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ADDRESS BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
BEFORE THE
EDUCATIONAL STAFF SEMINAR
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"THE ROLE OF THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING
OFFICE IN THE EVALUATION OF FEDERALLY
FUNDED EDUCATION PROGRAMS"

Over the past decade funds expended for education by all sectors--local, State, Federal, and private--have increased three fold--from \$30 billion in 1962 to \$86 billion in 1972. This same period saw an even greater rate of increase in Federal education expenditures--a four fold increase from \$3 billion to over \$13 billion. Along with this growth in Federal funding there has been a sharp rise in the number of different programs to improve education in the Nation.

In spite of these new programs there is growing concern by the public and by the Congress over the quality of education being made available to the children of America.

A recent issue of the magazine "American Education" cited some alarming statistics about reading, the skill considered by educators to have the most bearing on success in educational endeavors:

- one of every four 11-year-olds in the United States cannot read at grade level; and
- the strictest requirement in the country for graduation from high school is California's--and that requires only that a student read at the eighth grade level.

Add to these statistics the mushrooming cost of education and the financial plight of many of the Nation's schools, and one can readily see the basis for the concern over educational quality.

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Tonight, I would like to give a brief overview of the Federal Government's principal agency for delivery of educational programs - the U.S. Office of Education; outline the General Accounting Office's role in reviewing educational programs; and give some examples of GAO reviews of Office of Education programs. 57

From its inception in 1867 until 1950, the Office of Education was concerned basically with gathering statistics on the condition and progress of education in the Nation. During that period, relatively small programs were established to deal with land-grant colleges and vocational education and to provide financial relief for school districts affected by Federal activity.

In the 1950's the financial relief program was expanded by the 81st Congress through the passage of Public Laws 815 and 874 (aid to federally-impacted areas), and the Office of Education's function was broadened considerably with the passage of the National Defense Education Act of 1958. Legislation enacted in and since the mid-1960's has placed in the Office of Education many new programs involving large amounts of Federal funds in aid to elementary and secondary education, higher education, and vocational education at both the secondary and postsecondary levels. As a result, funds actually appropriated to the Office of Education have increased from about \$540 million in 1962 to about \$5.8 billion in 1972. Thus, the Office of Education has changed from a gatherer of statistics to an administrator of over \$5 billion of educational programs.

For the most part, Federal money for education is made available on a categorical basis, in that funds are awarded for specific purposes

rather than for general aid. Once funds are made available, it is the Federal Government's policy to let State and local governments control their educational programs within the boundaries of Federal guidelines and regulations. In fact, Federal control of education is specifically prohibited in many pieces of education legislation. For example, section 422 of the General Education Provisions Act states that no provision of certain enumerated acts is to be construed to authorize any department, agency, officer, or employee of the United States to exercise any direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration, or personnel of any educational institution, school, or school system.

Notwithstanding the absence of Federal control, the Federal Government has the responsibility to the taxpaying public to see that these funds are being spent for the purposes intended and that the programs developed by the State and local governments are meeting their objectives. This is the type of information that the Congress now seeks from the General Accounting Office.

In keeping with our objective--providing assistance to the Congress--GAO's procedures have evolved considerably over its 50-year history to keep pace with the changes in scope and philosophy of Federal activities, such as those in education.

Initially GAO performed its audit work almost entirely in Washington, D.C., where centralized desk audits were made of financial documents submitted by the Departments and agencies. The major emphasis of these audits was on detecting errors or illegal expenditures.

The Budget and Accounting Procedures Act of 1950 authorized the Comptroller General to require agencies to retain at the site of operations documentation that previously was transmitted to GAO. Thus, GAO was able to develop gradually its comprehensive audit approach--that is, it began to go beyond the legality and propriety of expenditures into aspects of management.

GAO's reviews are still concerned with fiscal and management accountability but more emphasis has been placed on program accountability. Fiscal and management accountability reviews are made to determine whether the law, regulations, and other criteria are being adhered to and whether Federal funds and other resources are being efficiently and economically managed. Program accountability on the other hand is concerned with whether the programs are effective in achieving the objectives intended by the Congress and whether alternative approaches have been examined that might accomplish the objectives more effectively or more economically.

The interest of the Congress in having GAO emphasize program accountability was indicated in the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, which, in essence, asked that GAO increase its efforts to review and analyze the results of ongoing Government programs and activities including the making of cost-benefit studies.

The concern of the Congress about the effectiveness of programs, particularly in the education area, and about the value received for the considerable sums being expended has been further emphasized by the Education Amendments of 1972 which added a section concerning evaluations by GAO to the General Education Provisions Act. This

section provides, in essence, that upon request of a congressional committee having legislative jurisdiction or, to the extent personnel are available, upon request of a member of such committee, the Comptroller General shall conduct studies of existing education statutes and regulations, review agency policies and practices, agency evaluation procedures, and evaluate certain projects or programs. Special attention is to be given to the practice of contracting with private firms, organizations and individuals for studies and services.

With regard to program evaluation I recently informed the Congress and the Office of Management and Budget that in our view, program evaluation is a fundamental part of effective program administration. The prime responsibility for making this evaluation, therefore, rests with the agency administering the program. In line with this, we believe that the Congress should attempt to specify the kinds of information and tests which will enable the agencies, the GAO and the Congress to better assess how well programs are working and whether alternative approaches may offer greater promise.

GAO's basic approach to evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs, or any programs for that matter, is to compare what the program has accomplished--its performance, data--against what it should have accomplished--the objectives of the program. In some instances one or both of the elements needed for evaluation--performance data and specific program goals--are not available, and this has necessitated devising other methods to assess the effectiveness of the programs.

GAO has performed reviews of Federal education programs at a number of agencies including the Office of Economic Opportunity, the

Veterans Administration, and the Department of Defense. The focal point of GAO's efforts, however, has been the Office of Education and I would like to discuss our reviews of four programs administered by this Office.

TITLE I ESEA

The first program I would like to talk about is title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. This title authorizes financial assistance to local educational agencies to meet the special educational needs of educationally deprived children living in areas having high concentrations of children from low-income families. The program is the largest single commitment by the Federal Government to strengthen and improve the educational opportunities in elementary and secondary schools across the Nation, and has been funded at about \$1.5 billion in each of the fiscal years 1971-1973.

Under this program payments are made to the States for grants to local educational agencies for designing and operating projects to overcome the educational deficiencies of the children.

We have made four reviews of the program since its inception. Three of these reviews were concerned principally with the efficiency of the Federal, State, and local administration of the program. Our fourth review, conducted at three local educational agencies in one State, was concerned primarily with the effectiveness of selected projects in meeting the stated needs of the educationally deprived children. In this review we concentrated on those aspects of selected projects which we believed would effect the results of the projects, such as the determination of the needs to be met by the projects and the selection of

children to participate. It was also our intention to evaluate the documentation available at the local educational agencies demonstrating the extent to which project objectives had been reached. However, we encountered problems in all three areas.

All of the local educational agencies had identified general educational needs of the educationally deprived children within their jurisdiction but had not made comprehensive assessments to determine the variety, incidence, or severity of these needs. In our opinion had such assessments been made, the local educational agencies would have been in a better position to design programs having maximum expectations of overcoming the educational deprivation of children selected to participate.

Two of the local educational agencies had not established definitive criteria or procedures for selecting children to participate in their programs, and one did not provide for adequate participation by nonpublic school children. As a result, no one could be sure that, in accordance with the law, the most educationally deprived children had been selected to participate in the programs.

Perhaps the most significant problems we encountered were in the area of demonstration of program results. To begin with, none of the local educational agencies established objectives for their programs in specific measurable terms by the type and degree of change anticipated in the child's performance. For example, one local educational agency devised a reading program with objectives such as:

- -To build a varied vocabulary.
- -To comprehend ideas in complex sentences.
- -To read for enjoyment.

Taking the first objective, to build a varied vocabulary, as an example, the local educational agency should have stated it in terms of an expected rate of increase to be used as a criterion against which actual achievement could have been measured.

The second major problem in demonstrating results involved the evaluation plans used by the local educational agencies. Evaluations that were made were based primarily on opinion surveys and teacher judgements. Although the evaluation plans called for the use of objective test data and data was in fact gathered in some instances, it was not interpreted nor used by the local educational agencies to measure program impact.

Based on the information we obtained from discussion with parents of title I children, teachers and school officials, and examination of various reports prepared by the State and local educational agencies, we concluded that the three local educational agencies had provided new or additional services which otherwise might not have been available, or which would have been available only on a limited basis, to educationally deprived children. However, due to the absence of objective data on program achievements, neither the State nor the local educational agencies were in a position to evaluate the programs' success or to determine whether changes in emphasis or funding were needed.

We recognize that there is considerable adverse opinion as to the value of standardized achievement tests as a true measure of educational gain. We believe, though, that evaluation designs should include some

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objective measures of program impact. The key is to have clearly stated objectives and then to select or devise objective and subjective data gathering instruments to measure progress in relation to these objectives.

The magnitude of Federal funds involved in the program and the continued interest expressed by the Congress and the public in educational projects for the educationally deprived has prompted continued GAO efforts in the title I area. We are currently making a survey to determine the feasibility of conducting a multi-State review of the results of projects designed to increase the reading ability of the educationally deprived child. One of the objectives of the survey will be to determine whether achievement test data is available that we might analyze--perhaps with the assistance of educational consultants--to evaluate the effectiveness of the reading projects. Our evaluation would not of course be restricted to test data, but would also include other types of evidence.

TEACHER CORPS

GAO's most recent reports in the higher education area assessed the impact of the Teacher Corps program in accomplishing its legislative objectives. These objectives, as set forth in the Higher Education Act of 1965, are to (a) strengthen educational opportunities for children in areas having concentrations of low-income families, and (b) encourage colleges and universities to broaden their programs for training teachers.

The Teacher Corps recruits and trains qualified teachers (team leaders) and inexperienced teachers (interns) for service in areas having concentrations of low-income families. Members of the Corps are

assigned to schools in teams consisting of a team leader and several interns. During their service, interns engage in courses of study leading to college or university degrees and to qualification for State teaching certificates.

GAO selected seven Teacher Corps programs for detailed review.

While some objective data were available, the nature of the Teacher Corps program is such that the success of a particular program or the Teacher Corps program as a whole cannot be measured solely by objective type data.

In assessing the effectiveness of the program we used the available objective evaluative data, but relied primarily upon information obtained through questionnaires mailed to all Teacher Corps graduates; interviews with members of the Teacher Corps, regular school teachers, local school officials, college and university officials, and State officials involved with the seven programs; and interviews with Teacher Corps officials to reach our findings and conclusions.

Our summary report on the Teacher Corps program assessed its impact at participating schools and institutions of higher education. We expressed the belief that the program had accomplished its legislative objective of strengthening educational opportunities available to children in low-income area schools where corps members were assigned. The teaching teams introduced several innovative teaching methods and projects not previously used in the schools. They also participated in community activities which provided extracurricular programs and projects involving both the children and their parents. Most importantly though, almost 75 percent of the corps members remained in the field

of teaching and of these, almost 80 percent were teaching in schools serving low-income areas.

In spite of these accomplishments the program had much less impact than it could have had. Many Teacher Corps innovations were not continued after the corps members had completed their assignments, and no specific procedures had been developed to determine which innovations would be desirable for the schools' regular curriculums.

We also reported that while the Teacher Corps program had had some success in encouraging institutions of higher education to broaden their teacher preparation programs, the program's impact was limited because many of the special courses that were developed or adapted for Teacher Corps interns had not been made available to other students majoring in teacher education.

We also concluded that the State departments of education could intensify the program's effectiveness by disseminating information concerning experiments and teaching methods successfully used in Teacher Corps programs in their States. The U.S. Office of Education could further this effort by accumulating and disseminating nationwide data on successful aspects of programs to State departments of education.

FOLLOW THROUGH

The next program I would like to discuss is Follow Through, a comprehensive program for children in kindergarten through third grade. It focuses on children who have been in Head Start and whose families are low-income. Head Start as you probably know is a program for underprivileged preschoolers and is designed to help the disadvantaged child

catch up before he enters the first grade of school--be it kindergarten or grade 1.

Congress created Follow Through in December of 1967 because early Head Start evaluations showed that the gains made by Head Start graduates soon dissipated if not reinforced in the primary grades. Therefore, Follow Through makes grants to local educational agencies to provide to eligible children and their families the same services as Head Start, including education, health care, nutrition, and social services. Direct parent participation in the conduct of local programs and community involvement are program requirements.

In addition to serving about 70,000 needy children at 172 projects in 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, at an annual cost of about \$60 million, Follow Through has been evaluating 22 new educational approaches to teaching disadvantaged children. The purpose of this research is to find out which teaching methods are most successful for children from low-income families and to disseminate this information to school administrators. The research findings will also be used to formulate future Federal compensatory education policy in the primary grades.

The Office of Education has already started to significantly expand the program through a 5-year plan of turning the administration of Follow Through over to the States and of using State and title I funds to help finance projects. After the plan is accomplished and the evaluation is completed, the Office of Education anticipates using the results of the Follow Through program as a basis to request new

legislation and an estimated \$2 billion for compensatory education program serving disadvantaged children in kindergarten through the third grade.

To evaluate Follow Through, we looked at the achievement the children had made and at how well the other services such as the medical and dental examinations had been delivered to them. We also evaluated the eligibility of the children participating in the program, the extent of parent and local community involvement, Follow Through's coordination with local Head Start projects, and program administration. Finally, but perhaps most importantly, we analyzed the Office of Education's overall research and development effort, which today is the program's main emphasis even though the congressional intent for the program continues to be reinforcing the gains of Head Start children.

We conducted our review at nine local educational agencies in nine different states. We reviewed small, medium, and large projects; urban and rural projects; and projects that represent a cross-section of the various types of educational approaches being evaluated by the Office of Education. Work was also performed at the Office of Education headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Our attempts to measure the effectiveness of Follow Through, like our attempts to measure the effectiveness of title I, ESEA, met with considerable difficulty. We found that the objectives that had been established were general rather than specific and the performance data was incomplete.

We were able to obtain and use some measures of educational gain. We used data that the Office of Education had collected to compare the

gain Follow Through students had made to the gain made by a group of students who had similar characteristics but who were not in the Follow Through program. The assumption was that if the Follow Through gain was greater, the program was successful.

We also talked to the teachers and parents of Follow Through children, including the teachers of Follow Through graduates, to determine if they noticed any measurable benefits. Finally, we determined at three projects with the help of a consultant how much a Follow Through child should have gained taking into consideration the income and education level of his parents and compared this score to what he actually gained. We then determined whether the difference between the two scores was significant.

Analyses of all the data has not been completed, but we plan to issue a report on this review to the Congress in early 1973. We anticipate making several recommendations which will, if implemented, affect not only the Follow Through program but also future compensatory education programs and evaluations of those programs. The recommendations will be aimed at (1) improving local program administration, evaluation, and documentation and (2) improving the national evaluation to make it more useful for local decision-making and for providing information to school administrators on successful Follow Through projects.

TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

The last area I should like to discuss, although not strictly an evaluation of the effectiveness of an educational program, warrants mentioning because of our approach to data gathering.

In 1966 the Nation was faced with an unprecedented shortage of almost 170,000 qualified teachers. This shortage was most acute in inner city and depressed rural areas. In recent years, however, record numbers of prospective elementary and secondary school teachers have graduated from colleges and universities, and reports indicate that many school districts are experiencing a surplus of applicants for teaching positions.

Although officials of the various government and private organizations involved in teacher training and occupational forecasting will agree that the Nation faces a problem with respect to a surplus of teachers, they recognize that there are shortages of teachers in specialized subject fields and in certain geographic areas.

We have recently undertaken a review of the relationship of federally supported teacher training programs to the current teacher supply and demand situation.

With advice from the Office of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics and private organizations such as the National Education Association; Council of Chief State School Officers; and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, our auditors designed questionnaires and mailed them to randomly selected local educational agencies (school districts), teacher colleges and universities, and all 50 State departments of education. The questions were designed to obtain information to show if any imbalances exist in teacher supply and demand, and if so in what subject fields and geographic locations. The answers should also give an indication of the probable causes of and possible solutions to these imbalances, if they exist.

The questionnaires were designed for the answers to be put in a format for computer processing so that the data could be summarized in a number of different ways. For example, we can summarize the data by locality served by the local educational agency, by geographic area of the Nation, and so on.

In 4 selected States, we held interviews with State, college and university, and school district officials to expand on the answers given in their questionnaires. We also talked with several teachers to obtain their comments on various issues bearing on the supply and demand situation.

This review is still in process and final reporting plans have not been finalized.

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As you can see by the above examples I've discussed, the assessment of a program's effectiveness is by no means a simple task. Objective data which would give quick insights into effectiveness is often not available at the Federal, State, or local level. Further; the objectives of many educational programs are written in vague terms that do not readily lend themselves to measurement.

Those people, at all levels of government, responsible for program formulation and evaluation system design must work at solving these problems to provide program managers with information they can use to evaluate success and determine whether approaches or funding levels need to be revised.

Those of us in the GAO will also be working on new evaluation methods and techniques to improve our ability to assess educational effectiveness and enable us to continue to deliver meaningful information to the Congress.