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Basics of Education Focus on ECS Report

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BOOK REVIEW


In the nearly thirty years since the Soviet launching of Sputnik, American education has undergone an intense period of evaluation, modification, and often misguided renovation. The function of the school has been expanded from that of educational institution to an entity of unparalleled social awareness. Author and educator Louis F. Weipert suggests institutions of learning have become the dumping grounds for many of society’s ills. America’s public schools have been forced to cater to the emotionally, physically and mentally handicapped while feeding the poor, balancing (where enforced) racial inequalities, medicating the ill and accommodating the linguistically different. The American Dream of fairness and equality for all is in essence crippling this nation’s schools. While all are being served, few are being educated.

The result of such diverse and disjointed efforts on the part of academia is a general and widespread apathy regarding education. In the wake of the overwhelming social responsibilities being placed on the school, America is now being faced with a malaise regarded by Weipert as educational abdication.

The author defines the educational abdicator as one who has relinquished any responsibility for education but continues to influence it nonetheless. An abdicator is identified as not only one whose career lies within the realm of education but encompasses those from outside who likewise influence and shape the nature of public education. Among those whose indifference to scholastic endeavors most negatively effects education are students who habitually enroll in extracurricular activities that remove them from the classroom or those who opt for classes designed to entertain instead of instruct and inform. Also detrimental are parents who send their offspring to school without first having taught the basic disciplines of manners and courtesy. Valuable instructional time is lost when civility must be taught in the classroom. Educators at all levels abdicate their responsibility when they permit boredom and indifference to creep into their classrooms or reduce their academic and behavioral expectations in an effort to avoid conflict. Administrators are seen by Weipert as abdicating when the public relations aspect of their positions takes precedence over that of the instructional leader. Increasingly troublesome are the special interest pressure groups who, although representative of a minority of the population, are demanding equal representation in a system already overburdened with a multiplicity of nonacademic obligations.

Weipert offers no immediate cures for our educational ills. That which is disabling our nation’s schools has not evolved overnight. Responsibility for it rests with each of us for, as the author indicates, we are all the malefactors as well as the unwitting victims.

While Weipert’s biased and often hostile rhetoric may offend and perhaps anger readers of liberal educational persuasion, he does nevertheless open some emotionally charged topics of education to much-needed scrutiny. This is a book that must be read by educators and administrators alike. It will undoubtedly be discussed and debated for some time.

—by Susan Day Harmison

Basics of Education
Focus of ECS Report

What makes a good school good? How do students learn? How do good teachers teach? How can poor schools change and improve?

These questions and their answers are the focus of Education Advisory: 1985, released this winter by the Education Commission of the States (ECS).

Designed as a resource handbook for newly elected and established education leaders, Education Advisory: 1985 provides a short, readable synthesis of the basics of education—how students learn, how good teachers teach, how good schools become and remain good and how poorer schools can change and improve.

"Education as we know it is rapidly changing," said ECS President Frank Newman. "Policy makers must be ready to address short- and long-term population and enrollment changes. This book provides many of the tools for making tough choices, as well as the context, both past and present, for these changes."

Beginning with a discussion of the context for making decisions about education, the 56-page book presents a comprehensive overview of factors that constitute optimum learning conditions, the characteristics of good teachers and good schools, the content of recent reform reports, how and why schools change and the renewal process outside the school building.

The handbook concludes with a detailed resource list and state-by-state statistics on subjects including per capita income, per pupil expense, total K-12 enrollment and average teacher salaries.

For more information on Education Advisory: 1985, contact Sorita Weiss, ECS public information officer, at 303-850-3653. Copies at $10 each may be ordered through the ECS Distribution Center at 1800 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colo. 80203, 303-850-3692.

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The Education Commission of the States is a non-profit, nationwide compact formed in 1985 to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education. Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are members. Offices are in Denver, Colo., and Washington, D.C.