Selected National Trends in Educational Administration

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In the decade ahead, who will determine and teach the skills necessary for the administration of public education? What will be the future of school boards? These are two of the major questions this author sees as confronting teachers of educational administration if present trends continue.

**selected national trends in educational administration**

By Alfred P. Wilson

Dr. Wilson is Head of the Department of Administration and Foundations at Kansas State University. Humanly adept with faculty development, he is also particularly interested in organizational analysis and change processes.

At a recent conference sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators, educators pondered the question, “What will schools be like in 1985?” The results showed a dramatic movement away from using Carnegie units for rewarding students. The “futurists” indicated that most of the schools would be year-round, individualized, with about one third of the student’s school program being completed in learning environments outside the school. The group agreed that differentiated staffing, adult and early childhood education, collective bargaining, and the replacement of the principal’s role of decision-making with policy-making bodies of teachers would be commonplace.

A review of recent trends by the author suggests that school administrators will be directly affected as each of these and other changes are implemented. In addition, perhaps more than at any time in recent history, the administrator’s decisions will be closely monitored and often held in suspicion by his many publics.

Attacks have been leveled at an ever increasing pace by reformers who never visit schools, university educators with sophisticated statistical treatments of old data, large foundations, and universities that give degrees without expecting even rudimentary competency. In addition, state departments, regional laboratories, and the federal government are beginning to parrot the complaints.

For the most part, educational administrators will be monitored by teachers, classified personnel, state departments, universities, legislatures, federal auditors, parents, taxpayers, and students. At times the various populations will work in tandem, yet at other times cohesion will be like old masking tape—just not there.

Administrators can expect increasing fluidity in money with more basic support coming from state and federal sources. They will need to adjust with flexibility to the changing state and federal guidelines in using funds. The pressures for expenditure accountability will increase and be many sided and more sophisticated than in past years, with federal and state auditors in the forefront.

The National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and local teacher groups will unite with other public employee groups into a strong united coalition to insure mutual benefits, and there will be hard bargaining for money. The dilemma of the changing professional associations will not be of major importance for most school superintendents. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) has voted to dissociate in any...
formal way from NEA. For middle management, however, the
dilemma will be painful. Many middle managers, especially
elementary principals and subject supervisors, desire to
continue their professional memberships with teachers. Yet
teachers, central office, and school boards are emphasizing
the need for them to develop and perform in new roles.
The school administrator’s level of training will increase at
both the pre-service and in-service levels as his position
becomes more sophisticated. Hucksters (which may mean
not only private concerns but also some universities and state
departments) are entering the training market. Some degrees
will be cheap, given without extensive learning taking place.
Skilled trainers will still be hard to find. Teacher training
institutes without having the skilled staff will often attempt
to train administrators in the same mold as teachers; business
enterprises will attempt to train them without being able to
relate to education; and private consulting firms giving
superficial training and nonaccredited degrees will abound.
Determining who can teach the skills administrators want
and need to have will be one of the hardest decisions ad-
ministrators will make.

One trend that will be of major consequence to school
administrators will be the selection of competent school
board members. As schools come under attack, school
boards will have a more difficult time finding skilled people
to serve. There will also be many who will use the school
board as a springboard for other public office or a sounding
board for social reform without having the student’s welfare
as a primary concern.

Another trend becoming evident across the nation is that
large school systems increasingly are hiring superintendents
and middle managers from within or from other large
systems. The small-school-district-to-large-school-district pat-
tern of movement has almost stopped. This trend will
cause almost entirely new pattern of mobility for school
administrators.

In this brief space the author has attempted to discuss
some developing trends in educational administration. He
has made no attempt to present all trends, and depending
upon the reader’s locality, some activities outlined may be
presently in practice. However, administrators in any locality
will be dramatically affected by one or more of the concepts
presented. Increasing pressures from various publics; fluidity
of money; accountability; changing relationships with staff;
developing new skills; and new patterns of mobility—all are
becoming realities.

The job of administration and the training of ad-
ministrators are becoming increasingly complex, with the
success of our future, in some measure, being the deter-
minant of how well we have succeeded.

"The school itself, as custodian of ever-larger numbers of people, for increasing
proportions of their life span, for an ever-growing number of hours and interests, is well
on the way to joining armies, prisons, and insane asylums as one of society’s total in-
stitutions."

—Everett Reimer

School Is Dead, p. 37
(Cedar City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1971)