An Emergency in the Education of American Youth
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A statement adopted August 22, 1943, by the Educational Policies Commission

By the hundreds of thousands, boys and girls who in other times would have completed high schools, are now leaving school before graduation to go to work. In some communities, the exodus from high school has already reached proportions which are alarming to all concerned for the success of the war effort and for the long-time welfare of youth. In practically all communities, withdrawals have reached the point where they require immediate attention and action. And almost everywhere, the rates of withdrawal are steadily mounting.

At the same time, there are large sources of labor, especially of adults employed in the production of luxuries and in other non-essential occupations.

The motives which impel youth to leave school for work are understandable - the attraction of high wages, the desire to do something definite to help win the war, the influence of the example of their fellows, and the arguments and inducements of those who, thoughtlessly or otherwise, would exploit the labor of youth.

High school students, and often their parents also, are likely to respond to these motives without giving thought to other considerations, which are of far greater importance to the national welfare. All adults concerned in these matters - particularly employers, school officials, and parents - should see that youth clearly understand such considerations as those which follow, and that they carefully weigh them before making their decisions.

The greatest service which boys and girls of sixteen and seventeen can render to the war effort is to get ready for the national service which most of them will be called upon to give at eighteen, in the armed forces, in war production, in civilian war agencies, or in specialized training. Time after time, high officials of the Army and the Navy, of government and industry,
have urged youth to use the years up to eighteen to build the foundations of a broad education. That way, they have affirmed, lies the greatest national service.

The greatest service which boys and girls of sixteen and seventeen can render to themselves is to secure now the education which will surely be needed in the highly competitive labor market of the postwar years.

Many cases have already been reported of successful arrangements for combining part-time work in war occupations with the continuation of regular schooling until high school graduation. Such cooperative plans offer the greatest promise of a constructive solution to the problem. All such arrangements, however, should be guided by the principle that both the national welfare and the welfare of youth require that education have first claim on the time and energies of youth.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Youth who have not completed high school are in the war most effectively when they are carrying forward their regular school work, plus the special curricula and activities provided by the schools as a recognized part of the total war effort.

2. School attendance until graduation is the best contribution to the war effort which school-age youth can make.

3. Full recognition should be given to the statements of the Army, Navy, and War Manpower Commission, to the effect that the great need is for the highest quality of service which can be obtained and that continued schooling until graduation is the one best assurance for the performance desired.

4. Parents, industry, labor, business, and society in general will profit best by the adequate education of all youth.

5. The personal needs and development of the individual pupil can best be met by continuance in school until graduation.
6. The interpretation of the school laws, in respect to school leaving, should be made clear, to the effect that permits for work are granted for time which is released from schooling and that the burden of proof is upon those who interfere with the continuance of youth in school until graduation.

7. Safeguards for the proper granting of work permits should be rigorously maintained.

8. Counseling services should be given in connection with individual requests for work permits. Pupils should be advised to enter only such occupations as are officially listed as essential.

9. Requests for work permits should be presented in advance, and personal contacts should be made with parents before the issuance of permits.

10. School officials should immediately interview pupils who left school before the end of the preceding term and offer specific counseling in respect to the desirability of their return to school.

11. Each school should survey the local situation with respect to essential work needs and the best possible adjustment for the maximum amount of schooling, with such provision of time for essential work as may be necessary.

12. The health of pupil workers should be given full consideration, and provisions for work should apply only to those who are physically capable.

13. In any of those centers where the needs for war emergency manpower cannot be met in any other way, cooperative schemes involving adjustments between school time and employment should be developed, the work schedule not to exceed one-half time.

14. Every effort should be made to meet the needs of working youth by the extension of school opportunities through late afternoon and evening hours, on Saturdays, and during the summer months. All such extensions of the school schedule should receive the benefits of state aid.

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