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My dear Dr. Studebaker:

I am happy to send my greetings and very best wishes to the members of the Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association. While you as the leaders in educational administration in this country will be considering many problems concerning better ways to conduct educational institutions, I hope you will give special attention to the central problem before our country and the world. I refer to the problem of maintaining and improving the democratic processes, both political and economic, of our American way of life. No body of citizens bears greater responsibility for the successful functioning of a democracy than the educational administrators and teachers. It is the responsibility of government to carry out the will of the people. But it is the responsibility of organised education to make sure that the people understand their problems and are prepared to make intelligent choices when they express their will.

It is of great importance to the future of our democracy that ways and means be devised to engage the maximum number of young people and adults in a continuous, fearless and free discussion and study of public affairs. This should be the natural postgraduate program of all citizens whether they leave the full-time school early or late. We have meeting places in every community, built by the people and used for day school work. Thousands of new buildings have been erected in the last few years. We now face the problem of promoting educational programs to make the most of our physical and human resources. The planning of such programs is a major responsibility of the educational profession. The result of such programs will be to strengthen the fabric of democracy.

Very sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Dr. J. W. Studebaker,
Commissioner of Education,
Department of the Interior,
Washington, D. C.
CRUCIAL ISSUES IN EDUCATION

J. W. STUDEBAKER, UNITED STATES COMMISSIONER OF
EDUCATION, WASHINGTON, D. C.

Several days ago I called one of the secretaries at the White House and asked him if he would speak to the President suggesting that we would be happy to hear a message from the President of the United States. Two or three days later I received a letter from him which I am pleased to read to you at this time. (Commissioner Studebaker then read the letter from President Franklin D. Roosevelt.)

In recent years, the meetings of this body and the studies reported by its various commissions have shown new vitality. The pressure of events in the modern world has forced many of us out of the academic cloisters. We are now more sensitive to the full meaning of the word “issue.”

The subjects of the last three yearbooks of this Department indicate a new temper among us: Social Change and Education, The Social Studies Curriculum, and The Improvement of Education—Its Interpretation for Democracy. In all of these cooperative works we discover an emphasis on the relation of education to the social situation.

The most recent pronouncement dealing with the social responsibilities of education comes from the Educational Policies Commission thru the facile pen of Charles A. Beard. The pertinence of this professional expression is revealed in the title: The Unique Function of Education in American Democracy. In all of these presentations we recognize that the issues in education are born of the crucial issues in society.

The particular issues I wish to emphasize are not new ones. They are discussed or at least touched upon in the reports and studies to which I have referred. They are considered in our educational journals. But these issues are not being met by programs or plans which are adequate or satisfactory. Therefore, I think it is worthwhile to continue the discussion of them—even to repeat the call for a nationwide response to the challenge of issues which are so crucial.

The advertisers sometimes offer a prize to the person who can list the largest number of words using the letters of a trade name they wish to impress upon the public consciousness. I have been seeking new ways of presenting these crucial issues in education hoping to bring them more clearly to the attention of the public. And, I intend to exhaust the possible variations if necessary in order to get adequate plans organized to meet these issues.

What are they? I shall mention ten. Then, for want of time, I shall discuss in some detail only the first one, leaving the others for your consideration and for more complete public pronouncements which I expect to make during the next year.

The first crucial issue in education grows out of a major conflict which is swiftly reaching the stage of a crisis throughout the world. The conflict is between two principles of social organization. One principle is ancient and we thought discredited. The other is modern but it faces new tests. In a word,
the conflict is between dictatorship and democracy, between tyranny and tolerance. No important institution can ignore this issue. The question which confronts us is: What more can education do to undergird American democracy? Or to put the question another way: What are the implications of the issue so far as educational policies and processes are concerned?

The second crucial issue in education arises out of another major conflict which is of worldwide proportions. This conflict is between two principles of economic opportunity. One principle asserts that "man shall live by the sweat of his brow." The other principle, if general practise may be summarized, is that a large percent of men shall not be permitted to live by their work but shall be forced to accept a meager charity. In a word, the conflict is between equality of opportunity and a state of widespread unemployment. Again, no important institution can escape the responsibility of dealing with this issue. The question which confronts us, as our special responsibility, is: What more can education do to assure educational, recreational, and work opportunities to youth?

This issue, the outcome of which vitally concerns our national welfare and our whole system of education, involves the adjustment of American youth to modern conditions. We are still confronted with the baffling problem of the gap between the school and the job. Whether the number of idle youth seeking jobs is 5,000,000, 3,000,000, or 7,000,000, the issue is a desperately serious one. That this issue would pass with the lifting of the depression is found to be a vain hope by the daily events with which you are all familiar. Large numbers of high-school graduates, as well as those who do not complete a high-school course, cannot find jobs. More than 2,000,000 young people reaching the age of employability each year encounter the regiment of newly invented machines which have thrown jobs into the discard.

You know the picture; I do not have to paint it again for you. The federal government has come forward in the emergency with the CCC and the NYA. The services of these agencies are generally recognized as among the most useful of the emergency contributions. The United States Office of Education has been happy to have a part in their development.

Their services, however, fall in an area not limited to the emergency. Services now being performed by these agencies must be continued for many years, possibly indefinitely. As we progress from this emergency period into the next phase of our national life, it is essential that we lay definite plans for long-term developments and permanent services. This period of depression and readjustment has certainly brought us face to face with a variety of new circumstances—a more compactly organized society and a more intricate economy. What is organized education’s obligation to youth in this new situation? As I have said, I shall deal with this issue in detail at some later date. Let me close reference to it at this time by saying that the federal Office of Education, thru its Committee on Youth Problems, has been active in this field during the past two years. We have made some extensive surveys which are reported in six special publications now available. We are creating a
new Youth Guidance Division to provide advisory assistance to educational organizations desiring to establish youth guidance centers.

We are convinced that young people in whose future parents, teachers, and society have invested so much must not be abandoned at the point of separation from formal schooling. Our job is not finished until these young people have been guided into permanent places of service in the life and work of the community. Therefore, we in the field of education insist upon better coordination of the various agencies serving the needs of youth. Guidance, which is the fundamental aspect of all systematic education, and is, therefore, a primary responsibility of schools, must not be terminated until the individual young person makes a successful connection with his life work. And even after that there are many times in the lives of millions of adults when the guidance function of organized education must come to their service again.

Other crucial issues which I shall merely enumerate now are:

3. The worldwide threat of devastating war. What part can education play in preventing war, or at least in keeping America out of it?
4. The need for a closer understanding and friendship between the people of the twenty Latin American countries and the citizens of the United States. What more can education do to meet this need?
5. The responsibility of the federal government and the radio industry for the educational use of radio as the most powerful twentieth century development for mass communication.
6. The problem of the youthful criminal and juvenile delinquent falls partly but definitely upon the agencies of education for solution. What more can the schools do to answer this growing menace?
7. In the face of appalling casualties due to automobile accidents, we have an obligation to improve and extend safety education.
8. As much as we may emphasize vocational preparedness and economic well-being in the achievement of the more abundant life, we know that “man does not live by bread alone.” What further provisions should we make for the lifting of the cultural level of America? The material poverty of great masses of our people is only exceeded by the spiritual starvation they suffer for lack of good music, fine art, beauty, color, and inspiration. Whether culture in its highest sense is to be the possession of the many, depends upon whether our fine arts educational plans accompany our economic improvement plans.
9. Floods, dust storms, and drought dramatically force upon us the obligation for vastly more education for the conservation of natural resources. Is it one of the responsibilities of education to see to it that in the future the genius of our people shall be employed in preventing rather than in meeting disaster? For too long a time we have gagged at the gnat of preventative expenditures and swallowed the camel of colossal costs of disaster. What can education do about it?
10. The demand for policies under which American citizens in general may be given reasonably equal educational opportunities.

When I ask the question, What should education do to meet these issues? I am not asking a rhetorical question. Practically every one of these problems has been a focusing point for special conferences of experts and educators in the Office of Education during the past year. We are earnestly seeking ways by which the United States Office of Education may serve American education in creating more effective programs to meet these issues. The enumeration of these ten issues serves to suggest that a very broad and diverse
program challenges our thinking these days as we try to look at this great country of ours as a united whole. We see it as our duty in the federal Office of Education to promote the educational answer to these problems, not merely to collect statistics about what has been or is being done.

Before we examine more critically the problems involved in making education serve better the needs of a democratic society, may I point out the fact that the challenge to democracy and the dilemma of youth, the first two crucial issues, are closely interrelated.

If our democracy is working reasonably well, economic collapse can be avoided. The social intelligence of one generation operating thru democratic processes will protect the interests and opportunities of its own and the new generation. Conversely, if social intelligence is lacking so that the welfare of all is not attainable thru self-government, sooner or later the people will be persuaded to exchange their popular sovereignty for the promise of deliverance. The failure to keep open the door of opportunity for youth is tantamount to recruiting large numbers for the marching clubs of dictators. A generation of youth cannot be kept in idleness awaiting its turn at the fullness of life. Enlightened self-government leads us toward a balanced social-economic order. And a balanced social-economic order with the maximum of opportunity for all sustains a democracy.

Now let us turn for a few minutes to a consideration of the first issue. It is sometimes necessary in a statement like this to make it plain when one is discussing a democratic society that he is not talking about a political party on the one hand or the particular era prior to 1929 on the other. The fact is that no society has ever experienced the full application of the democratic principle. It is the American dream, but it has not been fully realized. At one time, those who opposed the democratic idea were outspoken in the expression of their distrust of the people. Later, when popular self-government became firmly established, they reached for the symbols of democracy with which to justify their attempts to frustrate the expressed will of the people. It is therefore necessary to inquire rather carefully just what is meant when the term “democratic society” is used. I do not mean to imply that the responsibility for undergirding American democracy carries with it the obligation to plead for the existing order of things. Neither do I suggest that it is the business of the teaching profession to gain adherence to some uniform conception (if it had one) of a new order of things. I am talking about a society where the majority will is law and the right and privilege of the minority to advocate a change are protected.

With that conception in mind, I submit two proposals for practical action in meeting the crucial issue of strengthening American democracy thru education. First, our schools and colleges should more clearly approach democratic societies in their own fundamental organization and operation. Second, it is the duty of educational agencies in a democracy to provide the maximum of opportunity to youth and adults to study and discuss the current social, economic, and political problems with which our citizens must deal.
In other words, education must do two things better and more extensively than it has in the past: (1) develop patterns of democratic behavior in the group life of the learners; (2) provide facilities by which people, young and old, trained in the ways of democracy may function intelligently on matters of current importance.

Education for a democratic society begins in the home. The meeting of this crucial issue starts, therefore, with parent education. Family life itself should function as a tiny but vital unit of democracy. Children should be nurtured and guided to democratic maturity in the home. There they should learn to act in the interests of the group, to respect the rights of others, to accede to group decisions arrived at thru discussion, and to cooperate in common undertakings. A democratic society cannot be maintained in a nation unless the social principles needed in the larger community are first practised in the smaller groups.

The direct influence of education begins in early childhood and continues thru the period of adolescence and to the years of adulthood. Certainly we cannot escape the obligation to develop habits of democratic behavior during the formal schooling period beginning in the nursery school and the kindergarten. When children and young people congregate in schools for the purpose of study, we must not forget that they learn much more than they are taught. They learn from each other as well as from teachers and books. They are members of a school or college community. If the school is run like a totalitarian state it will prepare satisfactory citizens for that kind of society. But most of us still believe that the school can and ought to be run on the principles of a democratic society.

We, therefore, need to practise democratic social principles in the classroom and in the extracurriculum programs.

As examples of the classroom application of democratic technics, I may mention the activity program in elementary schools and the seminar in higher schools. The activity program is designed to create group interest and promote group cooperation in organizing and using subject materials. Constructing a display offers many more opportunities to develop democratic patterns of behavior than the formal recitation based on an assignment in a textbook. And those who are skilled in the use of group methods find that the mastery of the subject matter assigned takes much less time if it is motivated by a social purpose.

The seminar, or class discussion, sometimes actually led by the students themselves, trains youth in the technics of truth-finding, in habits of tolerance toward differences in point of view, in the ability to hold suspended judgment when conclusions are relatively uncertain. Such methods of organizing the study program enable the teachers and professors to play the role of guides and counselors in the intriguing search for truth. Thus, in the words of Woodrow Wilson, “we come to depend not upon the understanding of one man but to depend upon the common counsel of all.” Authoritarianism in the classroom is conducive to the same evil in society.

Outside the classroom we have unlimited opportunities to help youth grow into self-disciplined citizens. Pupil or student self-government has made
great advances. By organizing themselves to plan their own affairs, young people come to appreciate and understand the ways of democracy. By practising democratic procedures in the group-control over small things, they earn the ability to function as citizens in the control over larger affairs. The group planning of school discipline, of social activities, of publications, etc., is as educational in result as the study of textbooks.

But, as most of us know from experience, the management of schools thru a large measure of pupil participation is not the easy way. It is much easier for the teacher or professor or principal or superintendent to make the rules and render the decisions. It is much simpler to assign pages in textbooks and hear formal recitations. It takes less preparation and genius to lecture than to plan and lead discussions. But our purpose is not to train people to recite facts—it is rather to help them to understand and use facts. Our object is not to transfer textbooks to the memories of children—it is to develop people who are free because they know how to find things out for themselves. Our aim is not to graduate human encyclopedias—it is to send out young men and women who are fit citizens for a democratic society because they are self-respecting and self-reliant.

When we have made adequate provisions educationally to assure proper home training thru parent education, and when we have improved the total school experience for children and youth, we have yet a further function to perform to meet the crucial issue at hand. We must plan to meet the needs of adult citizens for study and discussion of problems as they arise. The plans for such programs must anticipate the maximum of participation of the learners. These post-school programs must demonstrate democratic procedures, and they must help the adult in grappling with the complex problems of our day.

If education is to meet the crucial issue of preserving and improving American democracy, we must move forward with a program which reaches from early childhood thru active adulthood. In each stage we have new devices and technics at hand with which to vitalize our educational programs.

We can now bring to the most isolated rural school the finest symphony orchestra, speeches by the leaders of world thought, and dramatizations of the material which may be uninviting in the textbooks. This is made possible by the radio and the modern recording machines.

Take a scene from our exciting American history like the following in which Thomas Jefferson was talking with his friend, George Mason, in Mason’s home in Virginia:

THOMAS JEFFERSON: I see you’re reading the Magna Charta, Mason. And what’s this—the English Bill of Rights?

GEORGE MASON: I wanted to discover what previous attempts had been made toward individual liberty.

THOMAS JEFFERSON: These documents protect Parliament against the King, but they give little protection to the people against Parliament.

GEORGE MASON: I amuse myself sometimes— evenings— jotting down a plan for greater rights than these, a plan of some future government.

THOMAS JEFFERSON: Who knows how soon that future may come? There are things stirring. I feel them in the air—changes, principles...
GEORGE MASON: That's it! Principles! People must have principles to live by. . . . I wrote something like that last night. . . . Let me see if I can find it. . . . ah—here it is! "All men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights, namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety."

JEFFERSON: Go on! Read more.

MASON: "That government is, or ought to be, instituted for the common benefit, protection, and security of the people, nation or community."

JEFFERSON: Let me see that! "When any government shall be found inadequate . . ."

MASON: Here's more of it!

JEFFERSON: Let me take this, will you, Mason? All of it. I have a plan in mind. I can use this!

VOICE: Thomas Jefferson does find use for it. . . . Months pass and it is July 4, 1776!

SECOND VOICE: Listen to the words and phrases—proclaiming to the world our Declaration of Independence . . . while the Liberty Bell rings in a new nation!

VOICE: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles. . . ."

MUSIC: Chorus—Orchestra and Bells Triumphant to Finish.

What I have just read will be cast and expertly produced over a coast to coast radio network in a few minutes from now. It is part of a series of educational broadcasts arranged by the radio project in the Office of Education on the theme, "Let Freedom Ring." This series of thirteen half-hour programs will dramatize the long struggle for the rights and liberties set forth in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the United States. It will first be produced over the Columbia network for thirteen Monday evenings at 10:30 E.S.T. (9:30 in New Orleans), starting this evening. Then the scripts, with supplementary material, will be made available to schools and colleges. Local producing groups, dramatic art and social science classes, and radio workshops may adapt the scripts to present in their classrooms or assemblies, or over local or nearby radio stations. The Office of Education has been producing demonstration programs over the air during the past year. A script exchange service has been organized, and hundreds of student groups are adapting and rewriting these radio scripts for their own productions.

We now know that educational broadcasting can be as interesting and appealing to radio audiences of both youth and adults as commercial programs. With five programs on the air reaching fewer than half of the stations on the networks, we have received more than 250,000 communications from radio listeners in seven months. It is my conviction that education must move rapidly forward in making use of the airways, both in local communities and throughout the nation, as one way of vitalizing the educational approach to our problems and of stimulating an intellectual curiosity. I think we should reserve certain high frequency wave lengths for the exclusive use of local
educational agencies and for the free discussion of civic affairs. I have officially made a request for this reservation in Washington.

I dwell on this particular technic of vitalizing and democratizing the educational process not because it is by any means the only one, but because we have been able to make new headway in this field in the past few months. We have yet to make adequate use of the motion picture as an educational medium. Both radio and motion pictures can help us in motivating a study of the important civic problems facing our citizens as well as in clarifying certain aspects of these problems.

The Office of Education has been making a step forward in developing definite policies for adult civic education during the last twelve months. Today there are nineteen public forum demonstration centers operating in as many states. They are managed by the people in the local communities, under the executive control of superintendents of schools. These demonstration centers are exhibits of what can be done in this field. The Office of Education has sponsored and financed these demonstrations with federal funds for a short period in order that they might point the way in the further development of communitywide discussion programs.

In the five-month period prior to the first of February, communitywide forum programs have been operating in ten rural and urban communities with a total population of approximately 2,000,000 people. To indicate the magnitude of the discussion program which has been conducted in these ten places, I am able to report that more than 350,000 people have attended 3,854 public meetings.

All of these meetings were arranged and all forum leaders were chosen by the local administrations. The subjects discussed, dealing with current social, economic, and political problems, were also selected by the local management. In connection with these discussions, the ten projects presented 990 radio programs on various allied subjects. The details of the forum program are to be found in a publication which is available thru the Office of Education in Washington.

I refer briefly to these two experiments in vitalized education, forums and radio, as examples of the practical efforts which can be made to meet the crucial issue of supporting our democratic life educationally.

While I have drawn your attention to ten issues—and there are many others—I have placed the major emphasis on the first one, the most urgent, the most crucial, namely, making education contribute to the growth of democracy. The reason for this emphasis is made plain by events of recent history which show so vividly the results of dictatorship. If we fail to meet the crucial issue of maintaining democracy, of increasing popular confidence in the value and efficacy of self-government, it will make little difference what we have done about these other problems.

To create the fine fabric of civilized, democratic society requires the sacrifice, struggle, and patience of generations of human beings. To destroy it takes but a short period of ruthless reaction. Machine guns, strategically placed, can silence the most courageous and able minds. Fires can make short
order of books which represent the patient study of millions of human beings thru generations of searching for truth. Concentration camps can isolate critical intelligence, and by harsh example force the expression of uniform opinions and views. Penalties and threats can throttle the use of the means of communication to broadcast facts or opinions on which human welfare may depend.

Once the great principles of majority rule and minority rights have been trampled under foot, peaceful and orderly and self-enriching social progress is impossible. Once the power of the few to control and exploit the many is unchecked and unlimited, we can expect a repetition of the unbridled arrogance of tyranny. The history of despotism is a reliable prophet of the social catastrophe which may be expected. Contemporaneous events warn us of the conditions of war and poverty which accompany the methods of dictatorship.

Upon the educators in the remaining democracies falls the historic task of giving new vitality and power to popular institutions thru the educative process. This is the crucial issue before us.

Your 1937 Yearbook Commission has recognized it. In bold terms the Commission has stated the issue and suggested some of the responses of the educational forces.

To be specific, it is highly likely that Fascism, under some name or another, will come to the United States unless unemployment can be lessened, most able-bodied men and women employed at decent wages and salaries, the farmers given a fair return for their labors, and adequate provisions made for security in sickness, unemployment, and old age. The chances of bringing about these conditions will be remote unless we can preserve such essentials of the democratic and progressive system as freedom in the schools, and freedom of church, press, and the air. Hence, the role that education must play if we are to avoid Fascism and dictatorship is one of supreme importance.

Since the trend towards reform or Fascism is bound to be rather definitely decided within ten years or so, we cannot put our full trust in improving the instruction in the schools. The die will be cast one way or the other before many now in school have become adults. Therefore, much depends upon the speed, effectiveness, and frequency of the organization of such forums and programs of adult education as those now being promoted by the United States Office of Education.

I appreciate this very kind reference to our efforts in this direction. But fortunately, the "promotion" of adult civic education has engaged the energies and devotion of large numbers of educational and civic leaders. It is my privilege and duty to give voice to their aspirations, and to call for the enlistment of all the leaders of our profession in active service to make America a safe place for democratic progress. There is no time to lose. These programs for popular enlightenment in the protection of popular self-government must be promoted in every state and community. I leave this crucial issue upon your conscience.