

In the Aftermath of Excellence

Nearly two years after *In Search of Excellence*, mandates are still coming from the top, but dignity and support are beginning to return to the lives of teachers and principals.

Patrick Reddy, The Cincinnati Post



Ernest Boyer giving some helpful advice to a high school principal and an area supervisor from the Cincinnati Public Schools.

ERNEST L. BOYER

The fascinating book *In Search of Excellence*, which has been on the bestseller list for months, is about dramatic reforms taking place in the business world. The authors of this internationally acclaimed report describe, in colorful detail, the inner workings of the nation's most successful corporations. Their theme, as I understand it, is that a business can succeed, even flourish, if it has clear goals and gives recognition to those who do the work.

There is a message here for public education.

During the past 18 months we've had an avalanche of school reports and a subsequent flood of activity in almost every state. In a recent survey, over one-third of the nation's teachers said they had been touched directly by the current push for school improvement. I have the clear impression that during these past months there has been more school improvement activity than during any other comparable period in the nation's history.

All of us who care about the nation's schools should be pleased that education has moved to the top of the national agenda. We should be reassured by the seriousness of the great

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debate. We should be grateful that those outside education—business and industry leaders, for example—are supporting public education. And we should be impressed that the media are putting the schools in larger social context.

As I criss-cross the country, I have been persuaded that Americans care deeply about education. Today we seem to understand that the future of our schools will shape the future of the nation. Therefore, I propose two cheers for the current push for excellence in our schools.

Still Improving From the Top Down

Yet, I am concerned. I worry, that in the search for school improvement, the emphasis will be on regulation rather than renewal. There is, I feel, a real danger that as new statewide mandates are imposed, local schools will be bypassed in the process. Philip Caldwell, President of the Ford Motor Company, recently observed that long before a new car goes into production the engineering drawings are reviewed by assembly workers to remove the bugs. Such participation not only brings greater efficiency in production but greater dignity to the workers. In the old days, he said, engineers would simply prepare new car designs in splendid isolation and

then blame assembly workers when the pieces didn't fit.

It's ironic that while the nation's industries and businesses are encouraging more responsible involvement of the workers, the public sector seems to have it just the other way around. In too many states, we are still trying to fix education from the top, and, in the process, imposing more bureaucracy and control.

This raises the larger question of how American public education will be governed. For the first time in our history, over 50 percent of all educational funding now comes from the states. As more authority shifts away from the local school, we may be shaping unwittingly a bureaucratic education model that leaves teachers and principals more accountable, but less empowered. In the process, they will be blamed for the failure of design problems dictated unilaterally from above.

One year after the widely publicized report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, Secretary Terrel Bell released another report entitled *The Nation Responds*. This was a summary of school reforms in all 50 states. The vast majority of these initiatives were centrally imposed. They focused on more courses, more

testing, more teacher preparation. Many of these mandates were appropriate and overdue. But I was also deeply troubled that of the 20 school improvement categories cited in the new report, only two supported the renewal of school people. The focus overwhelmingly was on institutional rules and regulations.

As I read through the long list of reform proposals in *The Nation Responds*, I wondered how many of them had been taken to principals and teachers for their suggestions, or to see if the new "engineering plans" for education would work in classrooms and local schools.

I understand that statewide guidelines are essential. We need to clarify our goals. The core curriculum should be more carefully defined. Higher standards for teacher certification are required, and a career ladder would, I feel, strengthen the professional status of the teacher.

Still, education is a human enterprise. Renewal must take place in the heads and hearts of people. And while we tighten the procedures, we also must find ways to give more participation and more empowerment to those who do the work. Our top priorities should focus on those who meet with children and, especially, on the working conditions of the teachers.

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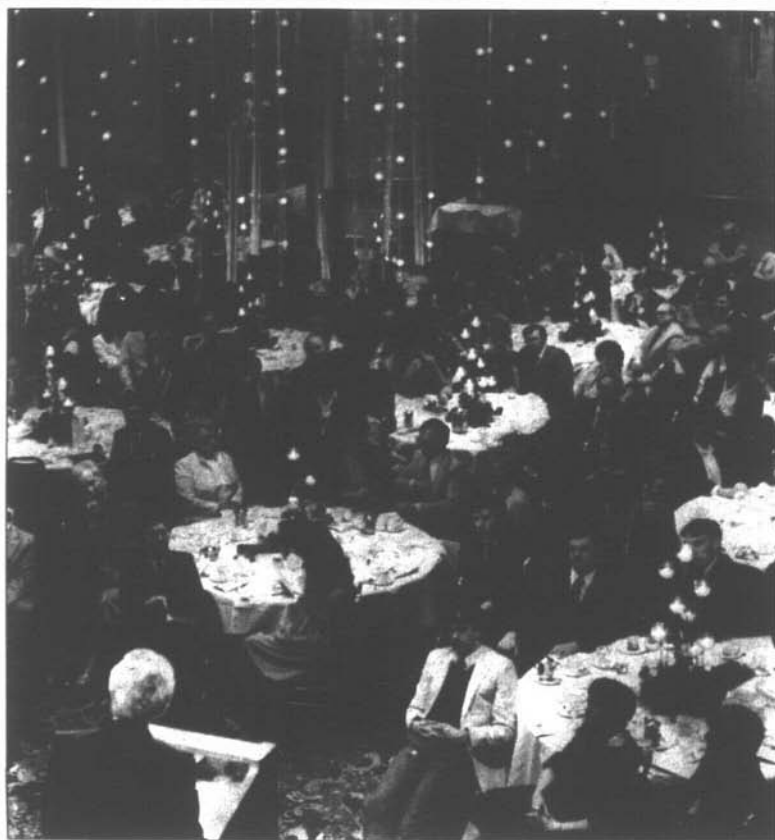
Supporting the Teacher's Dignity

In the Carnegie report called *High School*, we urge the creation of a teacher excellence fund in every school—a competitive program to give support to teachers to implement a good idea. We also call for a teacher travel fund to make it possible for classroom teachers occasionally to go to national conventions or to meet with colleagues from other schools. In our report we say that every five years teachers should be eligible to receive a special contract—with extra pay to match—to support a summer study term. And we call for lengthening the school year by two weeks to give time to teachers for paperwork and professional development. And why not introduce a nationwide teacher exchange program so classroom instructors could spend a term in a district that contrasts sharply with their own?

During the past 12 months I have spoken to hundreds of audiences from coast to coast and met with a dozen or more legislative committees. In each instance I've urged that, in addition to more rules and regulations, we also give support to teachers. And I'm delighted to discover that recognition and renewal projects are popping up all across the nation.

Last spring I participated in a city-wide teacher celebration in Cincinnati. Awards were given to 70 teachers to implement a good idea. One winner, a Latin teacher, was given a summer grant to identify the Roman influences in the greater Cincinnati region. The goal was to help her students see the connection between an ancient culture and the community in which they live.

Last summer, I attended a commencement exercise at a large East



Patrick Reddy, The Cincinnati Post

Boyer addresses a crowd of over 500 teachers, principals, superintendents, and civic and business leaders at a dinner given by the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, which honored over 70 award-winning teachers.

Coast university. Borrowing a suggestion in our report, college officials at that institution had asked students to nominate an outstanding high school teacher who had changed their lives. Nominations flooded in. A student-faculty committee selected the chairperson of the math department at Asbury Park High School to receive an honorary degree. At commencement time this outstanding teacher spoke eloquently to thousands of students and parents about the agony and ecstasy of teaching.

I also attended a reception at the home of the president of Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. Trinity had received a foundation grant to recruit outstanding high school students as prospective teachers. A large group of top-flight candidates applied, and the 17 winners—the Breckenridge Scholars—received four-year,

full-tuition scholarships at Trinity with the understanding that after graduation they would teach three years in the San Antonio public schools. The winners, whom I met at the reception, came from the top 3 percent of their high school class.

One further point. During the past 12 months I've been crusading against the public address system. The abuses of this Orwellian interruption suggest to students that the logistics of the school are more significant than learning. And I'm pleased that at least two states (Texas and California) have urged that the indiscriminate use of the PA system be dramatically curtailed. In small ways such as this, we can reaffirm the dignity and the status of the teacher.

In the Carnegie report we also conclude that we have not just a school problem but a youth problem in this

nation. Time and time again, we heard students say that they felt unneeded and unconnected to the community at large. In our report we propose a new Carnegie unit, a term of voluntary service for all students—a time when they might work at hospitals and nursing homes, at art galleries, or tutor other kids at school.

During the past 12 months we've received dozens of inquiries about the service proposal. Most recently, Superintendent Alonzo Crim in Atlanta has introduced service as a districtwide idea. The point is that we cannot have healthy schools with a pathology among the youth, and it seems clear to me that many students urgently need a larger sense of mission.

Strengthening Leadership

In the end, of course, principals are crucial. Today's principals have limited time, few resources, and virtually no authority to make decisions. They have little or no control over books or budgets and no resources to reward a good idea. One principal told me recently that he had \$40 discretionary money, which was in fact the profit from the Coke machine. The money, he said, was used to buy coffee for the teachers' meetings.

School renewal means renewal of the principal. In August 1984 I attended a week-long, statewide meeting for principals in Florida. This was a man-

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Boyer shares an informal moment at the Greater Cincinnati Foundation dinner with teachers and Father Charles Currie, President of Xavier University.

dated, legislatively funded meeting that, for the first time, brought together all of the state's high school principals. At first there was some understandable resistance, but by the time the session ended there was, I felt, a strong feeling among the principals that the meeting was a good investment and that it contributed significantly to their professional development.

In the same spirit, last July I once again joined the itinerant faculty of the /I/D/E/A/ institute, a Kettering-funded project that has, for many years, promoted the continuing education of school administrators at the school and district levels. I met old friends, some of whom have returned to these week-long sessions for ten years or more because they understand that they must be not only managers, but leaders.

To strengthen school leadership, The Carnegie Foundation announced a grant program to give up to \$3,000 to 200 principals. Within four weeks over 10 percent of all the principals in the nation had applied.

The creative ideas submitted in the applications were most exciting. They included such projects as seminars for teachers on the centrality of language, the use of gifted students as teacher interns, an international seminar for 9th grade students, a teacher travel fund, a master teacher project in which senior teachers work with new instructors, and the list goes on. The specific ideas, however, are less important than the message—the princi-

pal is a leader, the one who brings an educational vision to teachers and to students.

The Carnegie Foundation has also scheduled four national academies for principals—regionally organized institutes in which the winning principals met with colleagues to talk about leadership and school renewal. These 200 principals represent a nationwide network of school leadership that, in the end, may have more to do with educational renewal than the national reports or statewide regulations.

We recently announced Phase II of the school renewal program. This time, larger grants, averaging about \$35,000 each, will be awarded to a smaller number of schools. Again, emphasis is placed on ideas and leadership at the local level.

Finally, we need national leadership as well. If the nation is at risk, it seems to me the nation should respond. Instead of focusing only on merit pay and crime in schools, the President also might propose a senior fellowship program for teachers, similar to the one President Eisenhower called for nearly 30 years ago.

This brings me to the point where I began. The push toward school excellence has been significant and sustained; but while tightening the requirements, we also must concern ourselves with the renewal of the people who meet with children every day—and whose influence will live on long after legislators have turned to other matters and the experts have gone back to Mt. Olympus. □

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