

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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REPORT
to
THE ONE HUNDRED AND SECOND LEGISLATURE

S T A T E A C C R E D I T A T I O N
O F S E C O N D A R Y S C H O O L S

by
Interim Joint Committee
of the 101st Legislature

January 1965

STATE OF MAINE

IN SENATE May 21, 1963

ORDERED, the House concurring, that there be created an Interim Joint Committee to consist of 2 Senators, to be appointed by the President of the Senate, and 3 Representatives, to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to study the present statutes, regulations and practices relating to State accreditation of secondary schools for such changes, if any, the Committee may find desirable; and be it further

ORDERED, that the Committee report the results of its study to the 102nd Legislature.

Name: (Hichborn) /s/ Clyde A. Hichborn

County: Piscataquis

(S.P. #602)

Pursuant to the above order, an interim joint committee of the 101st Maine Legislature herewith submits to the 102nd Maine Legislature the following report of a study relating to State accreditation of secondary schools.

MAJORITY REPORT

The facts disclosed by this study are not in dispute, nor are they complicated. "Accreditation" is a badge of educational excellence awarded by the State. As such, it is sought by high school administrators and parents, and as more schools become accredited the pressure mounts on those institutions which do not meet the standards. The Committee recognized that an evaluation of high school standards of excellence requires more than a study of subject matter and course content and that the present methods of approval and accreditation of Maine's secondary schools is a sincere attempt to make a comprehensive evaluation of all areas.

The majority of those who expressed opinions on one or more of the areas explored were, for the most part, in accord with present standards. The principal areas of disagreement were centered in a discussion of the Revised Statutes of 1964, Title 20, Section 473, subsection 3; Section 1011; and Section 1231. Opinions were expressed that requirements regarding compulsory teaching of health to all students "...has outlived its usefulness" and "...a health course (should be) elective rather than required." On the other hand, the Committee received communications from representatives of various professional groups urging the retention and strengthening of health and hygiene courses in secondary schools. There appeared to be general agreement that the interpretation of these related statutes lack uniformity.

It is apparent that the Commissioner has full authority in this regard and, in fact, is directed to "...prescribe such rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry out in successful manner said program of health, safety, and physical education, and he may require such reports from superintendents as he may deem necessary."

TWO CHANNEL ACCREDITATION

If there was, as suggested by some, reluctance on the part of dissentors to come forward to express their views, the Committee had no way to assess. The exponents of this philosophy were noticeably absent from public hearings and the Committee had to rely on a few advocates for information in this regard.

Opinions were expressed by a minority who felt that a system of dual accreditation would be desirable for those smaller high schools who might, under a dual or two channel system, be granted "academic accreditation" if their schools provided a degree of academic excellence in the area of instruction which was acceptable to the reviewing board even though they were not entitled to full accreditation because of inadequacies in some physical or non-academic area.

The Committee recognizes the validity of the opinions of advocates of dual accreditation, however, it feels that the same purpose will be accomplished if the visiting committees place the values of material and academic evaluation in proper perspective.

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Because of lack of direction in the interpretation and enforcement of Section 1231 regarding temperance, the effectiveness of this statute is widely questioned. The lack of uniformity in the implementation of Section 1011 appears to be the subject of considerable criticism.

These areas are adequately covered in the "Manual for Approval and Accreditation of Maine Secondary Schools". If there is need for further clarification or direction it can be accomplished through existing regulations.

Events and statistics indicate that a more realistic approach to the matters of health and hygiene education in the public schools would be in the public interest. The Committee is unanimous in its suggestion, therefore, that the Commissioner review this matter for the purpose of establishing greater uniformity of compliance.

GUIDANCE

While the present manual specifically establishes a recommendation for a guidance counselor arbitrarily at a 1 to 400 ratio, competent opinions were expressed to the Committee that a more realistic approach might be to judge on a basis of excellence of guidance rather than upon a numerical formula. This was suggested especially in view of the acknowledged shortage of fully qualified guidance personnel.

CONCLUSION

The Committee is cognizant of the work done by the Committee on Accreditation and is unanimous in its commendation of their latest revision and recommendations. The Committee feels that their efforts have resulted in great improvement in school evaluation and that present methods of team evaluation show a definite improvement.

Although it would appear that some of the criticism leveled at these accreditation committees in the past is no longer justified, it is the feeling of the Committee that accreditation standards should continue to be studied and that when reevaluation appears to require change the State Board of Education be so advised by the Committee on Accreditation.

It is the opinion of the majority of this Committee that no further legislation is indicated in the area of accreditation at this time.

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON
ACCREDITATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS
101st LEGISLATURE

Senator Ralph D. Brooks, Jr., Chairman
Senator Clyde A. Hichborn
Representative Audway S. Treworgy
Representative J. Willis Watkins

January 1965

MINORITY REPORT

I respectfully disagree with my colleagues.

The facts disclosed by our study are not in dispute, nor are they complicated. "Accreditation" is a badge of educational excellence awarded by the State. As such, it is sought by high school administrators and parents, and as more schools become accredited the pressure mounts on those institutions which do not meet the standards.

Thus stated, the enterprise is laudable, provided we assume that the accreditation standards to which our high schools aspire are standards of educational excellence. Unfortunately, such an assumption is wrong. Some of the standards are foolish; others may be socially desirable while remaining educationally irrelevant.

When confronted with their own written standards, the State Department officials pointed out that all the items therein set forth need not be met; that they are guidelines only. Thus a school committee or principal finds out which standards are in vogue this week only when the report of the Committee on Accreditation is delivered next month. On some occasions deficiencies set forth in such a report are met and the next accreditation committee enforces other standards to create new deficiencies. The result is frustration and often a waste of taxpayers' money. Such administrative foolishness should not be the subject of legislation, or even harsh reproach. No program in any department is administered without occasional injustice or without human error in judgment.

The basic issue is, then, not the inconsistency of application of the standards, but the standards themselves. Departmental administrators insist

that an accredited high school must offer more than excellence in academic education. There must be equal excellence in non-academic areas, such as vocational training, plant facilities, and administration. Thus some of our finest educational institutions (e.g., South Portland, Lee Academy) are not accredited.

If the gold star of accreditation were more accurately described, or if academic accreditation as such were added as an alternative, there might be no serious quarrel. But we have the almost dishonest situation of a term generally understood by parents (and college administrators) to refer to educational standards, being misused to require programs, material and performance totally irrelevant to education. What would Ford Motor Company do if some governmental agency should decree that in order to stamp each Lincoln Continental as an "accredited motor vehicle" such cars must meet standards generally associated with a crawler tractor?

What of the college entrance questionnaires which ask a principal whether his high school is accredited under State law? It is no answer to point out that a clever principal can answer (or rather dissemble) in the space provided that his school is accredited by the New England Association. All principals might not think of such a tack. Others might be more stubbornly honest.

What of the parents who are interested in the best educational facilities for their children? How many send their pre-college offspring to distant towns, or decline to move to a more desirable location because the local high school is not accredited? (It lacked a first aid room!) How many, being unable to afford tuition or to move away, wail bitterly that their children won't be able to get into college because the local high school is not good

enough to be accredited. (It has no gymnasium!)

These recitals are not farfetched. They are logical results of misbranding.

I warmly urge that a system of "academic" accreditation be superimposed by statute on the present system. Then schools may be fully accredited (They have that certified librarian!), academically accredited, or not accredited at all. College administrators, parents, and taxpayers will no longer be fooled by a false label, and a measure of honesty will have returned to the administration of education in this State.

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON
ACCREDITATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS
101st LEGISLATURE

Representative Bradford Snow

January 1965

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