

1372 ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION AMENDMENTS

AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS PROGRAM IN URBAN CENTERS

The crisis of inadequate urban schools is nationwide. The convergence of disadvantaged populations in slum areas, the lack of socio-economic opportunities, the marginal cultural experiences, as well as the exposure to impoverished schools, perpetuate and further precipitate a host of social evils.

The schools are the only social agency to which all of the children of our multi-ethnic population are exposed. It is here where we should provide opportunities for intellectual challenge, integrated relationships, and cultural and emotional enrichment.

In view of our economic wealth and our great reservoirs of knowledge, we are spending relatively less on our schools than many poorer countries. Schools today lack the commitment necessary to fulfill basic educational needs. The gap is widening at a tragic pace because of the tempo of current social change. This is where we have come after a hundred and fifty years of democratic education.

There are controlling basic components essential to all educational systems. The omission of any threatens the minimal adequacy of all. What the AFT here proposes is not revolutionary. It is simply a reaffirmation of the integral elements of any school system which aims to be educational rather than custodial. What exists now in most urban centers is an extensive deficit in the essentials necessary to any educational system. Teachers cannot work under such conditions without violating their integrity as professional educators.

Is it unreasonable to ask for:

1. A seat and a desk for every child for a full school day?
2. A building of viable size? Giant schools magnify within their walls the impersonal regimentation and crowding which are so oppressively a feature of modern urban life. Can we not create within the school a small world where children feel safe? Where there is a room for every class and every rightful activity?
3. A class small enough so that every child can receive the individual attention necessary for learning and growth? Is not informed adult support a condition for the cultivation of curiosity, a prerequisite for learning and development?
4. A policy of selecting supervisors who are sensitive to the needs of these children, their community, and their teachers, and respectful of their potential?
5. A system of providing efficiently, adequately, and promptly those supplies necessary for a well-functioning curriculum?
6. A pupil-staff ratio that allows for a sufficient number of specialized personnel, librarians, psychologists, social workers, counselors, reading experts, in a peer-team relationship with teachers in meeting a common challenge?
7. A range of services specially designed to recognize the many factors which contribute to the malfunctioning of children and to develop new programs of rehabilitation? Does not the lack of these services generate a rising clamor for more punitive controls and for the exclusion of children? The disruptive actions of these children are only intelligible when seen as a symptomatic defense against intolerable conditions in the school and the larger community.
8. A democratic framework that elicits the genuine involvement of the teachers in formulating and developing a climate appropriate to these children?
9. Recognition that the school can no longer afford to be an alien island in an urban village? Leadership by boards of education in mobilizing the immediate school community for a bootstrap operation? More extensive opportunities for parents, neighbors, and school personnel to meet at home and in school, to be exposed to each other's personalities and aspirations? Is it not conceivable that this might lead to a mutuality of understanding and trust which is basic to effective education?
10. A plan aiming at totally integrated schools that would give all our children the opportunity to learn about and live with children of a wide variety of national, religious, ethnic, and cultural heritages? Can we not take advantage of this educationally favorable climate to help our children develop a world without prejudice?
11. A curriculum less invested with middle class values and accents, and more respectful of the current meaningful realities and strengths of our multi-faceted population?