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THE UNITED STATES COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON



August 12, 1963

Dear Mr. Fogarty:

I have wanted for some time to send you an informal and personal report on our reaction to Admiral Rickover's suggestion that the Nation would benefit by the establishment of some national standards in education. You will recall that he has suggested this in testimony before you on several occasions, urging that a voluntary plan be worked out under the direction of a group of distinguished scholars.

I find myself in hearty agreement with the Admiral that the Nation does need a way of estimating where it stands in the quality of its work in education--and the parents need a way of knowing how well their local school is doing. Soon after talking with you about these matters in the early winter, I had an hour's talk with Admiral Rickover to get a more detailed sense of what he had in mind. I then asked the Brookings Institution to study his suggestions and to report their view on whether the method he proposed would accomplish what he had in mind.

Brookings reported that in their opinion his proposal might have some serious unintended consequences and recommended that some other way be sought. Admiral Rickover had suggested that a set of tests be created by a group of scholars to be given to high school seniors if they wish to take them. Brookings pointed out that it was likely that the students who took them would probably be those whose parents were ambitious for them, or students who were already doing quite well academically. The results might therefore be skewed and not represent a fair sample of what was happening with boys and girls at all levels of ability, ambition, and family circumstances. It is even conceivable that the results would suggest to the public that our high schools are doing better than they actually are because of the nature of the sample.

Yet I hated to stop at this point. Admiral Rickover obviously is dealing with a very important point. I have subsequently been consulting with a number of men who seem to me well qualified to advise in this area: men such as Henry Chauncey, President of the Educational Testing Service, Ralph Tyler of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and John Gardner, President of the Carnegie Corporation. Our thinking has not yet jelled into a detailed program, but the outlines are getting clearer.

The first step must be the establishment within the Office of Education of a strong statistical unit, well qualified to carry out a good sampling program. The recent reports that have come in from Project Talent, conducted through the Cooperative Research Program, gives us the basis for a good way of collecting data, but is not inclusive enough as yet.

What we need before we take the next step is to find a first-rate man to head up the program. I have had bad luck in the last three months in trying to get such a man, but I can assure you that we are still trying and will not give up. After he gets on board, I think we can describe a detailed plan to you to carry out the intent of the Admiral's program.

Sincerely,

Francis Keppel

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Honorable John E. Fogarty
House of Representatives
Washington 25, D.C.