

**THE SCHOOL REVIEW  
MONOGRAPHS, NO. I. RESEARCH  
WITHIN THE FIELD OF  
EDUCATION, ITS ORGANIZATION  
AND ENCOURAGEMENT**

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NUMBER I

Research within the Field of  
Education, Its Organization  
and Encouragement

## FUNDAMENTAL ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS

ELLWOOD P. CUBBERLEY

*Professor of Education, Leland Stanford Junior University*

I have been asked to state some of the more fundamental administrative problems, financial in nature, which are at present in urgent need of study and which may be solved, in part at least, by united effort on the part of students of education. Without taking time for any preliminaries, and without attempting to present any comprehensive outline, I will briefly describe three major administrative problems upon which we can profitably expend a large amount of effort. The present status of educational organization and interest makes the study of these three problems especially opportune.

### I. THE PROBLEM OF FINANCE

The problem which underlies all other problems in school administration is the problem of securing adequate finance. Many things we desire and talk about very much are impossible until this key problem—finance—has been solved in a satisfactory manner. Almost everywhere this is a pressing problem. But few states have as yet evolved any rational scheme either for the raising of revenue for the support of education or for the apportionment of the revenue after it has been collected. Not only is the revenue levied for the maintenance of public schools inadequate, but the basis upon which the revenue is raised is one that never will give good results. The methods and the units of taxation are fundamentally wrong, and no satisfactory state system of education can be evolved until a new and a better basis for securing revenue has been put into operation. We may talk as much as we like about improving the teacher, the conditions of education, the rural schools, etc., but with little real result unless additional revenue is provided. Real improvement along such lines is fundamentally a question of money.

What is needed most in the large majority of our states is sufficient revenue to provide a good system of schools throughout the state, and this can never be in such states as Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, or Kansas, under present taxation and apportionment laws. Local maintenance and the census basis of apportionment are both thoroughly bad, and should be superseded by better plans as soon as can be done. In another place<sup>\*</sup> I have illustrated the conditions and the way out in some detail, and I do not need to elaborate the matter here.

This financial problem is one which can be worked upon with excellent results by men in almost every state in the Union. Everywhere, almost, our so-called educational leaders are trying to find a solution for their financial difficulties, but the only way out they seem to know is that of raising the tax rate. It may be necessary to raise the school tax in any case, but raising the tax alone will never give the results desired. The taxation and apportionment plans of the states must be overhauled as well. What is needed, in most of our states, is a new campaign of education along the financial side. The first to be educated will need to be the schoolmasters themselves. When they have thoroughly grasped the significance and difficulties of the financial problem, a campaign of education with the purpose of educating the public will be necessary. The old principle that the wealth of the state should educate the children of the state needs to be insisted upon anew, and it must be insisted upon that the burdens and advantages of education shall be more nearly equalized. The fundamental problem, for example, in such states as Illinois, Missouri, and Kansas is a problem of taxation and revenue, while in such states as Michigan and Texas it is more a problem of apportionment.

So long as our school systems remain local school systems, as opposed to being parts of a real state school system, but little fundamental educational progress can be made. What is needed in every state is a system of school support which makes the child to be educated the basis, and a system of apportionment which clearly recognizes the unit of cost in education—the teacher.

<sup>\*</sup> *School Funds and Their Apportionment.* Teachers College Contributions to Education, No. 2.

This problem of taxation and apportionment is the most thoroughly fundamental problem in the administrative side of education today. Careful statistical studies of conditions and needs should be made in each state, following the lines of the general study cited. With the facts and figures thus collected, the campaign for a better financing of education can be begun.

## II. THE PROBLEM OF COUNTY REORGANIZATION

Closely connected with the problem of finance and apportionment is that of a reorganization of our but slightly related town and rural and high schools along rational business and educational lines, with a view to economical and efficient maintenance. In nearly every county in the United States, a few southern states alone excepted, we find a multitude of small, inefficient, and often unnecessary schools. By a rational system of reorganization, based on educational needs and efficient service, from 20 to 60 per cent of these schools could be dispensed with, better schools and graded and high schools provided for the county, much greater returns for the same money secured, and a thoroughly rational system of school organization and supervision provided. The method by which this can be accomplished has been well set forth in a recent publication of the United States Department of Agriculture,<sup>1</sup> and to this I refer for a detailed explanation of the nature of the reorganization which might be effected.

To secure the best results, and to produce an educational and business-like organization, the county superintendency should also be included in the reorganization, as has been done in a few states. The county superintendent of schools should be evolved into an expert educational officer as soon as possible, and his political connections should be terminated. To secure this much-to-be-desired end, he should be appointed by a board, preferably an elected county board of education, and appointed because of professional and administrative capacity, and without reference to residence or political affiliation. In other words, the office should be thrown open to brains and capacity, and the present protective

<sup>1</sup> George W. Knorr, *Consolidated Rural Schools and the Organization of a County System*, Bulletin No. 232, Office of Experimental Stations.



tariff levied in favor of the home politician should be withdrawn in the interests of the children. The sooner we take our county school systems entirely out of politics and place them on a basis closely analogous to our city school systems, the better it will be for the schools.

This would give us county boards of education, composed of laymen, closely analogous to city boards of education, which would select and appoint the county superintendent and a sufficient number of deputies properly to supervise the schools of the county, and would oversee all business and financial affairs. In conjunction with the superintendent this body could proceed to reorganize the school system of the entire county along rational educational and business lines. Useless and inefficient schools could be dispensed with, central graded schools established where needed, rural high schools provided, and close and adequate professional supervision instituted at, in general, no greater total outlay than is now necessary to maintain an unnecessary number of small and inefficient schools.

A series of studies could be made, by counties, following the lines laid down by Mr. Knorr in the document cited, which would do much to help along a movement for rational county school organization.

### III. THE STUDY OF UNITS OF COST

In the investigation of this topic we are as yet only in the merest beginnings. The pioneer studies of Elliott and Strayer<sup>1</sup> have thrown some real light on the nature and difficulties of the problem, and have paved the way for further work. The United States Bureau of Education will issue, some time during the year, a bulletin containing a study of the data collected by the Census Office with reference to educational systems. This will form another valuable contribution to the subject, and bring us a little nearer to the study of units of cost. The national bureau is also, in connection with the Association of School Accounting Officers, the Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association, and state and city school officers, trying to secure

<sup>1</sup>Teachers College Contributions to Education Series.

agreement upon uniform forms for accounting and arranging statistical data. This is a necessary first step. There must be uniformity in data before we can compare different systems. Once uniformity in accounting is secured we can then proceed to a study of the various units of cost for school systems of different sizes and located in different parts of the county, and gradually establish certain cost units, or norms of expenditure.

Of these, we know almost nothing today, and the variations between school systems on different items of cost are very large—too large to be explained on a basis of varying degrees of efficiency. While a certain latitude as to expenditure must always be allowed for between different school systems, the introduction of business methods of estimating and auditing expenditures cannot help but be of service. There can be little doubt but that there are at present many unrecognized financial wastes in the administration of our schools, county and rural as well as city and town, which a study of units of cost will reveal and correct; and there also can be little doubt but that there is much very unwise expenditure which a comparative study of units of expenditure will lay bare. The purpose of all such studies is not so much to reduce total cost as to secure greater returns from the money expended.

This problem is a large one, and one which may engage the efforts of many workers for the next decade, at least. It is one of the most important administrative problems now before us, and the co-operation of many workers and institutions is desirable.

## EXPERIMENTAL EDUCATION

WALTER F. DEARBORN

Associate Professor of Education, The University of Chicago

A systematic statement of experimental problems in education within the limits of this paper could result in little more than an enumeration of titles. A sufficient estimate of the present status of experimental work in education, which it is the object of this paper to present, may possibly be as well secured by reviewing in some detail two or three typical problems or lines of investigation. We shall choose for this purpose problems which have thus far been studied mainly in the psychological laboratory with a view to showing that, so far as the educational experimenter is concerned, they may now best be studied in the form of the school experiment.

In arguing for the school experiment the writer would not, however, have it be forgotten that in existing school records and reports, and in present school practices, there is already accumulated or available a body of data which, if properly evaluated, just as truly represents the results of experimental investigation as any new experiments might do. School practices always represent great educational experiments; and in summoning laborers into the field it may be well to remember that the fields are already white unto the harvest and that reapers now are needed quite as much as the sowers and planters of new experiments. The statistical studies of Thorndike, Ayres, and others have uncovered results which it would take years of new experimentation to establish. School superintendents and principals may well concern themselves first with these evidences of what has been going on in their schools before raising the question of new experiments. Comparisons of the differences in the retardation and elimination of large city with small city or town schools and their causes; of the effect in these respects of the manual-training or commercial high school compared with that of the usual type of high school; a determination of what sort of pupils go to these schools as judged, for one