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MRA POSITION PAPER—1973

Compensatory Education in Michigan

Prepared by Kenneth L. Carlson

The current thrust for accountability in education should provide Michigan educators with a fruitful opportunity to develop new methods of effective and efficient instruction. The accountability model developed by the Michigan State Department of Education seems conceptually sound. However, the present attempt to test this accountability model in compensatory education leaves much to be desired.

The Michigan compensatory education program, known as Chapter 3, is in its second year of operation. The state legislature has provided \$22.5 million to raise the achievement levels in reading and mathematics of under-achievers in sixty-seven Michigan local school districts. A total of 112,000 children have been designated as Chapter 3 students by a formula based on the fourth grade state assessment test.

Participating school districts receive \$200 for each underachieving student. In order to retain the Chapter 3 funds, students must attain seventy-five percent of the goals that have been established by his local school district. Lack of desired growth result in a reduction of funds. Progress is measured by computing a student's growth on pretest and posttest data.

Studies show no relationship exists between monetary expenditures for instruction (in the range currently encountered in school districts) and educational achievement as measured by standardized reading achievement tests. Furthermore, factor analysis of data compiled as a part of the

Michigan Educational Assessment Program show monetary expenditures to be a dimension of education unrelated to the achievement dimension of education. Thus, statistical analysis suggests that we are faced with what might be called an impossible task because we are trying to change the results on achievement tests as a function of dollars when in reality these two variables appear to be unrelated in the real world.

Theoretically, the school district is responsible for a student's achievement. The Chapter 3 funds are to be used to provide intensive corrective and developmental instruction. The single condition for continuing funding is growth in academic achievement on a standardized or criterion referenced test.

It would seem that the local school district involved should be able to demonstrate this academic growth. However, this is not the case. Approximately 15,000 students evidenced no growth or a regression in academic achievement in reading and mathematics during the first year of the program. Fortunately, the punishment clause was not enforced so no school district received a reduction in funds for the 1972-73 school year. However, many changes in the implementation guidelines must be made.

The present guidelines make no provision for differences in individual student's ability. All students, regardless of potential, are expected to achieve equal growth. This is contrary to valid child development research, and therefore a change in policy is warranted.

Secondly, standardized tests only sample a child's academic achievement and should not be relied upon for computing growth of individuals. These tests were normed for comparison of groups of students not individuals. A suitable alternative seems to be criterion referenced tests. However, such tests have not been in use long enough to be considered reliable for evaluating academic growth.

Thirdly, funds should not be limited to only sixty-seven school

districts. There are many students in other Michigan school districts that could benefit from compensatory education services.

It is our hope that the state legislature will review the present condition of the Chapter 3 funding and make the changes that are needed. In our opinion, what is needed is a compensatory education act that allows all Michigan school districts to provide support services to children lacking development in the basic skills of reading and mathematics.