

FOREVER IN THE FORTIES?***WILLIAM S. TAYLOR**Dean, College of Education, University of Kentucky,
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Kentucky is still in the forties! Since the first rating of the states educationally, in 1918, Kentucky has been apologizing for its position. At first many persons maintained that the rating was unfair; that Kentucky had a better school system than the evaluation indicated. Other rating scales have been developed since that time and Kentucky has been scored on these. By every test Kentucky has been rated in the forties.

Great progress has been made in Kentucky in the past quarter of a century—but other states have made progress too. We are still in the forties and we cannot get out by pointing to our educational accomplishments or by feeling sorry for ourselves. If we want to improve our educational rank we must recognize our deficiencies and improve our program where it is weak.

Under present conditions to be born in Kentucky is to be born with a potential educational handicap. It is true that some of our cities and counties have excellent school systems but in far too many school districts of the state teachers are poorly qualified, buildings are inferior, teaching materials and equipment are inadequate, school terms are short, attendance is low, and learning is meager. Children attending such schools never have a chance to learn what education should do for them and for the communities in which they live. As citizens they will lack vision because they now lack opportunity to learn the things that contribute to effective citizenship. We are in a vicious circle. Poor schools make poor citizens; poor citizens are content with poor schools.

What are some of our handicaps in Kentucky? Why do we receive an embarrassingly low rating every time the states in the Union are ranked as to educational efficiency? Some of the most difficult problems we have to overcome are the result of constitutional limitations. Under a provision of the constitution the superintendent of public instruction must be selected on a political rather than a professional basis and his term of office is limited to four years. No intelligent person would think of requiring the president of the University and the presidents of the teachers colleges to seek their offices on a political basis. The position of state superintendent of schools in any state should be

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free from political influences and should be comparable in importance to the presidency of the state university. And not one reason can be found for limiting the term of office of the state superintendent to four years. It should be possible for a superintendent of public instruction to stay in office as long as he is giving efficient service. No superintendent, however strong and efficient, can project and carry through a constructive state program of education in a period of four years.

An additional handicap is the constitutional limitation of \$5,000 on the salary that can be paid to any person in public education, including the state teachers colleges and the University. The Legislature has added a further restriction in that it has authorized a salary of only \$4,000 for the state superintendent of public instruction. The salary for this office is so small that few men can afford to offer themselves for the position. It takes a brave man to resign from a good school position in Kentucky, run for office on a political ticket, without prospect of a position when his four-year term of office is over.

Another great handicap to the development of a strong educational program in Kentucky is the meager financial support which has been given by the Legislature to the State Department of Education. It has been difficult for the Department to procure men and women with the highest qualifications for leadership because of the low salaries paid and the uncertainty of tenure which results from the election of the superintendent on a party ballot. There has never been the security of office in the State Department of Education that has existed in the public-school systems of the state, in the teachers colleges, or in the University.

A long-recognized need in Kentucky is a coordinated system of education from the elementary school through college or university. Great strides have been made in recent years in coordinating the programs of elementary and secondary education. These programs are still not so well articulated with the program of higher education as they should be. Most authorities in the field of school administration agree that there are in Kentucky too many different boards administering the program of publicly supported education. This question needs serious study to discover the steps that could be taken to strengthen Kentucky's educational program.

Closely related, if not actually a part of the question of a better coordinated system is the problem of reducing the number of school administrative units in the state. We have at present too

many small districts which are in most cases weak. There are many reasons for combining city and county programs of education. Around our larger cities are great suburban areas that have all the problems of city school systems; in many instances, however, these areas are parts of county systems. The concentration of wealth within cities makes it easier for urban centers than for rural areas to support their programs of education. If larger school units could be established, the burden of support would be more nearly equalized and a more effective program would be realized.

Not only must the tax laws be revised but property assessments must be increased to more nearly their actual value. But at best, Kentucky would not be able to compete with the wealthiest states or even with the average state of the nation. Federal support for education must be provided if Kentucky is to approximate the national average in the provision of educational opportunity for its citizens. Kentucky does not have wealth to produce the income necessary for an educational program comparable to those of the upper 50 per cent of the states of the nation.

Kentucky ranks lowest of all of the states in the Union in the percentage of its children between the ages of fourteen and seventeen who are enrolled in high school. Our secondary schools in America have frequently been called the peoples' colleges. These are the schools in which the children of America should be given the kinds of education that will make possible richer lives and better work. Kentucky has not been able, in many areas, to provide transportation to high school for rural children. While there is a high school in every county in Kentucky, in a great number of counties the enrollments are exceptionally low. Elementary education is not enough for Kentucky's children. Some means must be found of making secondary education available to all of the children of the state.

All of us are agreed that longer terms must be made available in rural elementary schools. A rural child cannot learn as much in seven months in a poor school under an inadequately prepared teacher as a city child learns in nine months in a good school under a well-educated teacher.

Public school programs in every state are affected by the colleges and universities of that state. The institutions of higher learning in Kentucky have served well with the limited resources available. To insure adequate help from her state supported institutions of higher education, Kentucky must provide a larger measure of support for these schools. The teachers colleges and

the University need greatly increased funds if they are to give to the state the best possible service. The University should not only offer programs for the high school graduates who come to the campus for education, but it should also provide in-service education on the adult level for many groups of people who need training for the work they are doing or will do. Newly elected city and county officials should be able to come to the University for short courses before they take office; such public officials as county clerks, city clerks, county judges, city judges, and sheriffs should find at the University the help they need to enable them to give effective service. Business executives should have an opportunity to come to the University for training which would help them to improve their organization and management. Employees of business and industry should receive services through the Extension Division of the University that would enable them to improve their earning power and to give better service to the organizations that employ them. There has been in existence for a long time an unusually effective in-service education program for farmers and for homemakers. Similar services should be extended to people in other occupations.

These are only a few of the many things that need to be done to give Kentucky an educational program that will meet the needs of her people. We must stir ourselves to vigorous effort. We are not a pauper state. We can finance better schools than we now have, but we cannot provide schools as good as our children deserve from money raised in Kentucky alone. We must procure for our state the help necessary to give to children and adults an adequate educational program.



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