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ABSTRACT

This policy paper, by a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education for Policy and Planning, argues that President Clinton and the previous "education Congress" designed a top-down strategy reminiscent of the Great Society programs in the 1960s to reform America's school systems. The resultant educational legislation has occurred at a time when public trust in the federal government is very low. In particular, the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" and the "Improving America's Schools Act" (HR 6) will remove control from education consumers and elected officials and impose bureaucratic control by "education experts" who will shift the focus from academic performance and accountability (outputs) to "equitable" distribution of resources (inputs). True education reform can only be accomplished at the state and local levels and with emphasis on high academic standards and tests that measure mastery of core subjects. To achieve real education reform, three things must happen: (1) restore local control and undo the worst damage; (2) send programs home; and (3) eliminate the Department of Education. The appendix highlights the "10 worst ideas" in HR 6. (Contains 43 endnotes.) (LMI)

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In the Image of the Great Society: Reinventing K-12 Education in the Clinton Administration

By Bruno V. Manno

- *President Clinton and the previous "education Congress" designed a top-down, Washington-knows-best strategy reminiscent of the Great Society programs of the 1960s to reform America's school systems. This, ironically, has occurred at a time when public trust in the federal government is at an all-time low.*
- *This "reform" will remove control from education consumers and elected officials and will impose bureaucratic control by "education experts" who will shift the focus from academic performance and accountability (outputs) to "equitable" distribution of resources (inputs).*

True education reform can only be accomplished at the state and local levels and with emphasis on high academic standards and tests that measure mastery of core subjects.

Introduction

The Clinton administration could hardly contain itself. U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley reflected on two years of work at what "President Clinton call[ed] . . . reinventing American education."¹ He said, "We passed more good education legislation than in the past 30 years."²

An Education Department press release described the administration's work as a "quiet consensus without much fanfare." It continued as follows: "Inside the beltway, many Washington insiders say they're amazed. Not since the mid-'60s, veteran Capitol Hill watchers say, has so much been done for education."³

President Clinton was quick to join in. Heaping high praise on the Congress, he said, "I think this Congress will go down in history as a great Congress for education."

The usually politically correct *Washington Post* agreed. It said, "Whatever its record in other fields, the Congress . . . was highly productive in the field of education. Six bills were passed. . . ." Because of this "real achievement," the *Post* knighted them "an education Congress."⁴

The first victory in the federal education joust was the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act"—which the Clinton administration called the "foundation of the Clinton education agenda."⁵ Five other pieces of legislation followed, with the final triumph being the "Improving America's Schools Act" (HR 6). This 1,000-plus-page five-year rechartering of

This agenda is a throwback to the mid-1960s policies of the Great Society: Washington appears on the doorstep of communities and states bearing gifts, but, as with any gift from Uncle Sam, the long-term result is more federal red tape.

the federal government's main financial investment in K-12 education—the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), originally passed in 1965—allows the federal government to spend up to \$65 billion over five years on nearly fifty education programs.

Not everyone sees these legislative victories as such great accomplishments. Before Goals 2000 became law, former U.S. Secretary of Education William J. Bennett called it a “. . . terrible piece of legislation [that] puts the interests of the education establishment above the interests of children. [It] would hurt, not help, the education reform movement . . . [and] render the federal government and the education unions virtually unchallenged control over American education.”⁶

After Goals 2000 was signed into law, former U.S. Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander—who had also vigorously opposed the measure—had advice for those who will have to deal with it: “I would treat it about the same way you would treat a fox dressed as a duck at a duck-family reunion.”⁷

Bennett and Alexander led a last-minute effort to kill HR 6. They called it “. . . the kind of pernicious legislation which, if it is enacted, will make American education worse, not better. It will set back the renewal of American education [and] make it more difficult for reform-minded Americans to do what needs to be done.”⁸

In fact, both Goals 2000 and HR 6 further an education agenda that does the following:

- imposes a top-down, Washington-knows-best approach to transforming America's schools, thereby expanding federal control of local schools and diminishing what communities and states can do in those schools
- extends the national-policy role and influence of education experts from currently powerful interest groups, at the expense of civilian consumers such as parents and elected officials
- shifts education reform from a focus on academic results to a concentration on resources, from what our children should learn to what education bureaucrats spend

- suggests that federal education spending be placed on autopilot so as to send it into the stratosphere (in a little-known provision discussed later in this paper)

As Secretary Riley inadvertently implied, this agenda is a throwback to the mid-1960s policies of the Great Society: Washington appears on the doorstep of communities and states bearing gifts, but, as with any gift from Uncle Sam, the long-term result is more federal red tape and directives imposing rules and regulations on communities and states that presumably cannot be trusted to decide what is best for their schools.

Rhetoric to the contrary, most of the Clinton education agenda will, on balance, harm rather than help elementary and secondary education. It undermines a bipartisan proposal for reforming our schools set out first by the nation's governors in the mid-1980s. The fundamental basis of that proposal was what then-governor of Tennessee Lamar Alexander called “some old-fashioned horse-trading. We'll regulate less, if schools and school districts will produce better results.”⁹ The key to achieving this was leadership by a state's governor and citizens in its local communities.

That approach gathered further momentum in 1989, when President George Bush invited the governors to meet at an Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia. Together, Bush and the governors agreed to set six national education goals they would work to achieve by the year 2000.

What followed in 1991 was the Bush administration's America 2000 plan: not a new federal program but rather a national strategy for reaching the nation's education goals and transforming America's schools, community by community. More than 2,700 communities formed citizens' committees that were working to reach the goals.

America 2000 had several complementary parts, all intended to support a bipartisan agenda that would accomplish the following:

- develop high academic standards for all students, defining what we expect them to know and do

This sweeping systemic change assumes that the federal government knows what is best for states and communities and will be fair and equitable in making sure that they toe the line.

- test for accountability and measure whether students are learning to those standards
- cut federal red tape and deregulate the process of schooling to allow for the innovations and resourcefulness of educators and communities
- shift control of schools to education consumers—elected officials such as state legislators and mayors as well as parents and business leaders—away from the producers, the education “experts”
- give families more choices among many different types of school

This approach contrasts sharply with the main elements of the Clinton education agenda. To highlight those differences, this paper delineates the Clinton administration’s education policy. It begins by discussing the single model of reform the Clinton administration is attempting to impose on the country from Washington—so-called systemic reform. Next is an analysis of Goals 2000 and HR 6 and an examination of how they “transformed a nationwide reform movement into [another 1960s Great Society] federal program.”¹⁰ Finally, I make some suggestions about what Congress can do to revive the bipartisan agenda set out by the governors. This involves sending education home and returning control to families, schools, communities, and states.

“Systemic Change”: The Clinton Reform Model

In the words of Education Secretary Riley, Goals 2000 was the beginning of “a new [federal] partnership in American education” with state and local school systems.¹¹ This partnership is based on a “systemic approach” to education reform. Its most prominent advocate is the present U.S. Undersecretary of Education, Marshall S. Smith.

In writings published before his current tenure (during the Carter administration he was Chief of Staff to the first Secretary of Education, Shirley Hufstедler), Smith and his colleague Jennifer A. O’Day acknowledged that systemic reform provides “. . . a more proactive role for the centralized elements of the system. . . .”¹² This type of reform also leads to greater uniformity—they call it coordination

and alignment—in “. . . all parts of a state instructional system—core content, materials, teacher training, continuing professional development, and assessment. . . .”¹³

Particularly important to this view as it relates to the nation’s education agenda are the issues of equity and fairness in distributing resources and services among districts.¹⁴ Advocates of the systemic approach call for ways to judge whether there are adequate money, programs, and other human and fiscal resources to educate children in every school, district, state, and, ultimately, the nation. They assert that to assure broad-based equity nationally, a new type of school resource standard must be created. That means delivery standards—or what the Clinton administration euphemistically calls “opportunity-to-learn” standards.¹⁵

Clearly, these standards are a way of obtaining resources, both financial and human. But they also are “legal criteria for assessing whether students had been provided due process and equal protection.”¹⁶ They are, therefore, “. . . leverage for courts and advocates [and can lead to] actions that could be taken by courts, legislatures, and advocates against a district or state. . . .”¹⁷

Naturally, society needs some mechanism that can police the system and enforce the sanctions. Smith and O’Day propose regular school reviews, by teams from outside the district, to evaluate the quality of practices and resources. They speculate that a system of national inspectors might help in “. . . enforcing common standards . . . and [be] a professional force in the political arena.”¹⁸

All of this places a high premium on the proactive role of Washington while minimizing state and local control and resourcefulness. This sweeping systemic change assumes that the federal government knows what is best for states and communities and will be fair and equitable in making sure that they toe the line. Moreover, it creates an enforcement bureaucracy with the power to punish districts that fail to do what the Washington education establishment wants them to, and opens the door for even further micromanagement by Washington.

Overall, Goals 2000 has very few provisions targeted directly toward relieving what is the nation's essential education problem today: our young people are not learning nearly enough for their own or the nation's good.

Goals 2000: Educate America Act

This systemic approach is enshrined as a national education policy in Goals 2000. Many groups within the education establishment welcomed this proposal with open arms—always a bad sign for those committed to challenging the status quo in education. Gordon M. Ambach, executive director of the Washington-based Council of Chief State School Officers, approvingly called it the “most significant federal legislation in 30 years.”¹⁹

On the other hand, social critic Irving Kristol describes it as an “expensive disaster” in the making. Indeed, it proves Kristol’s “first law of education reform”: “Any reform that is acceptable to the educational establishment, and that can gain a majority in a legislature, federal or state, is bound to be worse than nothing.”²⁰

To be fair, a few provisions in Goals 2000 warrant some praise. For example, it writes into law the six national education goals established in 1989 by President Bush and the nation’s governors. It also writes into law the National Education Goals Panel, established by President Bush and the governors to monitor progress toward achieving the goals.

Overall, however, Goals 2000 has very few provisions targeted directly toward relieving what is the nation’s essential education problem today: our young people are not learning nearly enough for their own or the nation’s good.²¹ Moreover, there are three particularly onerous provisions in the law.²²

First, new federal dollars available for Goals 2000 may not be used for at least the next three years for “high stakes” tests—that is, tests that have consequences. States cannot use Goals 2000 money to develop tests that will be used to determine promotion, high school graduation, or admission to college. The result is thus neither a meaningful accountability system nor a national testing system.

This provision fatally undermines a school district’s attempts to improve student achievement, because it prevents schools from providing students with incentives to work hard.

It establishes a no-fault system with no consequences for failure and no rewards for success.

Even an education establishment figure such as American Federation of Teachers Union President Albert Shanker has pointed out the problems with this approach. He says, “All of the standards, all of the other measures called for in Goals 2000—curriculum development, assessment, professional development, parental involvement—will not mean a thing unless we attach stakes to students’ achievement of standards. . . . When you have a system that basically says, ‘It doesn’t count’ . . . you have a system that will not work. Right now, what students want—college admissions, jobs, and job training—is disconnected from their school work. And as long as it stays disconnected, our educational system will not work.”²³

Second, in judging educational quality, Goals 2000 puts more emphasis on “inputs”—such as school spending, how teachers teach, and class size—than it does on outputs, the academic results students achieve. It does this by creating a process for developing national delivery or opportunity-to-learn standards that measure school resources.

Rather than providing students with an opportunity to learn, however, these standards will provide advocacy groups with increased opportunities to litigate. The standards will become the impetus for new lawsuits that drag states and communities into court to force them to redistribute resources. The standards will provide another form of legal entitlement, in education.

Such litigation is not some sort of farfetched hypothesis. Consider the 1993 Alabama case in which the state court ruled that the state’s K-12 system violated the Alabama constitution because it did not provide students with an adequate education. In a 125-page opinion, Judge Eugene Reese listed numerous criteria the state’s schools would have to meet, including “providing students with an opportunity to attain” sufficient skills to compete with students throughout the world, and “sufficient understanding of the arts to enable each student to appreciate his or her cultural heritage and the cultural heritage of others.”²⁴

Despite the Clinton administration's rhetoric about plans created locally from the "bottom up," Washington will set the requirements, describe the contents, write the rules, and control the purse strings.

Helen Hershkoff, an American Civil Liberties Union lawyer representing the plaintiffs, called the decision "a landmark because it recognizes that children have a right not only to an equitable education but also to an adequate education."²⁵ This language reflects a delivery standards approach.

As Congressman Bill Goodling (R-PA) said at a committee hearing on Goals 2000, "I agree with the concept that you need to have equal opportunity, but all I can see is the trips to the court."²⁶

The third disturbing Goals 2000 provision involves creating a new federal bureaucracy composed almost exclusively of education experts. This new bureaucracy will perform several tasks, including the certification of state standards. The law establishes a nineteen-member panel—the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC)—that will oversee the certification of education standards—including delivery standards—that states "voluntarily" submit to it.

In reality, NESIC is to be a sort of national school board whose members are the usual education-establishment suspects—experts in school finance and equity and the long laundry list of professional educators, activists, and interest-group representatives. Significantly, there are no NESIC membership requirements for bipartisanship or lay control of education. Harold Howe, former U.S. Commissioner of Education and now senior lecturer emeritus at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, calls this part of Goals 2000 an ". . . elaborate bureaucratic structure that brings Uncle Sam into . . . the classrooms of 2 1/2 million American public school teachers."²⁷

In blocking the development of a "high stakes" exam system, emphasizing resource standards for schools at the expense of academic standards for students, and expanding federal control of education by representatives of the current education establishment, the Clinton administration is essentially reinventing education in the image of the Great Society: more rules, regulations, and directives from education experts in Washington.

Improving America's Schools Act

HR 6, the "Improving America's Schools Act," culminates the efforts of the Clinton administration to reinvent education by imposing greater subservience to Uncle Sam. This approach manifests itself in four primary ways. (See sidebar on pages 14 and 15 of this paper.)

First, HR 6 manifests a top-down, centralized view of the federal role in education, with the U.S. Department of Education as central planner. The bill mandates that statewide education reform plans be submitted to the U.S. Secretary of Education for approval. Though this provision is ambiguously phrased, there is little doubt that these plans are expected to describe a state's content standards (what students must know and do), performance standards (what student achievement is good enough to denote content mastery), and delivery or opportunity-to-learn standards (what resources—fiscal and human—communities will devote to ensuring that students achieve the content and performance standards). The statewide reform plans must also include assessment plans tied to each of the standards, and schedules projecting what yearly progress will occur.

Local districts, too, are required to develop their own reform plans, for state approval. These are to be integrated into the plan sent to Washington. A myriad of details must be specified, including how districts coordinate health and social-service programs, homeless children programs, preschool programs, and a host of other programs. They are even required to describe a parent-involvement policy that includes topics to be discussed at parent-teacher conferences.

Despite the Clinton administration's rhetoric about plans created locally from the "bottom up," Washington will set the requirements, describe the contents, write the rules, and control the purse strings.

Second, HR 6 expands the federal power grab begun in Goals 2000, by dictating and micromanaging what communities and states are required to do. For example, any district receiving federal funds must expel from school, for at least one year, any student found to have brought a

“Systemic reform” is nothing more than many of the same old bureaucrats talking to many of the same old interest groups. In all likelihood, they will produce the same old results—or worse.

weapon to school. Certainly an incident such as this requires a swift and sure response, but should it be Washington’s job to mandate a national policy on weapons and school expulsions for every school district and impose it on all states and communities? Are local school boards, communities, and families incapable of devising their own solutions to this problem? Most certainly not.

This is just one of many ways in which HR 6 strengthens Washington’s choke-hold on local decision-making regarding schools. The Clinton administration, as might be expected, claims that this interpretation is unjustified. Secretary Riley comments, “I strongly disagree with [the] belief that [our education package] will federalize American education.”²⁸ But even mainline education establishment groups find this increased intrusiveness troubling. Bruce Hunter, senior associate executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, says, “The trend is worrisome, and they don’t seem able to control themselves. This Congress has been more willing than ever to be the county council, the mayor’s office, or the school board. . . .”²⁹

Third, HR 6 reinforces another onerous aspect of Goals 2000 and the systemic model that favors control of education by bureaucrats and interest groups. As mentioned, Goals 2000 placed NESIC under the control of the usual education establishment suspects—experts in school finance and equity and the long laundry list of professional educators, activists, and interest group representatives. HR 6 continues this move to expand the influence and control of bureaucrats and interest groups.

For example, the National Assessment Governing Board—the policymaking group for the nation’s report card on student achievement—now will have its members chosen by education interest groups. Placing the only testing program with a long record of objectively monitoring student learning in the U.S. under the control of bureaucrats and interest groups is like setting a fox to guard the ducks. This “reform” has put a broad smile on the faces of the education foxes.

Another example of increased interest group control is the provisions in HR 6’s “Gender Equity Act.” They mandate teacher training in “gender sensitivity [and] gender equitable practices.” This politically correct provision panders to the wishes of a major interest group and is based on spurious research.³⁰

In short, HR 6—like Goals 2000—places control of education in the hands of education’s producers rather than parents and other consumers, experts rather than laypersons, bureaucrats rather than civilians. “Systemic reform” is nothing more than many of the same old bureaucrats talking to many of the same old interest groups. In all likelihood, they will produce the same old results—or worse.

Fourth, HR 6 carries even further the Goals 2000 and systemic model approach to judging quality in education by focusing on intentions and efforts, institutions and services, and resources and spending, rather than goals and ends, products and results, and on what students learn. As noted earlier, it does this by proposing to put education spending on autopilot and send it into the stratosphere.

HR 6 would increase the total share of federal spending on education at least one percent per year until it reaches 10 percent of the federal budget. This year alone, the 10 percent formula would add approximately \$130 billion to the federal education budget. No improvement in student learning would need to occur for this to happen.

HR 6 provides numerous other windfalls for the education establishment. For example, among those targeted to gain are the “professional development” experts, especially the colleges of education. They would reap professional development money from at least two new sources: the reconfigured Eisenhower Professional Development Program, and a mandated ten percent “setaside” for professional development of teachers in low-income schools that have not made adequate progress in reaching agreed-upon student achievement goals.

In sum, HR 6—like Goals 2000 before it—is

Because of these “reforms,” increasing numbers of decisions made in Washington will override and control those made by families, schools, communities, and states. Ironically, these changes are coming at a time when public trust of the federal government is at an all-time low.

nothing more than a Washington power-grab. It is the most amount of money for the least amount of change.

Sending Washington Home

Reinventing education in the image of the Great Society has one main effect. It undermines the bipartisan agreement on how to reform our schools first put forward in the mid-1980s by the nation's governors. This initiative was furthered later that decade by the establishment of six national education goals, and advanced in the early '90s by the America 2000 community-by-community strategy for reaching those national goals.

Some commentators try to gloss over or deny the differences between the administration's perspective and this bipartisan approach. For example, one proponent of this view says, “Goals 2000 is the child of Mr. Bush's America 2000 plan.”³¹

Nothing could be further from the truth. America 2000 was about *voluntary* national goals and high *academic* standards in core subjects for all students; gubernatorial leadership linked with local responsibility and freedom in reaching those goals and standards; tests that tell us whether students are learning to the standards and that have consequences for promotion, graduation, and employment; professionals accountable for the results of learning and rewarded for teaching well rather than just putting in time; and wide-ranging choices for families among public and private schools that differ on many dimensions.

Goals 2000 and its companion piece, HR 6, focus on national delivery standards that concern money, not results, and on standards for schools, not standards for students. They forbid the use of federal money to develop “high stakes” exams, expand Washington's role in education by creating a new federal bureaucracy that is akin to a national school board, and allow public school choice only when both the sending and receiving school consent to the family's request to leave.

In the words of former Secretaries of Education Bennett and Alexander and Senator Dan Coats,

“By signing off on HR 6 and Goals 2000, President Clinton transformed a nationwide reform movement into a federal program.”³² In other words, it corrupted a true partnership with the states and the nation's governors and turned it into another bureaucratic and regulated intrusion from Washington.

The Clinton administration's approach to education reform substitutes the judgments of Washington bureaucrats and education experts for those of laypersons and civilians—especially families—in states and communities across the nation. Because of these “reforms,” increasing numbers of decisions made in Washington will override and control those made by families, schools, communities, and states.

Ironically, these changes are coming at a time when public trust of the federal government is at an all-time low. A 1994 survey report on the American Dream, conducted for the Hudson Institute's Project on the New Promise of American Life, summarizes the thirty-six-year trend data as follows: “Today, when Americans are asked how much of the time they trust government to do what is right, only 2 percent say ‘all the time’ and just 14 percent ‘. . . most of the time.’ This reflects the lowest level of trust ever measured for government in Washington. . . . [M]ore than one of five . . . trust Washington ‘almost none of the time,’ an equally damning finding.”³³

Even some Democrats agree that Washington should dramatically alter its involvement in education and other realms of endeavor it now micromanages—and not in the direction the Clinton administration is going. Alice M. Rivlin, Office of Management and Budget Director for the Clinton administration, wrote the following in a Brookings Institution study published before she assumed her current position: “The federal government should eliminate most of its programs in education, housing, highways, social services, economic development, and job training. Washington not only has too much to do, it has taken on domestic responsibilities that would be handled better by the states. Revitalizing the economy may

According to Alice Rivlin, Washington has too much to do, and has taken on domestic responsibilities better handled by the states. Revitalizing the economy may depend on restoring a cleaner division of responsibility between the states and the national government.

depend on restoring a cleaner division of responsibility between the states and the national government.”³⁴

Another dimension of the “trust in government” issue is apparent in an American Dream poll question regarding which branch or level of government has or should have the most power today. Whereas 55 percent say that Congress has the most power and state and local governments are named by fewer than 10 percent, 41 percent believe that state and local governments *should* have the most power, with only 29 percent believing that Congress should. This is true across the demographic and ideological spectrum.³⁵

Undergirding this agenda is the principle of subsidiarity. It affirms that problems should be solved “as close to home” as possible. It is clear that transferring or devolving power back to states and communities—in other words, sending Washington home—receives significant backing from many Americans.

Public Desire for Real Education Reform

In light of these considerations, what changes do Americans think should be made in their schools? In recent years a fairly consistent perspective is evident.³⁶ The most recent data show the following:

- 89 percent say that developing the best education system in the world is essential to America’s future strength and is more important than having the most efficient industrial system (60 percent) or the strongest military (40 percent).
- 81 percent favor requiring public schools in their communities to conform to national achievement standards and goals.
- 70 percent favor the use of standardized national tests to determine whether a student advances to the next grade level—with 72 percent wanting to rank the local public schools by student achievement.
- 77 percent think that federal agencies should give local authorities more say in how they spend the tax money they receive from the federal government.

- 62 percent favor allowing families to choose which public schools students attend in their communities, with even stronger support for this policy among minorities (70 percent for blacks, 66 percent for Hispanics) and inner-city residents (70 percent).

According to a report by Public Agenda, the American people want safe schools where discipline is enforced and students master the basics before moving on to other things.³⁷ This “traditionalism,” however, does not lead them to yearn for “the good old days.” The report says, “They seem to want a new and improved version of the little red schoolhouse.”³⁸ According to the study, the public thinks that schools should not be boring places that children fear because teachers simultaneously pander to them and intimidate them. For example, nearly 70 percent do not believe that spanking would lead to much improvement in student achievement. Rather, they think that learning should be fun and that teachers should enforce rules and standards that help students gain knowledge and skills and give their best effort.

Unfortunately, the Public Agenda report also indicates that most education bureaucrats and experts do not share the public’s view of what are the top education concerns and are out of sync with what most Americans want. “[T]his study and others Public Agenda has conducted in the last two years suggest that the large majority of Americans are uncomfortable with many of [the] changes” wrought by education experts in recent years.³⁹ The disagreements involve fundamental issues such as teaching composition without teaching spelling (60 percent of Americans reject this strategy), learning to do arithmetic by hand before starting to use calculators (86 percent of the public supports this), and mixing students of different achievement levels together in classrooms, so-called heterogeneous learning (only 24 percent of the public believe that this will increase student achievement).

According to Public Agenda’s executive director, Deborah Wadsworth, there is an “. . . enormous

Congress should also bar the Washington education bureaucracy from doing almost anything that interferes with local control of standards, curriculum, testing, and teaching.

disconnect between [political and business leaders and the education experts] and the public. There has been a lot of lip service paid to communicating with the public. But people have real concerns, and until the leadership pays attention to them, they are not going to go away."⁴⁰ Unlike the public, the education experts prefer much of what has been enshrined in Goals 2000 and HR 6: a Washington-knows-best approach to school reform.

The report also found that 58 percent of Americans do not trust elected officials in Washington to make decisions about how schools should be run. (An interesting related finding is that 41 percent do not trust their state's governor to do so either, although this data was compiled before the 1994 elections.)

The conclusion is inescapable: "Today, Washington is on a collision course with what the American people want and what they know is right [in education]."⁴¹ Uncle Sam's programs and rules will not allow for the radical changes most Americans want.

Achieving Real Education Reform

In practical terms, then, what does all this mean for Congress as it looks at K-12 education? Clearly, Congress should begin with the premise that education is not going to be fixed in Washington. Rather, it is the proper work of families, schools, communities, and states. With that in mind, Chester E. Finn, Jr., suggests that a federal education package passed by the Congress that tries to send education home will have three parts.⁴²

First, restore local control and undo the worst damage. Congress should turn back both the Goals 2000 and HR 6 federal power grabs by repealing the most damaging provisions.

To start, Congress should abolish the National Education Standards and Improvement Council (NESIC) and restore the bipartisan nature and independent authority of the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP). (As mentioned earlier, NESIC is the equivalent of a national school board that would be dominated by those who oppose real change in our education system. NEGP is the

governors' group that tracks the nation's progress toward achieving national education goals.) Congress should also restore the independence of the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), the policymaking group that oversees the nation's report card on student achievement. These actions would do much to squelch the return of the "experts" to a primary role in controlling a centralized national education policy.

Congress should also delete the new national education goals that have been added to the original six. By bringing up resource requirements, these additions dilute the focus on improving student achievement, thereby undermining the point of having such goals.

Congress should also bar the Washington education bureaucracy from doing almost anything that interferes with local control of standards, curriculum, testing, and teaching. There are several examples of what Congress can do. To start, it can eliminate the requirement establishing state improvement panels that create reform plans the Washington bureaucracy must approve. It can also eliminate all references to opportunity-to-learn standards. And it should abolish the provision that restricts the use of federal money in developing "high stakes" tests.

Congress should also make it clear that civil rights enforcement involves protecting the universal rights of individuals and pursuing a color-blind society. Enforcement should not be based on solutions driven by spurious research on gender equity, race norming (the policy of "adjusting" test scores to compensate for characteristics such as race or poverty), and other forms of politically correct group consciousness.

Second, send programs home. Most of the separate K-12 programs that now exist in the Department of Education and cost the nation's taxpayers approximately \$10 billion should be sent home to states and communities. So should those that target areas such as special education. And so, too, should programs for children administered by other agencies, such as Head Start in the Department of Health and Human Services.

The guiding principles for Washington in whatever functions it performs should be taken from the agenda of the American people: “choice, deregulation, innovation, accountability, and serious assessment keyed to real standards in core subjects.”

The national research and development centers and the regional educational laboratories—and myriad other forms of education “pork” for the experts—should be part of any package that goes to the states. The states can use the money to purchase the research and school-improvement services they need.

Along with these programs, Congress should send home the means of paying for them. One option is to create a major “block grant” with few if any strings attached. Or Congress could swap programs with the states. The states would receive a package of education programs and the federal government would assume full control of and responsibility for other areas such as Medicaid. A third option is to reduce federal taxes and let the states substitute their own if they think the programs worthy of support.

Decisions about what to do with these programs should involve broad consultation with the nation’s governors. Also, the final package could allow individual states some discretion in choosing which K-12 programs they want returned to them, because no one-size approach is likely to meet every state’s needs.

Third, eliminate the Department of Education. Once so many education programs were returned to the states, there would be no need for a cabinet-level agency. The remaining programs could be housed in an independent agency with a cabinet-level advisor in the White House reporting to the President. Another option is to create something like an Office of Children and Families that includes other children’s programs such as Head Start. Some thought could even be given to creating a streamlined Department of Health, Education, and Welfare or a Department of Education and Employment that would merge the departments of Education and Labor.

The federal government should continue to support some research and collect statistics, especially as they relate to state, national, and international comparisons of educational achievement. This process should support the gathering of necessary information to report on the nation’s progress in

achieving the national goals. Washington should also have a strong “bully pulpit” role, especially in singling out what seems to be working or not working in efforts to transform our schools. Finally, as noted earlier, federal civil-rights efforts should focus on pursuing discriminatory actions against individuals, not civil rights activism on behalf of various approved groups. Congress should also consider transferring this function to the Department of Justice.

The point of all these reforms is not to reduce the attention the nation gives to education. Rather, it is to focus that attention on encouraging and challenging families, schools, communities, and states to transform their schools, because they—not Washington—are the only ones who can do that.

The guiding principles for Washington in whatever functions it performs should be taken from the agenda of the American people: “. . . choice, deregulation, innovation, accountability, and serious assessment keyed to real standards in core subjects.”⁴³

Conclusion

The Clinton administration has reinvented education in the image of the Great Society and developed a Washington-knows-best agenda for transforming our schools and centralizing even more power in Washington. That approach may please education bureaucrats and experts, but it is sorely out of touch with what most Americans want.

It is ironic to have the Clinton administration advocate centralization when public and private organizations and institutions throughout the world see central management and top-down planning as failed endeavors. Taking their place are market-driven approaches that decentralize, eliminate bureaucratic/administrative layers, and encourage local control and decision making.

The time has come—and the country seems willing—to have Washington send education home to where it belongs—families, schools, communities, and states. Rather than be incrementalist in its approach, the Congress (and perhaps even the Clinton administration) now has an opportunity to be bold. Our country and our children will benefit immensely.

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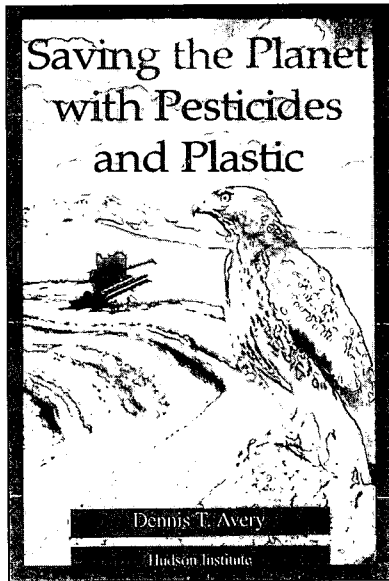
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The ten worst ideas in HR 6

[Note: The statements in italics are direct quotes from HR 6 or the conference report that accompanied it.]

1. Federal bureaucrats and a new “national school board” gain more control over curriculum, standards, and testing, even those developed without Goals 2000 funding.

Any State desiring to receive a grant . . . shall submit to the Secretary a plan. . . . Each state plan shall demonstrate that the State has developed or adopted challenging content standards and challenging student performance standards that will be used by the State, its local educational agencies, and its schools. . . .

If a State has State content standards or State student performance standards developed under . . . Goals 2000 . . . and an aligned set of assessments . . . the State shall use such standards and assessments. . . .

If a State has not adopted State content standards and State student performance standards . . . the State plan shall include a strategy and schedule for developing [them]. . . .

Standards under this paragraph shall include. . . .

2. The federal government inserts itself into parent-teacher conferences, sex education courses, and even the pay of athletic coaches.

A schoolwide program shall include . . . teacher-parent conferences, at which time the teacher and parents shall discuss . . . what the parents can do to help the student improve. . . .

None of the funds authorized under this Act shall be used—(1) to develop or distribute materials, or operate programs of courses of instruction, directed at youth that are designed to promote or encourage sexual activity, whether homosexual or heterosexual. . . .

[E]ach coeducational institution of higher education that . . . has an intercollegiate

athletic program, shall annually, prepare a report that contains the following information. . . . Whether the head coach is male or female. . . . The average annual institutional salary of the assistant coaches of men’s teams . . . and . . . of women’s teams. . . .

3. Congress redefines “the family.”

The term “family” means a group of interdependent persons residing in the same household.

4. Federal “gender equity” regulations (and enforcers) will rule U.S. schools.

Such professional development activities shall . . . include strategies for identifying and eliminating gender and racial bias in instructional materials, methods, and practices. . . . Such professional development activities may include . . . instruction in gender-equitable education methods, techniques, and practices. . . .

The state educational agencies shall review the local educational agency’s plan . . . to determine if such agency’s professional development activities . . . include gender-equitable education methods, techniques, and practices.

[T]he Secretary is authorized to provide support and technical assistance—(A) to implement effective gender-equity policies and programs at all educational levels, including . . . introduction into the classroom of textbooks, curricula, and other materials designed to achieve equity for women and girls . . . the development and evaluation of model curricula, textbooks, software, and other educational materials to ensure the absence of gender stereotyping and bias. . . .

There shall be in the Department, a Special Assistant for Gender Equity who shall be appointed by the Secretary. The Special Assistant shall promote, coordinate, and evaluate gender equity programs. . . . The Special Assistant shall advise the Secretary and Deputy Secretary on all matters related to gender equity.

“It is the sense of the Congress that the total share of the Federal spending on education should increase by at least one percent each year until such share reaches 10 percent of the total Federal budget.”

5. Chalk up another expensive victory for the construction unions.

All laborers and mechanics employed . . . in the performance of any contract and subcontract for the repair, renovation, alteration, or construction . . . of any building or work that is financed in whole or in part by a grant under this title, shall be paid wages . . . in accordance with . . . the Davis-Bacon Act.

6. “Opportunity to learn” standards are alive and well.

Corrective actions may include . . . (VIII) implementing opportunity-to-learn standards or strategies developed by such State under the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. . . .

The House bill, but not the Senate amendment, says nothing in this section shall be construed to create a legally enforceable right based on opportunity-to-learn standards. The House recedes.

7. The bill hamstringing today’s most promising reform strategies.

A local educational agency that chooses to implement a school choice plan shall first develop a comprehensive plan that includes assurances that . . . both the sending and receiving schools agree to the student transfer; . . .

The Senate amendment, but not the House bill, provides that the ESEA shall not be construed to deny States or local educational agencies the opportunity to use Federal funds to contract with private management firms. The Senate recedes.

8. The independence of the National Assessment of Educational Progress is compromised by giving education interest groups the exclusive right to nominate board members.

The Secretary shall appoint new members to fill vacancies on the [National Assess-

ment Governing] Board from among individuals who are nominated by organizations representing the type of individuals described in subsection (b)(1) with respect to which the vacancy exists. . . .

9. Congress intends a vast increase in federal spending for this kind of thing.

It is the sense of the Congress that the total share of the Federal spending on education should increase by at least one percent each year until such share reaches 10 percent of the total Federal budget. . . .

10. Congress sets discipline policy for 83,000 schools.

[E]ach State receiving federal funds under this Act shall have in effect a State law requiring local educational agencies to expel from school for a period of not less than one year a student who is determined to have brought a weapon to a school. . . .

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continued from page 12

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