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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 administrators 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 pattern of movement has almost stopped. This trend will cause almost an 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 administrators are becoming increasingly complex, with the success of our future, in some measure, being the determinant 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 institutions."

—Everett Reimer

School Is Dead, p. 37

(Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1971)