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Wallace Dace

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Quality students should not be denied quality education.

A proposal for federal preparatory schools

by Wallace Dace

The need for federally subsidized, high quality public education, available to all gifted students regardless of race, creed, color or family financial circumstances has come to be keenly felt recently by thoughtful observers of the American educational system. Various articles in the press attest all too vividly to the serious decline in academic standards of many public school systems, especially in the larger cities.

According to a story in **Time** magazine (July 12, 1982, p. 53) the Boston public school system, the nation's oldest, "may now be one of the worst." A study conducted by the **Boston Globe** discloses serious deficiencies in academic achievement, reading skills and teacher morale. Perhaps the most serious problem uncovered by the **Globe** was the fact that "there is no citywide curriculum for teaching basic skills in each grade and no standard of promotions. As a result, 89 percent of the students are promoted each year." And yet, "a third of the 10,000 high school students taking more than two academic courses flunked more than half their basic academic subjects last winter."

Many other articles in newspapers and periodicals report similar situations in our larger cities, brought on by declining city tax revenues, cuts in federal support and antagonisms within the states between the smaller communities and the large cities. Hence, the places to begin a new federal program in quality education appear to be the larger urban areas. Further, in addition to a pressing need for help, the cities also provide very large student-age populations from which to draw, by examination, those gifted children who should be admitted to federal preparatory schools.

Wallace Dace is a professor in the Department of Speech at Kansas State University.

Finally, the element of academic competition among the cities should be considered. Competition is a useful principle in a free society. It forces prices down in the industrial sector, generates improvements in items like automobiles and video recorders and in education, by a process of general osmosis; it is clear that competition from private schools has improved standards in public schools. City governments like to feel their municipalities are nice places to live in as well as to visit. Boston doesn't want to be known as the city with the worst public schools in the country any more than it wants to see the Red Sox in last place in the American League East.

Federal support for education is commonplace in Europe. Federal Departments of Education and Culture subsidize primary, secondary and technical schools, universities, research institutes, theater, opera and ballet companies, libraries and art museums, among other institutions for the public good. In America, only the military academies and a few research institutes are supported at the federal level even though it is only the federal government that has the enormous financial resources necessary to achieve a significant improvement in the level of both public education and cultural opportunities for the American people.

In Europe, the primary-secondary educational systems tend to follow along two fairly distinct routes. All students take the first three grades together, starting at about age 6. Then, at age 9 or 10, students choose between schools which prepare them, on the one hand, for the practical worlds of commerce, industry, civil service, engineering and the performing arts or, on the other hand, for the worlds of law, medicine, the theoretical sciences, literary scholarship and philosophy.

Training for the first group of endeavors tends to stop with the high school or technical school diploma, but the second group requires further study at a university. Those students who wish to pursue this route take examinations which are designed to indicate their aptitude for university-level study, and those who pass enroll in special preparatory schools with fairly rigid courses of study. In France this type of school is called a **lycee** and in Germany, a **Gymnasium**, but the curricula are much the same in all of these university-oriented schools, regardless of country.

Over the years a kind of European consensus has developed regarding the preparation of students for the university. They should be acquainted with at least one other culture other than their own and preferably two—this cultural knowledge being obtainable by thorough study of languages and literatures. They should be well prepared in history, geography and some of the other social sciences. They should have a sound knowledge of the biological and physical sciences and be satisfactorily trained in mathematics.

This kind of primary-secondary education is available in America, but it is usually provided only in very expensive, private preparatory schools, many of which charge as much for room, board and tuition as the most expensive private universities. It would be a substantial shot in the arm for public education in America if university preparatory schooling of high quality were available to **all** students who qualify for such schooling, regardless of family income.

A proposal for such educational opportunity would perhaps not fall on deaf ears in Congress. There are mem-

bers of both the House and the Senate who hold deep and abiding convictions regarding the fundamental importance to our democracy of a good education, available to all. Hence, a plan to establish high quality federal preparatory schools in a number of large cities, as a pilot project, would very likely receive serious consideration by the appropriate congressional committees.

Such a plan should be sufficiently broad to draw enough votes in Congress to be passed and sent to the President. The more cities marked for these new schools, the more votes the project should receive in the Congress. There are 60 cities with populations over 260,000 and about 44 million people live within their city limits. If another 56 million people live in the suburbs of these cities, then a program of 60 federal preparatory schools, one in each city, should serve the needs of about 100 million people. If the program proved to be popular with the public, it could be expanded to reach the smaller cities.

The Department of Education in Washington would be the logical administrative agency to supervise the federal preparatory schools. The Secretary of Education would appoint the principal of each school who would, in turn, recruit the faculty and staff. The secretary would be responsible, in general, for the curriculum of each school, the standards of teaching and the budget. This would include determining the total cost of operating the 60 schools for each fiscal year, in advance, and submitting this budget to the President. When the overall budget was approved by the Congress, the principals would be informed of their budgets for the following year.

In recruiting the faculty, the principal should be guided by the general assumption that each teacher should hold the Ph.D. degree in the appropriate field. Many students are graduated from university doctoral programs every year who would make excellent teachers in their fields but who do not feel comfortable with the stress and emphasis on research and publication associated with university teaching. This large pool of teaching-oriented Ph.Ds could be called on to provide the bulk of the faculties of the federal preparatory schools. Students who had completed all the course work for a Ph.D. but had not written the dissertation, might also be considered.

Further, the principal would be responsible for planning the teaching schedule, supervising the administering of the examinations which determine the admittance of the beginning class each year, seeing to the operation of the cafeteria and other aspects of maintenance, administering the budget and generally running the school in a manner satisfactory to the Secretary of Education. Faculty should receive tenure after a four-year probationary period, and their pensions should be administered by the Civil Service. A uniform salary schedule should be established by the Secretary of Education which could be modified, as circumstances required, by the principal. The principal would include a report on the school's activities for the year with the annual budget request. The final duty each year would be to award the diplomas to those students who, in the principal's opinion, had completed the prescribed course of study satisfactorily.

The school year should consist of two semesters of 16 weeks each, running from September to May with the usual holidays. The faculty would work on a nine-month basis, and the top members of the administration, on 12. The total course of study should run over a period of eight years with each student regularly taking six subjects per day. With an hour allowed for lunch, the school day should run from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Each student would take a fixed course of study, six subjects per year for eight years. If one failed a subject, the entire year would have to be repeated.

The faculty teaching load should be limited to three hours per day, or 15 hours per week. By giving the teachers time to grade papers and prepare proper tests, the standards of teaching should be high, and the jobs themselves should attract very capable people. Since a total of 288 classes would have to be covered per day (48 subjects multiplied by six sections of students) and the teachers cover only three classes each per day, the faculty would

The 48-subject program may be summarized as follows:

YEAR						
8th	English VIII	French VIII	German VIII	History VI	Integral Calculus	Physics II
7th	English VII	French VII	German VII	History V	Differential Cal.	Physics I
6th	English VI	French VI	German VI	History IV	Solid Geometry & Trig.	Chemistry II
5th	English V	French V	German V	History III	Plane Geometry	Chemistry I
4th	English IV	French IV	German IV	History II	Algebra II	Biology II
3rd	English III	French III	German III	History I	Algebra I	Biology I
2nd	English II	French II	German II	Geography II	Arithmetic II	General Sci. II
1st	English I	French I	German I	Geography I	Arithmetic I	General Sci. I

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have to number 96 or more. Adding in administrators, library staff, cafeteria personnel and maintenance workers would probably bring the total staff of each school to about 120 persons. Since class size should be held to about 20 to 25 students, the total enrollment should not exceed 1,000—resulting in a teacher-pupil ratio of about one to ten.

In Europe, teachers usually take a class through four years of work. In this way, they come to know their charges well and can demand the most from each pupil, since they will know if a particular student is not working up to full potential. If this system were adopted for federal preparatory schools, an English teacher in a given year, for instance, might be teaching a first-year class meeting for the first time, a third-year class that had met for two previous years and a sixth-year class that had been meeting for one previous year. The next year, a teacher would have the same students at levels one year higher.

Language study is usually divided into two four-year segments. In the first four years the pupils read from all historical periods, from the middle ages to the present, but the stories and poems chosen are those which can be readily understood by children aged 11 to 14. From ages 15 to 18, the pupils start over again at the beginnings of literature and again read their way up to the modern period, but this time they are exposed to the more complex poems, plays, stories, novels and essays. The teachers have the entire say-so over what is read in each class at each level and thus are not subject to boredom by having to teach the same things over and over. This system, too, might well be adapted to the new federal perparatory schools.

The requirement of both French and German in a quality preparatory school does not seem excessive. The richest modern literatures are written in French, German and English, and educated persons everywhere tend to be acquainted with all three. Nor is eight years of training more than what is required to become genuinely fluent in a language. There is a tremendous difference between being able merely to order a meal in a French restaurant or ask directions of a French bus driver, and discussing the issues of the day with an educated Frenchman or reading the plays of Racine in the original. Too many Americans remain in the first category all their lives because their language preparation was inadequate at the primary and secondary levels.

The value of the rest of the curriculum appears to be self-evident. A thorough grounding in geography is essential to obtaining a substantial grasp of history from ancient times to the present. Short segments of political science, sociology and economics could be inserted in the history program at the discretion of the teacher, so long as sufficient time is allowed for the student to master the essentials of world history, "the record of man's struggle for freedom," as Kant defined it.

Mathematics, from arithmetic through integral calculus, forms the basis of scientific study, while two years of each of the major sciences, biology, chemistry and physics, seem little enough preparation for continued study at the university level of modern achievements in science and medicine.

The cost of operating 60 schools of the kind envisaged here would not be excessive in view of the considerable return to the nation in the form of enhanced intellectual achievement on the part of men and women who have been seriously challenged in primary and secondary school. If salaries averaged about $20,000 per year for a staff of 120 persons, the payroll would run to about $2.4 million. Rent on a suitable building together with operating and maintenance costs ought to run no more than $600,000 thus bringing the annual cost per unit to about $3 million. This cost multiplied by 60 units would bring the total outlay to about $180 million annually, in its initial phase, something less than the cost of a B-1 bomber. Ideally, the students should pay only for lunch, but a few additional expenses such as books, supplies and science laboratory fees would probably be unavoidable.

The kind of public preparatory school described herein would provide the basic elements of a good, general education. A student so educated could enter college and test out of a great many required courses. In fact, a student who had received a Federal Preparatory Diploma could probably finish undergraduate college work in three years, or even two, and enter graduate school to prepare for law, medicine, scholarship or theology at an earlier age than is now customary.

Our best students should receive the best possible primary and secondary education. Quality students should not be denied quality education on the grounds that such a thing promotes "elitism." An intelligent student who wants to learn, who reads, writes, thinks, enjoys homework, is educable in the highest sense, should not be held to the level of the average students in the class in the name of democracy. This is a perversion of a great concept, because one of the basic elements of democracy is the protection of the rights of minorities. And intelligent, gifted, motivated students like the young William James and the young Thomas Edison are inevitably members of a minority, whose right to unlimited intellectual growth should be carefully protected by our democratic public school system.

Appendix

The sixty largest cities in the United States with their populations are listed below. Figures are taken from the 1980 **Directory of the Mayors of America's Principal Cities,** published by the U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1620 Eye St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

1. Akron, Ohio (249,815)
2. Albuquerque, N.M. (284,617)
3. Atlanta, Ga. (425,666)
4. Austin, Tex. (313,009)
5. Baltimore, Md. (827,439)
6. Baton Rouge, La. (302,236)
7. Birmingham, Ala. (280,544)
8. Boston, Mass. (618,250)
9. Buffalo, N.Y. (400,234)
10. Charlotte, N.C. (281,696)
11. Chicago, Ill. (3,074,084)
12. Cincinnati, Ohio (410,441)
13. Cleveland, Ohio (625,643)
14. Columbus, Ohio (533,075)
15. Dallas, Tex. (848,829)

16. Denver, Colo. (479,513)
17. Detroit, Mich. (1,314,206)
18. El Paso, Tex. (391,049)
19. Fort Worth, Tex. (367,909)
20. Honolulu, Hawaii (713,500)
21. Houston, Tex. (1,455,046)
22. Indianapolis, Ind. (708,867)
23. Jacksonville, Fla. (532,346)
24. Jersey City, N.J. (239,998)
25. Kansas City, Mo. (458,251)
26. Long Beach, Ca. (338,344)
27. Los Angeles, Ca. (2,743,994)
28. Louisville, Ky. (330,011)
29. Memphis, Tenn. (667,880)
30. Miami, Fla. (354,993)
31. Milwaukee, Wisc. (661,082)
32. Minneaplis, Minn. (371,896)
33. Nashville, Tenn. (430,941)
34. Newark, N.J. (331,495)
35. New Orleans, La. (580,959)
36. New York, N.Y. (7,422,831)
37. Norfolk, Va. (284,033)
38. Oakland, Ca. (332,028)
39. Oklahoma City, Okla. (369,438)
40. Omaha, Nebr. (371,012)
41. Philadelphia, Pa. (1,797,403)
42. Pittsburgh, Pa. (449,092)
43. Phoenix, Ariz. (679,512)
44. Portland, Ore. (379,826)
45. Rochester, N.Y. (262,766)
46. Sacremento, Ca. (262,305)
47. Saint Louis, Mo. (519,345)
48. Saint Paul, Minn. (272,465)
49. San Antonio, Tex. (783,765)
50. San Diego, Ca. (789,059)
51. San Francisco, Ca. (663,478)
52. San Jose, Ca. (573,806)
53. San Juan, P.R. (486,596)
54. Seattle, Wash. (490,586)
55. Tampa, Fla. (271,365)
56. Toledo, Ohio (366,525)
57. Tulsa, Okla. (338,765)
58. Tuscon, Ariz. (302,359)
59. Washington, D.C. (700,130)
60. Wichita, Ks. (267,276)

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