State of the City: School and Campus
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New York City's 950 public schools, staffed by a force of 60,000 teachers and administrators, enroll 1.1-million children—approximately one-third of the state's school population and more than the schools of all but fourteen states. The City University's network of campuses—one graduate center, ten four-year colleges and nine two-year community colleges—enrolling 266,000 students (including part-time), taught by a faculty of 17,000, constitutes one of the largest institutions of higher education in the world.

No other city bears anything approaching the burden of New York's educational budget. This year the public schools' operating expense stands at $2.4 billion; School Chancellor Irving Anker has submitted a budget request of $2.7 billion for the 1975-76 school year. Of this sum, the city contributes slightly more than 60 per cent, the state a little over 30 per cent and the Federal Government the rest.

The City University has a budget of $662.6 million for 1975-76, but, under the pressure of the present budget, is facing a possible 10 per cent cut despite an anticipated increase of 9,000 students in September. Of the university's budget, approximately half is contributed by the city, the other half by New York State.

The city's pioneering commitment to public education remains more indispensable than ever. The schools' black and Puerto Rican student population—much of it from the poorest homes—now represents almost two-thirds of the total enrollment. Educational services cannot be temporarily reduced or suspended without permanent harm to children and youths, though there is not much doubt they can be delivered more efficiently.

How, then, can the schools become more effective and less wasteful? Can productivity be improved without hurting quality? Are all present operations essential to the maintenance or improvement of that quality? What austerity measures are feasible, without a deleterious effect on learning?

Improving the Schools

Some savings are clearly possible at a time of declining enrollments. Effective consolidation of some underutilized schools and phasing out of inefficient plants will lessen expenditures—moves already under way.

Smaller classes in the early grades have been largely responsible for the slight upturn in reading achievements. To prevent backsliding, classes must be kept small. More, rather than fewer adults, must work with the children. Careful selection of the best available teachers—now made possible by a surplus in the labor market—needs to be supplemented by intensified use of the increasing corps of properly screened and trained volunteers.

Administrators should be returned to classroom duty. On-the-job teacher training at relatively low pay, patterned on medical internship and residency, could signally improve educational quality, while lowering the payroll. The cost of teacher absenteeism must be trimmed.

The high cost of vandalism must be reduced, if possible by making the culprits repair the damage. Strict cost-accounting must be imposed on maintenance and supplies. Expenditures unrelated to the quality of education must be eliminated.

Decentralization, which was a political as well as educational necessity during the unrest of the sixties, must now justify itself solely on the grounds of better education. We believe this to be feasible, and in fact some districts have already proved the point; wasteful practices in other districts, under the guise of decentralization, are unacceptable. Duplication of expenditures must be eliminated; districts must be held strictly accountable for the integrity and effectiveness of their bookkeeping and fiscal policies.

Integration must be made synonymous with better education. There is a need for "magnet schools," which attract students of all races by virtue either of their generally outstanding quality or by offering extraordinary opportunities in, say, foreign languages, mathematics, science, or even pre-professional areas.