In Favor of an Elected State Superintendent

By E. B. ROBERT

The dean of the College of Education of Louisiana State University has lent his support to the recent question of whether the educational interests of the people are best served by election or appointment of the chief state school officer.

In a democracy the elected superintendent is directly responsible to all of the people for the success and the progress of public education. He must answer to the people every four years for the services which he and his department of education are rendering. He cannot escape any of his responsibilities by hiding behind or "passing the buck" to a board or to any other group or individual. He is responsible. Our state and nation are now plagued with bureaucracy. We should certainly not move further in this direction educationally.

An elected state superintendent is one of the chief public officials of the state. He is in a position to take all issues regarding public education directly to the people. He is also in a position to speak as an equal with other state officials about the welfare of the schools. He can go directly to the Legislature or to any other organization and present the case for the schools without fear of intimidation or of losing his job. In fact he can do all of these things and more if he expects to continue in office.

What of Controls?

An elected superintendent of education is not subject to discipline by the state school officials as he might be if he were appointed by any kind of board. It is in order to inject political into the school system with an appointive superintendent than it is with an elected superintendent. This fact has been demonstrated time and again in states that have appointive superintendents. Almost any governor finds it far easier to control a board or a majority of a board than to control all of the people who are interested in the advancement of the public schools.

In the states where state boards of education appoint college presidents, it is a well-known fact that these presidents are frequently changed when the state political administration changes. It is also true that appointive state superintendents are frequently changed when there is a change in state administration. There is no reason to believe that the state superintendent of education in Louisiana would be an exception if he were appointive instead of being elected by the people.

It is far easier to get rid of an inefficient and poorly qualified elected superintendent than it is to get rid of the same kind of individual who has nothing to do except to cater to the wishes of a majority of a board which is responsible for giving him his job and determining his duties and his pay.

An elective state superintendent and a department of education selected by him are responsible for the success of an educational program. No matter how good a board of education may be, the members of that board do not have the time, the ability, or the training necessary to carry on a program of public education.

A board at best should devote its attention to policy-making and to the general regulation of the school system under the legislative acts and the constitution of the state pertaining to educational matters. The elected superintendent is far more sensitive and responsive to the needs, interests, and wishes of all of the people than a board with its appointive superintendent is likely to be.

The fact that not one of nine candidates for governor of Louisiana in 1952 had a candidate for superintendent on his ticket is ample evidence that the average politicians know when an elected state superintendent is giving satisfaction to the people. It has already become popular to give a poor superintendent trouble and opposition and to co-operate with and support a strong official in whom the people generally have confidence. When a state superintendent runs and is elected on a ticket, he has the support of the new administration. When he has no opposition he can work with the new administration.

Problems Not Solved

States that have changed from the elective to the appointive superintendent have not solved either their political or their educational problems. On the contrary, the schools have had more interference of an adverse nature than they have had in the past; there has been an attempt to solve educational problems behind closed doors instead of in the arena of public opinion.

In public education the problem is to enlist the sympathy and support of all of the people. If educational problems are never political issues, and if the people are barred from participating in the determination of school programs and policy, then, of course, there is no politics in education. What we need

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Mathematics Institute

From June 15 to 21, Louisiana State University will hold its third annual session of the Mathematics Institute.

There will be discussion groups in algebra, geometry, arithmetic, junior high school mathematics and enrichment materials. Also, there will be a geometry laboratory. The discussions will be led by experts in these fields. In addition there will be lectures given by outstanding people in mathematics and related fields.

Excellent rooms and meals will be provided on the campus at reasonable rates.

Programs will be available soon after March 1. For further information write to:

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