

AS I SEE IT

Euthanasia

BY DIANE RAVITCH



Diane Ravitch was Assistant Secretary of Education in the Bush Administration. Her latest book is *National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide* (Brookings).

THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION is expanding the U.S. Department of Education with new programs like direct student lending (*see p. 122*). Here's a much better idea. Close it down.

I served in the department for 18 months during the Bush Administration, as Assistant Secretary for Education Research & Improvement. I was responsible for supervising the spending of \$450 million each year. I can say without hesitation that most of the money was wasted. It subsidized technical assistance that no one asked for; research that few read or used; multimillion-dollar programs that served only those professionals who received the funding; and activities that were protected by congressmen, or their staff members, who were assiduously courted by education lobbyists.

I did learn one thing on the job: The only way to achieve eternal life was to become a federal program. Seldom was any program in my agency evaluated. When I tried to evaluate them, the recipients went screaming to their congressional protectors.

At appropriations time, the Democratic congressman who quizzed me got his script from the lobbyist for the "regional education laboratories," which receive about \$50 million each year. (Conveniently, the lobbyist was a former staff member of the congressman.) If the department tried to withhold funding from some useless project, there was sure to be some threatening letter from a congressman, with hints of an investigation or public hearings.

The Department of Education was established in 1979, in the waning months of the Carter Administration. It is one of the smallest cabinet agencies, with a budget of about \$32 billion. But this is a tail that wags a big dog. It manages about 250 federal programs, issues regulations and employs about 5,000 people.

Now, most of the 5,000 are very nice people, and some are extremely competent. But most are clerks and grant administrators who know less about education than the average teacher. They are no better qualified to help or direct the nation's schools than is the staff in any state or city or county department of education.

If the Education Department were abolished, it would not be missed. All the valuable functions performed by the federal government—the Headstart program, extra funds for

poor students, college scholarships—existed long before the Department was created in 1979. Headstart is currently administered by the Department of Health & Human Services; college loans could be administered efficiently by the Treasury Department; and funds for poor kids could be transferred to the states as a block grant. The Department should be replaced by a small Office of Education, to collect data and report to the nation on the condition of education.

For its \$32 billion the Department of Education does not educate a single student. It does not make schools better. Its very existence is a burden to states and localities, because the department's regulations require them to employ bureaucrats to monitor compliance with federal regulations. Every time an administrator is hired to write reports on federal programs, local resources are expended that ought to be used in the classroom. An international study reported recently that 50% of those employed in American schools are not teachers, the highest proportion of noninstructional personnel of all modern industrial nations.

If the department were abolished, all funds for education reform, teacher training, bilingual education, aid for the disadvantaged, special education for disabled students and technical assistance could be returned to the states. The states are freer to initiate experiments, likelier to close down failed experiments and more sensitive to local needs than is the federal government. By contrast, federal programs add unnecessary administrative costs. They mean uni-

The Department of Education does no educating, but it does provide a lot of pork. Why not kill the darned thing?

form regulations that reduce flexibility and ignore local variations; failed federal programs, protected by their sponsors, are seldom evaluated and almost never terminated.

I came away from my Washington job with this firm conviction: The people who are solving problems and achieving educational breakthroughs are not in Washington, D.C. They are out in the schools, in the state capitals, in the cities and towns. The federal government should not be micromanaging these people. By abolishing the Department of Education, Congress can make sure that more money goes to the nation's classrooms and can return control of education to the states and localities where it belongs. ■

AS I SEE IT

Euthanasia

BY DIANE RAVITCH



Diane Ravitch was Assistant Secretary of Education in the Bush Administration. Her latest book is *National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide* (Brookings).

THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION is expanding the U.S. Department of Education with new programs like direct student lending (see p. 122). Here's a much better idea. Close it down.

I served in the department for 18 months during the Bush Administration, as Assistant Secretary for Education Research & Improvement. I was responsible for supervising the spending of \$450 million each year. I can say without hesitation that most of the money was wasted. It subsidized technical assistance that no one asked for; research that few read or used; multimillion-dollar programs that served only those professionals who received the funding; and activities that were protected by congressmen, or their staff members, who were assiduously courted by education lobbyists.

I did learn one thing on the job: The only way to achieve eternal life was to become a federal program. Seldom was any program in my agency evaluated. When I tried to evaluate them, the recipients went screaming to their congressional protectors.

At appropriations time, the Democratic congressman who quizzed me got his script from the lobbyist for the "regional education laboratories," which receive about \$50 million each year. (Conveniently, the lobbyist was a former staff member of the congressman.) If the department tried to withhold funding from some useless project, there was sure to be some threatening letter from a congressman, with hints of an investigation or public hearings.

The Department of Education was established in 1979, in the waning months of the Carter Administration. It is one of the smallest cabinet agencies, with a budget of about \$32 billion. But this is a tail that wags a big dog. It manages about 250 federal programs, issues regulations and employs about 5,000 people.

Now, most of the 5,000 are very nice people, and some are extremely competent. But most are clerks and grant administrators who know less about education than the average teacher. They are no better qualified to help or direct the nation's schools than is the staff in any state or city or county department of education.

If the Education Department were abolished, it would not be missed. All the valuable functions performed by the federal government—the Headstart program, extra funds for

poor students, college scholarships—existed long before the Department was created in 1979. Headstart is currently administered by the Department of Health & Human Services; college loans could be administered efficiently by the Treasury Department; and funds for poor kids could be transferred to the states as a block grant. The Department should be replaced by a small Office of Education, to collect data and report to the nation on the condition of education.

For its \$32 billion the Department of Education does not educate a single student. It does not make schools better. Its very existence is a burden to states and localities, because the department's regulations require them to employ bureaucrats to monitor compliance with federal regulations. Every time an administrator is hired to write reports on federal programs, local resources are expended that ought to be used in the classroom. An international study reported recently that 50% of those employed in American schools are not teachers, the highest proportion of noninstructional personnel of all modern industrial nations.

If the department were abolished, all funds for education reform, teacher training, bilingual education, aid for the disadvantaged, special education for disabled students and technical assistance could be returned to the states. The states are freer to initiate experiments, likelier to close down failed experiments and more sensitive to local needs than is the federal government. By contrast, federal programs add unnecessary administrative costs. They mean uni-

The Department of Education does no educating, but it does provide a lot of pork. Why not kill the darned thing?

form regulations that reduce flexibility and ignore local variations; failed federal programs, protected by their sponsors, are seldom evaluated and almost never terminated.

I came away from my Washington job with this firm conviction: The people who are solving problems and achieving educational breakthroughs are not in Washington, D.C. They are out in the schools, in the state capitals, in the cities and towns. The federal government should not be micromanaging these people. By abolishing the Department of Education, Congress can make sure that more money goes to the nation's classrooms and can return control of education to the states and localities where it belongs. ■

It has become fashionable for former Reagan/Bush education officials, such as Lamar Alexander and William Bennett, to call for the abolition of the U.S. Department of Education. Now former Assistant Education Secretary Diane Ravitch has joined the chorus (Forbes, May 22, 1995). The irony of Ms. Ravitch's complaints--which include wasted tax dollars and a failure to improve education--is that it all occurred while they were running the place.

This is an astonishing admission of poor stewardship and management failure on their part. There, is however, a huge leap in logic between their failed leadership and the argument that the Education Department should be abolished. A quick review of the Department today indicates that much of the failure in the Department can be attributed to the caretakers and not the institution.

Education is more important to America's future than ever before in our history. In 1992, the average earnings of those with a college degree were almost twice those of people with a high school diploma, and more than two and a half times of those who had not earned a high school diploma. In this decade, nearly 90% of the new jobs being created will go to people with some postsecondary education, and virtually none to those without a high school degree. increasingly, the American dream will come true only for those who reach for it based on a solid foundation of learning.

We know of course that learning is ultimately an individual and a family responsibility--there will never be good substitutes

for individual initiative and parental support. And local communities and state governments bear the responsibility for providing good schools. But there is also a vital role to be played by the federal government, helping families pay for college, helping schools strive for excellence, and helping to ensure educational opportunities for all...

Because education is so important, President Clinton is committed to investing more, and more wisely, in education. Rather than eliminating the U.S. Department of Education, Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley has been quietly leading the effort to make sure the Education Department manages those investments properly.

Here are some of the things this Administration has done to improve education for Americans and to improve on the acknowledged from performance of our predecessors:

- o Helping students pay for college: The U.S. Department of Education provides financial aid to approximately one out of every two students getting a postsecondary education. The Pell Grants, averaging \$1,500 to nearly four million students, mostly from families earning less than \$20,000 per year. When Secretary Riley took office on Jan. 21, 1993, this program suffered from a \$2 billion shortfall, because officials like Ms. Ravitch figure out how to accurately predict the annual costs of the program. Instead of continuing to pile up this debt and borrow from funds intended for future beneficiaries, Secretary Riley eliminated the deficit, improved forecasting and budgeting, and is now operating the program on a slight surplus.

The Clinton Administration has also instituted a new Direct Loan program, through which students borrow directly from the federal government, with a wide variety of repayment options. This approach reduces bureaucracy, saves taxpayers and students billions of dollars, and provides more options to better serve both students and postsecondary institutions. Students at participating institutions report less paperwork, shorter lines, and 24-hour turn-around in processing loans. (Note--sometime in the past weeks there was a good story in the clips that illustrates this point--maybe we can plug in a real example).

-o Raising academic expectations: One of the major challenges facing our nation's is that we need our schools expect too little of our students , especially compared with our countries. When he was Secretary of Education, Lamar Alexander proposed to help remedy this problem by setting national standards for what students should learn, and national examinations to measure their progress. This solution--fund the widely criticized U.S. History standards--and a flowed \$6 billion Chapter 1 compensatory education program with federal testing and accountability requirements that focused only on low-level reading and math skills.

Now, Lamar Alexander wasn't responsible for these requirements--Congress passed them before he came into office. But he did nothing to change them. President Clinton and Secretary Riley have. Through the Administration's Goals 2000 program, the 47 participating states are receiving financial support to raise academic expectations for their students--in

ways that are best for their local schools. Goals 2000 helps local communities and states set their own expectations, and then implement locally determined approaches to improving teaching, increasing parental involvement, using new technologies and other steps to improve student learning.

Further, we've overhauled the old Chapter 1 program, so that it too is aimed at helping students reach the challenging academic standards each state sets. Now, as a result of the Clinton Administration's efforts, what is taught in schools is based more on the independent decisions of local and state authorities, not on federal accountability requirements.

oo Getting rid of regulations and red tape: At the 1989 Education Summit with President Bush, governors of both parties complained about federal regulations in education. The governors and President Bush agreed that the Secretary of Education needed the authority to waive federal requirements that got in the way, and that state education systems needed to be held accountable for performance, not compliance.

As Secretary of Education, Lamar Alexander talked a lot about flexibility, but he didn't make a dent in the problem. In fact, he issued his own regulations on how the logo of his America 2000 program could be used by local communities and states.

In contrast, President Clinton and Secretary Riley have delivered. The Administration's Goals 2000 proposal is administered without any regulations at all. The Secretary also has the authority to waive federal education requirements if they

interfere with teaching and learning. In fact, Goals 2000 enables the Secretary to delegate his new waiver authority to six states, so that state education agencies will be able to waive federal rules, without checking with Washington first. This is just one example of how the Clinton Administration has helped make the Education Department a supportive partner in education, rather than a bureaucratic obstacle to it.

Unfortunately, none of this flexibility could be accomplished if the Department's programs are scattered throughout the federal government, as Ms. Ravitch proposes. Only a Secretary of Education, who talks directly to the President about an issue of such importance to the nation's future, who focuses solely on improving teaching and learning at all levels of education, could bring the vision, management and political skills necessary to make these changes. Dismantling the Education Department now would mean turning the clock back on real progress, and diminishing our ability to make vitally needed investments pay off.

When Bill Bennett, Lamar Alexander and Diane Ravitch were in office, they didn't talk much about dismantling the Department of Education. In fact, every 4 years, just before Presidential elections, the Reagan/Bush Administrations proposed substantial increased in education funding. (Check this) Now, out of office, they are playing to a different, more extreme part of the electorate now. But they are still playing politics with education. For our nation's students and our future, it's time to stop.

AS I SEE IT

Euthanasia

BY DIANE RAVITCH



Diane Ravitch was Assistant Secretary of Education in the Bush Administration. Her latest book is *National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide* (Brookings).

THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION is expanding the U.S. Department of Education with new programs like direct student lending (*see p. 122*). Here's a much better idea. Close it down.

I served in the department for 18 months during the Bush Administration, as Assistant Secretary for Education Research & Improvement. I was responsible for supervising the spending of \$450 million each year. I can say without hesitation that most of the money was wasted. It subsidized technical assistance that no one asked for; research that few read or used; multimillion-dollar programs that served only those professionals who received the funding; and activities that were protected by congressmen, or their staff members, who were assiduously courted by education lobbyists.

I did learn one thing on the job: The only way to achieve eternal life was to become a federal program. Seldom was any program in my agency evaluated. When I tried to evaluate them, the recipients went screaming to their congressional protectors.

At appropriations time, the Democratic congressman who quizzed me got his script from the lobbyist for the "regional education laboratories," which receive about \$50 million each year. (Conveniently, the lobbyist was a former staff member of the congressman.) If the department tried to withhold funding from some useless project, there was sure to be some threatening letter from a congressman, with hints of an investigation or public hearings.

The Department of Education was established in 1979, in the waning months of the Carter Administration. It is one of the smallest cabinet agencies, with a budget of about \$32 billion. But this is a tail that wags a big dog. It manages about 250 federal programs, issues regulations and employs about 5,000 people.

Now, most of the 5,000 are very nice people, and some are extremely competent. But most are clerks and grant administrators who know less about education than the average teacher. They are no better qualified to help or direct the nation's schools than is the staff in any state or city or county department of education.

If the Education Department were abolished, it would not be missed. All the valuable functions performed by the federal government—the Headstart program, extra funds for

poor students, college scholarships—existed long before the Department was created in 1979. Headstart is currently administered by the Department of Health & Human Services; college loans could be administered efficiently by the Treasury Department; and funds for poor kids could be transferred to the states as a block grant. The Department should be replaced by a small Office of Education, to collect data and report to the nation on the condition of education.

For its \$32 billion the Department of Education does not educate a single student. It does not make schools better. Its very existence is a burden to states and localities, because the department's regulations require them to employ bureaucrats to monitor compliance with federal regulations. Every time an administrator is hired to write reports on federal programs, local resources are expended that ought to be used in the classroom. An international study reported recently that 50% of those employed in American schools are not teachers, the highest proportion of noninstructional personnel of all modern industrial nations.

If the department were abolished, all funds for education reform, teacher training, bilingual education, aid for the disadvantaged, special education for disabled students and technical assistance could be returned to the states. The states are freer to initiate experiments, likelier to close down failed experiments and more sensitive to local needs than is the federal government. By contrast, federal programs add unnecessary administrative costs. They mean uni-

The Department of Education does no educating, but it does provide a lot of pork. Why not kill the darned thing?

form regulations that reduce flexibility and ignore local variations; failed federal programs, protected by their sponsors, are seldom evaluated and almost never terminated.

I came away from my Washington job with this firm conviction: The people who are solving problems and achieving educational breakthroughs are not in Washington, D.C. They are out in the schools, in the state capitals, in the cities and towns. The federal government should not be micromanaging these people. By abolishing the Department of Education, Congress can make sure that more money goes to the nation's classrooms and can return control of education to the states and localities where it belongs. ■