMAN	AGNES SAMUELSON
GEORGE S. COUNTS	JOHN A. SEXSON
EDMUND E. DAY	PAYSON SMITH
J. B. EDMONSON	GEORGE D. STRAYER
FREDERICK M. HUNTER	WILLIS A. SUTTON

Ex-Officio Members

WILLARD E. GIVENS	EMILY A. TARBELL
S. D. SHANKLAND	CAROLINE S. WOODRUFF

Advisory Members

J. W. STUDEBAKER	GEORGE F. ZOOK
------------------	----------------

William G. Carr, *Secretary*
1201 Sixteenth Street, N. W.
Washington, D. C.

CHAPTER ONE



The Structure and Scope of Public Education

"For every child a school which is safe from hazards, sanitary, properly equipped, lighted, and ventilated. For younger children nursery schools and kindergartens to supplement home care. . . .

"For every child an education which, through the discovery and development of his individual abilities, prepares him for life; and through training and vocational guidance prepares him for a living which will yield him the maximum of satisfaction. . . .

"For every child who is blind, deaf, crippled, or otherwise physically handicapped, and for the child who is mentally handicapped, such measures as will early discover and diagnose his handicap, provide care and treatment, and so train him that he may become an asset to society rather than a liability. Expenses of these services should be borne publicly where they cannot be privately met.

"For every child who is in conflict with society the right to be dealt with intelligently as society's charge, not society's outcast; with the home, the school, the church, the court and the institution when needed, shaped to return him whenever possible to the normal stream of life."

—THE CHILDREN'S CHARTER.

White House Conference on Child
Health and Protection.

Table of Contents

	PAGE
I. The Structure and Scope of Public Education . . .	1
II. The Administration of Public Education:	
Local School Administration	41
III. The Administration of Public Education:	
State School Administration	77
IV. The Administration of Public Education:	
Federal Relations to Education	103
V. Public Schools	121

I
THE STRUCTURE AND SCOPE
OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

THE structure of the school system in the United States is determined in large measure by the ideal of equality of opportunity through education. Ours is a one-track school system. The common expectation is that one will begin his education in the elementary school and will progress through the common school to the completion of his work in graduation from high school. For those of unusual intellectual ability, the door should be open to the opportunities provided by institutions of higher learning.

*Limited Opportunity Is Often Associated with
Inadequate Curriculum and Sparse Population*

Possibly the greatest limitation of the structure as now developed lies in the failure to adapt the curriculums of the schools to the greatly varied abilities, interests, and vocational outlooks of the students in attendance. Another major limitation in structure is found in the failure to provide education on the upper levels, particularly in sparsely populated areas. The realization of the ideal of equality of educational opportunity is dependent upon effectively free education and upon the organization of adequate attendance and administrative units.

*Education Should Be Made
Effectively Free*

Effectively free education involves, in addition to free tuition, the provision of books and educational supplies; in many cases of transportation; and in some cases of maintenance grants necessitated by the low income of the family group from which the pupil comes. American education will reach the ideal of equality of opportunity when all barriers, whether economic or social, resulting in a denial of educational opportunity are removed. It must be recognized that the total income of the people may be increased if adjustments are made to permit larger numbers of persons to prepare for and enter those callings in which artificial restrictions in the numbers receiving training now operate. Superior ability must be conserved wherever it is found. Greater stimulation to intellectual achievement and to artistic performance is needed than is now currently found in the schools.

*The Distinction between Elementary and
Secondary Education Is Disappearing*

The American system of public education commonly provides opportunities in elementary and in high schools. The dominant characteristic of these schools is the program of general education which they offer. Some adaptation related to varying abilities is found in many elementary schools, and differentiation of curriculums is provided in all except the very smallest high schools. The old distinction between elementary and secondary

education, based upon the selective character of the latter, is no longer justified. Elementary schools enroll approximately 100 per cent of the children between the ages of six and thirteen years, inclusive. Secondary schools enroll approximately 65 per cent of the children from fourteen to seventeen years of age, inclusive.

An increasing percentage of the group eighteen and nineteen years of age is enrolled in junior colleges or in the first two years of the four-year college. The time is approaching when the common school program in the United States will provide opportunities beginning with the nursery school or kindergarten and continuing through the junior college.

*Special Adjustments Should Be Made throughout
the School System To Care for the Handicapped*

There is need for the development of more adequate adjustment, not only in terms of curriculums but also in the regime of the school, for those who are mentally or physically handicapped and for those who are socially maladjusted. The provision of the special opportunities needed for the handicapped will often require special equipment. Examples will be found in the lighting and the size of type used in reading materials for those who have defective vision, in special furniture and other apparatus for the comfort and care of crippled children, and in facilities especially adapted to the needs of children of low mentality. In the cases of these and other handicapped children, their segregation in special classes has often resulted in more efficient school service. The organization of these special opportunities should not

deny to handicapped children association with the entire group in those activities in which it is possible for them to participate successfully.

*The Traditional School Organization
Is Being Modified*

The typical public school system in the United States provides eight years in the elementary school and four years in the high school. Beyond these units are commonly found the four-year college and the professional and graduate schools of the university offering advanced work for three or four additional years. This pattern is rapidly being modified. The common school program now extends from the nursery school and kindergarten through the junior college. Instead of the traditional organization many communities are now organizing their school system in three major units. The first includes the nursery school and kindergarten and the first six years of the common school program; the second a four-year program of continued general education; and the third a four-year unit, an important function of which is the differentiation of courses in line with the vocational outlook of the more mature boys and girls enrolled in it. During the period of transition in which we now find ourselves a great variety of organization still exists. In some communities we have the kindergarten and the first two grades organized as a primary school; in others the nursery school and kindergarten and the first six years of the common school are organized as the elementary school. Beyond this period the variations consist of three types

of organization: (1) a three-year junior high school, three-year senior high school, and two-year junior college; or (2) a six-year high school and a two-year junior college; or (3) the organization suggested above which consists of an elementary school carrying children to approximately twelve or thirteen years of age, followed by two units of four years each which complete the common school program at approximately twenty years of age.

Administrative considerations make it desirable to organize children in three major units rather than four. For the younger children, travel distance is an important factor. Even with the diminished enrollment in elementary schools we shall still need to provide more school buildings to house little children, and the units so provided will be smaller than those in which we house older children. Beyond twelve years of age the problem of travel distance is not so important. We need, however, to provide school units covering a sufficiently long period to make possible the development of the corporate life of the school. We must recognize as well that this second unit in the school system is almost wholly concerned with the provision of general education. In rural areas the consolidation of the whole common school system in a single plant has often provided a desirable as well as an economical unit of organization.

The Structure of the Elementary School Is Changing

In many local administrative areas in the United States a one- or two-year kindergarten enrolling children four and five years of age is included as a part of the

elementary school. In fewer centers the nursery school, admitting children at two and a half to three years of age, has been provided for some children. It is commonly accepted that the first two years of the traditional elementary school, enrolling children six and seven years of age, are more closely related to the work of the kindergarten and nursery school than to the upper years of the elementary school. For this reason a primary or junior school, combining the nursery school, kindergarten, and first two elementary grades, has been proposed as an important unit in the educational system.

Where such organization takes place, there remains a four-year intermediate school enrolling children from eight to twelve years of age as the upper unit of the elementary school system. This form of reorganization has often taken place without the segregation of children in separate buildings. Many modern elementary school buildings have been planned to accommodate the program of the primary school on the first floor and to provide special facilities for these younger pupils. Such modification in the structure of the elementary school is to be commended. Operating as it does to eliminate much of the rigidity and formalism of the first two grades, it is in line with the findings of child psychology and with the development of a modern curriculum in the elementary school.

*The Classification of Pupils Is a Major Problem
in the Structure of Elementary Education*

It is common practice in the United States to admit children to kindergarten or the first grade on the basis

of their chronological ages. These vary in the kindergarten from four to five years of age, and for entrance to the first grade from five to seven years of age. Whatever the age of entrance, there is a tacit assumption that the work of the school will be adjusted to the needs and capacities of children at the age at which they are admitted. As a matter of practice, however, it has been common to use the first year or two of school attendance as a period for the classification of pupils. Not infrequently from 10 to 30 per cent of the children admitted in any one year have been required to repeat the whole or a part of the year's work because they failed to master the skills associated with the grade in which they had been entered.

To overcome this maladjustment, semi-annual and even quarterly reclassifications have been proposed and carried into effect in many school systems. But even where this practice is followed, studies of retardation have clearly indicated that repetition is not a satisfactory adjustment. Other studies indicate that readiness to acquire certain skills does not occur in the same chronological period for all children. These facts have led to modifications in the classification of children in the elementary school and, in many cases, to the abandonment of fixed and uniform standards of achievement as the measure of the ability of children to make progress in the school system.

*The Social Purpose of Education Should Determine
the Classification of Pupils*

Good practice indicates that it is desirable to group

together those whose physical, social, and intellectual maturity enable them to live comfortably together. Children must be organized in groups in order that teachers, equipment, and educational supplies may be provided for them. It is an established fact that there is no particular virtue in setting a fixed period for reclassification. Good practice indicates the desirability of transferring children among the many groups which may be found in a single school whenever a better adjustment can be obtained. Certain it is that in any group of children who are under the leadership of skilled teachers, great variation in achievement will be the rule. No classification on the basis of achievement in school subjects can wipe out these differences. Children will most certainly vary in their relative standing in achievement in the various school subjects in which measurements are made.

*Some Segregation on the Basis of
Intellectual Ability Is Desirable*

Provision is commonly made for children of very low ability in special classes. This is a desirable adjustment and is made necessary both by the specialized curriculum and the special equipment needed, and by the fact that these children work together more satisfactorily if they are not grouped with children of higher mental ability.

Quite as good a case can be made for the segregation of children of very high ability. It not infrequently happens that able boys and girls find little stimulus in association with those who are distinctly less able in intelligence. Society has a tremendous stake in the

cultivation of intelligence wherever it is found. The school has an obligation to provide opportunities for broadening the experience of exceptionally able boys and girls. The adjustment which enables them to enrich their experience in practically every area which is included in the curriculum furnishes a sound basis for later intellectual achievement of the highest order. The traditional practice of rewarding proficiency in school subjects by rapid movement through the school system is not a satisfactory adjustment either from the standpoint of the pupil or from the point of view of the needs of society. Equally unsatisfactory is complete and absolute segregation of these boys and girls in special classes.

*Work in Special Classes Should Be Supplemented
by Activities in Which All Participate*

Children enrolled in the public schools should learn to live together. It is unfortunate if any group develops feelings of inferiority as a result of its school experience. There is real danger that very able children may develop a snobbishness which will interfere with their social efficiency. The many activities in the school program which lend themselves to participation by all children should form the basis for fundamental social training.

*The Size of Class Is a Matter
of Primary Importance*

Many of the problems of classification of pupils can be solved by reducing the size of class. In school systems