

THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

VOLUME VIII

JANUARY, 1927

NUMBER 1

A DOLLAR'S WORTH OF EDUCATION

This address before the Western State Taxpayers' Conference was published in the *Tax Digest* (November, 1926), Los Angeles, California.

IN THESE days when tax burdens are greatly increasing, it is perfectly natural that attention should be focused upon the largest item—education. It is always the largest item that seems to offer the largest possibility of a cut, though this by no means follows. It may be spent far more effectively than many smaller items. That is a fact to be determined. It will be determined not by prejudice, but by judicial examination.

Some tax associations, notably the one in California, are doing just the type of work that educationalists and taxpayers and other kinds of Americans appreciate. It is not trying to dictate American policy or to change the fundamental American traditions, which insure free government through the fostering of intelligence. It is merely inquiring into the administration of school fund and asking if the money is well spent. There are other leagues of taxpayers which exercise no such restraint, and are more propagandistic than judicial. They are perfectly willing to wreck the school system and American democratic institutions, provided they can save a few dollars. Such efforts are futile. They can have no permanent success. They stir animosities which are slow to heal. They separate themselves in the name of economy from the schoolmasters who are striving for efficiency, when it is plain to everybody that the forces for efficiency and economy must co-operate if the public is to get what it needs at the lowest reasonable cost.

I take it that this tax conference is not interested in a saving of school moneys which would change the fundamental nature of our American institutions and our national life. Our political forbears have determined that there shall be equality of opportunity for our youth to develop its human capacities through schooling. You are not interested in the tax reducer who says that there can be too many educated and intelligent men and women. Or in the fellow who fears there will be a short labor supply of the ignorant and docile kind, if schooling is too freely supplied. You want schooling, but you wish your dollar's worth of education.

How is a dollar's worth of education to be determined? In the same way that you know whether or not you are getting a dollar's worth of nails. It is indeed strange how many business men fail to see the fundamental likeness, and go astray in their thinking. They think that they ought to get a perfect human product from the schools at any price they feel comfortable in paying. That economic version is not true anywhere in business where men ask and pay a price. Quality and quantity go up or down as the price paid varies. This is just as true in schooling as it is in any economic service. Hold fast to this thought and many fallacies in thinking about school expenses will disappear.

The Changing Dollar

A dollar's worth of nails today is different from a dollar's worth several decades ago. Science and industrial progress have improved quality and quantity in production. You may need more or less of a thing, or a better kind. The dollar is not the same dollar. Its purchasing power has changed. All these factors have to be kept

in mind in school costs, yet they are not. Educational science and psychology can now give us a better educational product than before, and we want it. Our standard of living has raised here as elsewhere. It is the privilege of a democratic people to have better schools just as it is theirs to prefer an automobile to a horse and wagon.

The problem of getting people to want something else than they do, is another problem. Perhaps they have the wrong values and are spending too much money in one place. But this is a problem in the moral, social, and spiritual reconstruction of men and women. It is not a problem in economics. They may be spending more than their income. This is serious, but it is primarily a question of morality, though it has terrific economic effects.

The only way to know whether you are getting your dollar's worth in education is by comparative study. What is the other fellow getting for his dollar? How does he educate more people in a better way by spending less money? What is his method of administration? How is spending organized? What is the training of the spenders? How far, finally, can we apply his methods to our differing conditions? The last question will keep us sane.

There are two domains in which we can watch the uses of a dollar. The first is in the domain of administration and the second in the domain of teaching. We are more at home in the first field than in the second. Here is where taxpayers' associations have done their chief work. Locating schools, building and bonding, purchasing supplies, hiring and distributing teachers, have been the chief factors taken into account. Improving the effectiveness in turning out more and better human product is still a mysterious field to the layman, but the educationalist is beginning to understand it through the new science in education. Taxpayers must be concerned with it.

In the field of administration there are

certain obvious comparisons of methods which give aid.

We can give education cheaper and better through the consolidation of schools and the transportation of pupils, through sending students to another school district with one district paying another, where these devices are applicable to the particular case.

Larger units of school management than the little country district will help. County or community units of management may be given some larger use than now, without destroying local self-government, an essential feature in American life not to be lightly put aside. There is no more delicate problem than to determine which school functions shall be de-centralized. Only experience will tell what is right. The present passion for centralizing everything to get financial efficiency is dangerous. It is stressing consideration of one factor and losing sight of others. You may save money and get a centralized and standardized bureaucracy, inject politics into your schools and make them easy victims of propaganda. The representative of a new league of taxpayers' associations in one state proposes that all the schools be under control of one central state board and that all teachers be appointed by this board of laymen with professional advice. Such a board might well determine minimum standards of training and certification, but the hiring of teachers should be left with some authority nearer the parents of the children they teach. Anglo-Saxon civilization, of which America is a part, is more broadly common sense by its experience than it is narrowly and relentlessly logical in pursuing a single object.

Sources of Waste

The locating of different types of schools may, in these days of local pride, be a great source of waste. Four years of high school may be maintained where there should be only two years. Junior colleges may be maintained at home where the expense would be less than if students are sent away.

Large units of management on the higher ranges of schooling make for economy. Fortunately the new articulations of the school system will aid local adjustment. Where once we had just elementary schools, high schools and colleges, we now have respectable and effective units, including elementary schools of six years, junior high schools of three years, senior high schools of three years, and junior colleges of two years. Meager attendance is sometimes unavoidable. When it is, we must pay the bill. But it is more often avoidable with modern transportation, to saturate a school unit to the point of high working efficiency and economy, that is, to a thrifty point of organization.

Central purchasing instead of district purchasing is an advantage clearly demonstrated by every study made. One specialized office can do better than eighty school boards of laymen who do not make buying a major business. But experience opposes the purchasing for a school system being merged with a bureau of the general political government. School systems should be given a certain autonomy, like the courts. Their immense budgets are a constant temptation to politicians who would use their buying and hiring as patronage. We have clearly fought our way to independence of politics. Why retreat to ancient evils of which we are largely rid?

Clear, careful budgeting is of high advantage. But the budget officer who recommends cuts and reductions should be more than an accountant dealing with figures representing dollars. He should know something about function. All efficiency is related to educational function. In many cases the budgeting political officer is hopelessly ignorant. The budget is a splendid tool in the hands of a competent mind, and a stupid instrument when it is not. Budget forms must be made up with more regard for interpreting tasks to be performed than is the case at present.

Economy in Teaching

In the domain of teaching we have just begun to study economy and efficiency in a scientific manner. This is a wholly psychological problem which the ordinary layman does not and probably will not understand. Here reliance on the professional expert must be had. Segregation and different speed of mastery among groups of pupils is an economy. The bright will go faster and save school years. The slower will move ahead at their own pace without tripping and charging repeated years to the taxpayer.

Another illustration is provided in the lay opposition to supervisors. Good supervisors of ordinary teachers double the effective service of the teachers under them. It is all a matter of when and where and how they are used, a problem in educational adjustment. On the budget they look like extra help and are readily lopped off. Better increase the size of classes and provide good supervision than do without it.

Another fallacy is the talk about "trimmings, fads, and frills" in the course of study. With so many kinds of human nature to be served, what is a frill to one student is a need to another. The chief reason these subjects have not been eliminated is because the different parents could not agree. Therefore it is left to the schoolmasters, where it may better be left. The science of their own profession will take care of the matter. There is another economy fallacy that lurks in this field. To maintain some of these modern objects does not add their total budget cost to the taxpayer. The child has to be taught something. If it is not one subject, it is another. You merely add the differential in cost if there is one, not the whole budgetary amount. If a student making progress in a subject that costs 10 per cent more is compelled to take a subject of lower cost where he makes no progress and has had to repeat, the state loses ten-tenths where the thought was to save

one-tenth. Money expenditure is related to performance of function. America, as compared with other industrial countries, has a much heavier capitalization, but it pays higher wages and gets a mass production that lowers prices. There is a thought there for educational production.

Education research and new scientific procedure promise most for efficiency and economy in the domain of teaching. The intelligence tests as aids to diagnosis, standard achievement tests, the new comprehensive examinations, comparative study of teaching processes, all promise to give the taxpayer more for his dollar in school, just as science and scientific technology have given more and better nails for a dollar than before.

HENRY M. SUZZALLO

CAN VIRGINIA AFFORD TO GIVE HER CHILDREN A FAIR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

FROM the early days of the Republic, clear-visioned educators and statesmen have given an emphatic affirmative answer to this question. Thomas Jefferson, spokesman of the growing spirit of democracy, sought for nearly a half century to bring about the establishment of a system of schools, whereby the level of human happiness and of intelligent citizenship should be maintained and advanced. The concrete result of his work was the creation of the capstone of such a system, the state university. Two significant steps looking to the realization of a fair educational opportunity were the creation of the public elementary school system in the early days of reconstruction, and the building up of the high schools, as an intermediate link, in the early twentieth century.

Today, with a system, comparable in general outline to that of the other forty-seven states of the Union, we find statisticians in

practical agreement that Virginia ranks thirty-ninth in the effectiveness of its public education. For the first time there are available abundant statistical data indicating at once the actual support of education by the different states, and also their potentialities for its further extension. In *The Ability of the States to Support Education*,¹ Dr. Norton has given us the educational economist's analysis based on an unusually wide range of pertinent facts. The data for the table below have been drawn from this study and supplemented by a table in a recent issue of the *Journal of the National Education Association*.² For comparative purposes, the relative standing of North Carolina has been shown.

RANKING OF VIRGINIA AND NORTH CAROLINA IN SIGNIFICANT ITEMS OF POTENTIAL AND ACTUAL SUPPORT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

ITEMS	RANK	
	VA.	N. C.
1. Estimated value of tangible wealth.....	19	21
2. Index of economic resources.....	18	22
3. Estimated current income.....	21	23
4. Wealth per child, age 6-13.....	38	42
5. Index of economic resources per child.....	38	42
6. Average annual current income per child	39	43
7. Financial ability to support education..	39	43
8. Per cent of income expended for public elementary and secondary education, 1923-24	36	13

While in the main these figures speak for themselves, a brief interpretation may be in place. From items 1, 2, and 3 it is clearly seen that both Virginia and North Carolina rank above the median of the forty-eight states in actual financial resources. Items 4, 5, and 6, however, indicate that when these resources are pro-rated in terms of the school population, the two states drop to a ranking similar to the educational ranking which each has maintained. In addition,

¹*The Ability of the States to Support Education*. By J. K. Norton. The National Education Association: Washington, D. C. 1926. 85 pages.

²Can America Afford Education? *Journal of the National Education Association*, December, 1926, p. 286.