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PREVIEW

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Wright, Aaron Eugene

EDUCATIONAL POLICYMAKERS' AND PRACTITIONERS' PERCEPTIONS
OF THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL IN THE STATE OF
NEBRASKA

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Ed.D. 1982

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PREVIEW

EDUCATIONAL POLICYMAKERS' AND PRACTITIONERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE HIGH SCHOOL
IN THE STATE OF NEBRASKA

by

Aaron E. Wright

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Interdepartmental Area of Administration,
Curriculum, and Instruction

Under the Supervision of Professor Ward Sybouts

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 1982

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BY

Aaron Eugene Wright

APPROVED

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<u>Ward Sybouts</u>	<u>April 26, 1982</u>
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A.E.W.

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Chapter I

THE PROBLEM

"The high school has just passed through early adolescence, is still very venturesome, often lacks judgement, and is earnestly struggling to attain some maturity along with a clearer perspective on its purpose."¹ The transition from childhood and school to adulthood and the community was one of the functions identified by educators and demanded of its schools by the American public during the 1970's.² The public has been attributed with considering the following functions in addition to the preparation of children to adulthood be served by the secondary school:

1. Contribute to the transmission of culture.
2. Socialize the young.
3. Preserve society as a nation.
4. Promote the personal development of the young.³

James B. Conant also described three functions of the American comprehensive high school:

¹Burton W. Gorman, Secondary Education-The High School America Needs (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 13.

²Maurice Gibbons, The New Secondary Education-A Phi Delta Kappa Task Force Report (Bloomington: Phi Delta Kappa, Incorporated, 1976), p. 1.

³Galen Saylor, "Reform in Secondary Education: The Continuing Efforts to Reform Secondary Education and A Modest Proposal," Curriculum Bulletin, 32 (May, 1978), p. 2.

1. Provide a general education for all future citizens.
2. Provide good elective programs for those who wished to use their acquired skills immediately upon graduation.
3. Provide satisfactory programs for those whose vocations depended on their education in institutions of higher education.⁴

Little disagreement arose with the functions cited by Saylor and Conant; however, the preparation of students in high schools raised some doubt as to the effectiveness of the schools in performing these functions in the 1960's and 1970's. The possibility existed for students to graduate and be unprepared to choose a vocation, function in a job, or learn selected skills required in some jobs. Trump concluded that schools could not prepare students so they moved with little effort into functioning adulthood; however, unnecessary obstacles could be removed and opportunities provided so students could move toward fully functioning adulthood and citizenship.⁵

A gradual, carefully planned and supervised experience that would occur over a number of months and years rather than at some dramatic point called 'graduation' or 'dropping out' could curtail the sharp break between full-time school attendance and full-time attendance elsewhere.⁶

To achieve performance of the functions demanded by the public, reform may be required in the pattern of secondary education. Conant concluded:

⁴James B. Conant, The Comprehensive High School (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 23.

⁵Gibbons, op. cit. p. 1.

⁶J. Lloyd Trump, A School For Everyone (Reston, VA: The National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1977), p. 132.

...I am convinced American secondary education can be made satisfactory without any radical changes in the basic pattern. This can be done, however, if the citizens in many localities display sufficient interest in their schools and are willing to support them. The improvements must come school by school and be made with due regard for the nature of the community.⁷

The role of the school in the student's successful transition from school to the community has been a concern since formal education became a part of society in America. The first proposal for the basic reform of secondary education was presented by Benjamin Franklin in 1749. Prior to that time, the Latin Grammar School was the only formal, general secondary school available. In his "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania," Franklin called for an education that would meet the "most useful" and "most ornamental" needs of youth.⁸ The resulting Academy, developed on the basis of Franklin's proposal, "constituted the most significant, comprehensive, and influential reform ever proposed and carried out in American secondary education."⁹

In the one hundred years following Franklin's proposal, reforms of secondary education in the form of the establishment of the first public high school in Boston and the spread of the tax supported common school throughout the East and Midwest established the pattern

⁷James B. Conant, The American High School Today-A First Report to Interested Citizens (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1959), p. 96.

⁸Gorman, op. cit., p. 20.

⁹Saylor, op. cit., p. 3.

of education in the United States.¹⁰ By 1890, the general shape of American formal education was institutionally defined and the progressive movement's classic slogan, "Every child should receive an equal education," had gained acceptance in the public school system.¹¹

Although American formal education was institutionally defined by 1890, little uniformity existed among the curricula of high schools in the United States. In an attempt to remedy the lack of uniformity in the curricula of high schools, a subgroup of the National Education Association, The National Council on Education, appointed the Committee on Secondary School Studies to study the programs of high schools and attempt to bring more uniformity between and among curricula. The Committee's report did not include all of the major educational concerns of the time, so during the next twenty years a series of national commissions prepared reports on secondary education. The reports of the National Education Association's Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, appointed in 1913, and the Presidential Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education (The Prosser Commission), established by Congress in 1914, contributed to the systematic reform of the secondary school. The "Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education" were formulated by the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education and the report of the Presidential Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education led directly to the passage of

¹⁰Seymour W. Itzkoff, A New Public Education (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1976), p. 44.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 69.

the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917 which provided federal support for vocational education in high schools.¹² Efforts of the Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association and the Progressive Education Association in the 1930's and 1940's did not constitute blueprints for reform of the secondary school; however, those efforts were significant in the improvement of the nature and quality of the programs offered in secondary schools.¹³ Other than those efforts, no major reform proposals were made until 1949.

Even though secondary education made improvements during the 1960's, there were those who continued to criticize the quality of education provided by the public school.¹⁴ The pattern of public opinion reflected a body of perceptions and interpretations that testified to the perceived failure of public education to meet the needs of citizens in this country during the remainder of the twentieth century.¹⁵ The public's perception of failure of the education system was not a twentieth century phenomenon. Since the time of Socrates, citizens criticized programs for education of youth and advocated reforms in methods of preparing youth for adulthood. Since 1949, several proposals for reform in secondary education were made. The

¹²Saylor, op. cit., p. 4.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴James B. Conant, "The Comprehensive High School," High School 1980/The Shape of the Future in American Education, ed. Alvin C. Eurich, (New York: Pittman Publishing Corporation, 1970), p. 71.

¹⁵Itzkoff, op. cit., p. vii.

effects of the recommendations of the reform proposals on the role of the secondary school during the last two decades of the twentieth century merited attention of educators and citizens.¹⁶

One of the earliest of the recent reform proposals was the "Study for the Ford Foundation on Policy and Program," a 1949 report which contained criticism of formal education and emphasized the failure of the educational system to provide equal opportunity for minority groups and the poor.

In practice, education should accord equal opportunity to all. This is not only a fundamental democratic principle; it is a prerequisite to the social mobility and fluidity which are basic to democracy.¹⁷

Several major reports and plans for the reform of secondary education were formulated between 1959 and 1977. Saylor analyzed these proposals and identified the following reports as those which could serve as a basis for making changes in high schools:

1. James B. Conant, The American High School Today (1959), Slums and Suburbs (1961), and The Comprehensive High School (1967).
2. J. Lloyd Trump and Dorsey Baynham, Guide to Better Schools (1961).
3. Panel on Youth of the President's Science Advisory Committee, Youth: Transition to Adulthood (1973).
4. National Commission on the Reform of Secondary Education, The Reform of Secondary Education: A Report to the Public

¹⁶Saylor, op. cit., pp. 4-6.

¹⁷A Foundation Goes to School-The Ford Foundation Comprehensive School Improvement Program 1969-1970 (New York: 1972), p. 7.

and the Profession (1973) and Task Force '74, A National Task Force for High School Reform, The Adolescent and Other Citizens and Their High Schools: A Report to the Public and the Profession (1975).

5. National Association of Secondary School Principals, The Mood of American Youth 1974 (1974); The 80's--Where Will The Schools Be? (1974); The 12th Grade: A Critical Year (1975); The Task Force on Secondary Schools in a Changing Society, Secondary Schools in A Changing Society: This We Believe (1975).
6. The California Commission for the Reform of Intermediate and Secondary Education, The RISE Report (1975).
7. A Phi Delta Kappa Task Force, The New Secondary Education (1976).
8. National Panel on High School and Adolescent Education, The Education of Adolescents: The Final Report and Recommendations of the National Panel (1976).
9. J. Lloyd Trump, A School for Everyone (1977).
10. Harold G. Shane, Curriculum Change Toward the 21st Century (1977).¹⁸

There was a hiatus in the introduction of reform proposals between 1959 and the 1970's. Only Conant in 1961 and 1967 and Trump and Baynham in 1961 made major efforts to devise a program for reform in American high schools. During the 1960's, evidence accumulated that secondary schools were providing inappropriate learning opportunities for some students. Gibbons contended most high schools appeared to be unable or unwilling to meet students' needs.¹⁹ "Nearly one-half of the 1960 high school students in the Project Talent Survey, when questioned

¹⁸Saylor, op. cit., pp. 4-6.

¹⁹Gibbons, op. cit., p. 2.