



—Clemens Kalischer

WHO NEEDS SCHOOLS?

by JOHN H. FISCHER

For all the turmoil of the Sixties—the excitement, the demonstrations, the revolutionary rhetoric—the decade now ended has brought little actual alteration in most schools. To be sure, the atmosphere has changed. Students' hair is longer, their clothing scruffier, and their language less inhibited. The teachers, too, seem different. They are more outspoken, better organized, and less compliant than they were. But the institutional character of schools—their purposes, forms, and functions—look in 1970 much as they did in 1960.

What has happened during these ten years is that pressures of the sort that produce and usually must precede in-

stitutional change have accumulated to the point where significant reforms are not only possible but inevitable. Whether or not, recalling George Counts's query of the 1930s, the schools will dare now to build a new social order, the social order appears ready to rebuild the schools.

Predicting the schools of tomorrow has long been an attractive pastime for scholars, pundits, and prophets, but today the ordinary citizen is coming into the act. Although agreement on the kinds of schools we need is still something less than unanimous, parents, taxpayers, and voters do seem to agree that the schools are less effective than they ought to be. The current dissatisfaction is more than the chronic criticism to which schools and teachers are normally subjected, for it reflects a growing sense that the whole system needs overhauling. However

widely they may differ in their premises and purposes, conservative elders and radical youngsters alike insist that American education, as it now operates, is not responding as it should to the problems of modern society.

The most impressive evidence of the new attitude is an increasing willingness to consider solutions that heretofore would have been unthinkable—among them the abandonment of public schools. Middle-class city families began some years ago to express their preferences; by the thousands they are removing their children from the public schools and competing desperately and at high cost for the limited places available in private schools. Ghetto parents, sick and tired of condescending and recalcitrant school officials, are battling them for control of the schools in their own neighborhoods. Minority groups are organizing store-

front centers and street academies to give their children a better chance of making it. Some of the alternatives, such as the Job Corps and the Neighborhood Youth Corps, take the form of programs to rehabilitate the casualties of the school system. Many aspects of the educational activities of the armed forces, industry, and the unions are merely extensions, under other auspices, of functions that a properly conducted school system could and should be expected to provide.

Even the affluent suburbs that have long supported elaborate and expensive public school programs are now rejecting bond issues and higher budgets. The shortage of money is obviously one factor, but another, clearly, is a growing disbelief that the schools are giving proper value for the money put into them. And in Washington, the White House insists that before more federal funds are committed to education, ways must be found to get more for the taxes already being spent.

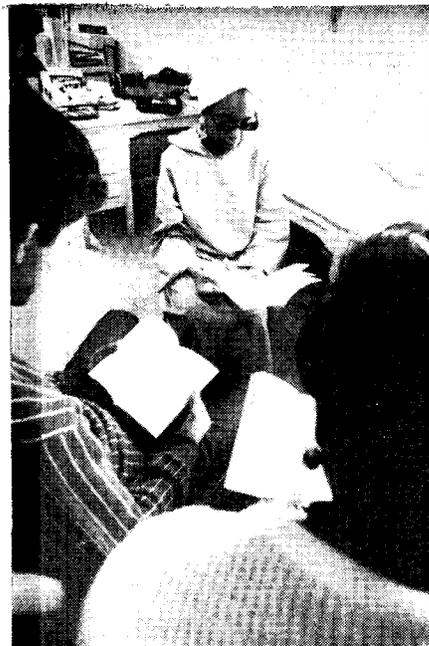
One result of the complaints is the proposal that alternative schools be established to compete with public institutions. A particularly bold venture is the so-called "voucher plan," which, ideally, would enable every child to attend whatever school his parents choose for him. With the pupil would go a voucher entitling his school to the amount of money appropriated per pupil in the local school budget. By thus expanding the options available to parents, the proponents of vouchers mean to stimulate creation of new independent schools, free of the inertia of public school bureaucracies and not inhibited by the traditional constraints of existing private schools. A major consequence envisioned by the proponents of this plan is the rapid reform of public institutions. The hope is that public school authorities would be persuaded by the pressure of competition to change their ways—or else, "else" meaning a precipitate loss of pupils and, with it, the money to pay teachers and administrators. A pilot program in vouchering will shortly begin under the auspices of the Center for the Study of Public Policy at Harvard and with the support of a grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity. It will be watched with interest by many observers and with more than a little apprehension by public school people.

Despite the enrollment of a sizable minority of children in nonpublic schools, elementary and secondary education in the United States is, for all practical purposes, a public monopoly. Aside from the 10 or 11 per cent whose parents prefer religious schools or can afford the tuition fees of independent schools, the sole course available to most families is to send their children

to the public school designated by the local school board. Nor in most school districts, and particularly in large cities, can a parent exercise any effective influence on what his child learns, how he is taught, or how he is treated as a person in the public school he is required to attend. One need not be an enemy of public education to agree that the stimulus of real competition might produce more responsiveness and faster responses than years of public discussion and political pressure have so far achieved.

The issue whether schools should be publicly or privately controlled, competitive or monopolistic, is overshadowed, however, by a prior and more basic question: Are they necessary? While a flat negative answer would be as irresponsible as it would be shocking to most people, the question cannot be dismissed out of hand. For some children, schools of the types now most common are simply not appropriate institutions. The radical question must be raised, for it deserves a well-considered response. Extremist critics argue (usually, however, within a narrow context) that existing schools are so damaging to the development of children that no child should be required to attend them. Instead, they say, he should spend his time acquiring whatever he needs to learn directly from the culture in which he lives. Such participation, they argue, would be superior to current pedagogy and less harmful to the child's growth and personality. Technologists press the claim that teaching machines, television, and tape recorders are more effective than most teachers, and that the best arrangement of all would be a computer console in every home.

Others, skeptical about schools but still hooked on humans, advocate a system of child-care centers extending from age two or younger to the upper primary level and providing every child with a combination of services integrated to assure optimum physical, mental, emotional, and social development. Intellectual development is presumed to follow as a consequence of a suitably nurturing environment in which the child finds opportunity, stimulation, and reward. And unintentionally augmenting the company of those who deny the necessity for formal schooling are the teachers and administrators who endorse the contention that some children don't need schools. These are the people who every year suspend from school substantial numbers of children. They act on the ground that exceptional behavior, which demonstrates to some observers a clear need for competent instruction and intensive care, is really evidence that the public interest, if not the chil-



—Clayton J. Price (Black Star)

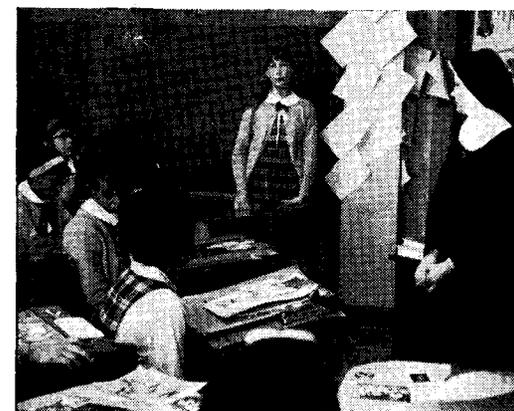
Minorities have organized storefront centers and street academies to give their children a new chance to make it.

dren's, is best served by excluding them from school.

Approaching the question from a somewhat different viewpoint are the advocates of "schools without walls." This group sees the process of schooling as more important than the place and holds that learning comes most profitably from experience in a variety of circumstances, exposures, and involvement. The community becomes the school, and whoever knows what the pupil wants to learn becomes his teacher. This is, of course, precisely the way most of us have learned the greater part of what we know. While estimates of the community's power to teach may divide the theorists, that power is a fact of life, and one too often ignored by school people in general and curriculum planners in particular.

The numerous proposals for replacing schools with less restrictive oppor-

(Continued on page 90)



—Black Star

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Schools Make News

The Politics of Despair

THE rising discontent of the young with their schools, colleges, and society at large was recently documented by several surveys of high school and college students. While the majority of high school students still seem satisfied with their schools, a large minority—up to 40 per cent—find their schools “repressive,” education an “assembly-line process,” and society decaying and without ideals, according to a recent Purdue University survey, *High Schools in 1970: A Study of the Student-School Relationship*. This large minority also tends to feel that their schools—teachers, principals, and counselors—are indifferent to their welfare.

Among college students, the Vietnam War is the cause of vast political and social alienation, according to a six-month nationwide survey conducted by Kenneth and Mary Gergen, Swarthmore College psychologists. The study, which included interviews with 5,000 students at thirty-nine colleges and universities, stated that negative reactions to the war included uncertainty about careers, decreased desire for graduate degrees, less attention paid to studying, and reduced respect for university administrators. One-third of the students interviewed said the war had made them feel more negative about organized religion and their families. One in five had considered leaving the U.S. One in three said they had altered career plans—many seeking a draft-exempt occupation, others indicating extreme confusion over their futures.

But across the nation, some students are channeling their disillusionment and despair over the war into constructive action by attempting to influence Congressional elections this fall. The Princeton Movement for a New Congress says that twenty-three universities with enrollments totaling 250,000 are following its plan to readjust their class calendar so that students can have two weeks off before the November elections to work for candidates of their choice. Student groups at 36 per cent of the responding state colleges and universities have also made plans to work in fall political campaigns, according to a survey by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, representing 272 institutions and some two million students. Few of these colleges, however, either because of state policy or administrative discretion, will be allowing time off.

The president of the National Student Association, which has chapters at more than 800 colleges, predicted increased student activism in 1970-71, but the annual NSA congress rejected a radical plan proposed by Rennie Davis for the shutdown of Washington next May by student blockades if American troops are still in Vietnam, agreeing to support the May 1 march only if it is nonviolent and confined to the area of the Pentagon. Instead, NSA voted to urge students to campaign for peace candidates and “engage in all other legitimate means of protests.”

Dope About Dope

BECAUSE YOUNG PEOPLE in the past few years have been inundated with a mass of contradictory and confusing information about the effects of different drugs, a group of fifteen students at Beloit College in Wisconsin has established a clearinghouse to collect and spread the most reliable information about marijuana, hashish, LSD, and other drugs. The aim is to provide valid and unbiased scientific data so that people can more effectively evaluate the information given them about drugs.

The organization, known as the Student Association for the Study of Hallucinogens (STASH), has, with the aid of \$50,000 in foundation grants, gathered into its library 98 per cent of the known literature on marijuana and has compiled the first definitive bibliography on cannabis, dating back 100 years (this is the first of a series; the second, on hallucinogens, will be published the first of the year); held two two-day seminars, one in Beloit last year on the problems and future of drug research, and one in June at the University of Chicago examining the control of adolescent drug use. STASH, using rented IBM typesetting equipment, has published the symposium speeches in book form and writes and edits its own bimonthly newsletter, *Capsules*, with specific in-



formation on current research and individual drugs, and the journal *Phantastica*, featuring book reviews, reports of meetings, and articles from professionals.

STASH is wholly operated by students, independent of the college, although it does retain seventy-five of the best-informed professionals in the field on a consultant basis. It was started two years ago by Jim Gamage, twenty-two, and Ed Zerkin, twenty-one, during a required field term from Beloit College when students pursue vocational projects that interest them. Both are now on leave from the college, but both plan to go on to medical school while continuing STASH. The group is neither pro nor con drugs. They simply believe, after being personally confronted with drug-abuse problems, that not enough is factually reported about drugs in the news media for the development of sound social and legal attitudes. STASH is located at 638 Pleasant Street, Beloit, Wisconsin 53511.

And out of the West . . .

CALIFORNIA LAST MONTH passed a major education reform bill that permits almost anyone, a businessman or community leader, to become a school superintendent. In a vast overhaul of the education-licensing process, school districts will be encouraged to hire any talented person without regard to administrative licensing or professional status.

The new law will be administered by a fifteen-member commission to be appointed by Governor Reagan. The commission will have its own staff, wide latitude in framing regulations, and will be controlled only by a veto from the State Board of Education.

The new law also provides for more flexible teacher licensing. Rather than carefully examining each individual applicant, the commission will examine teacher-training courses at each college, approve those that meet its standards, and then certify graduates of approved colleges as teachers. Further, the law limits to nine units the number of required “How to teach” courses a student must take, on the grounds that many are anti-intellectual and really don’t benefit a new teacher.

It’s Simple Arithmetic

JULIUS W. HOBSON, in his new career as director of the Washington Institute for Quality Education, a nonprofit research group, last month published the pamphlet “The Damned Children,” which provides local community activists with a guide for determining specific inequalities in school systems.