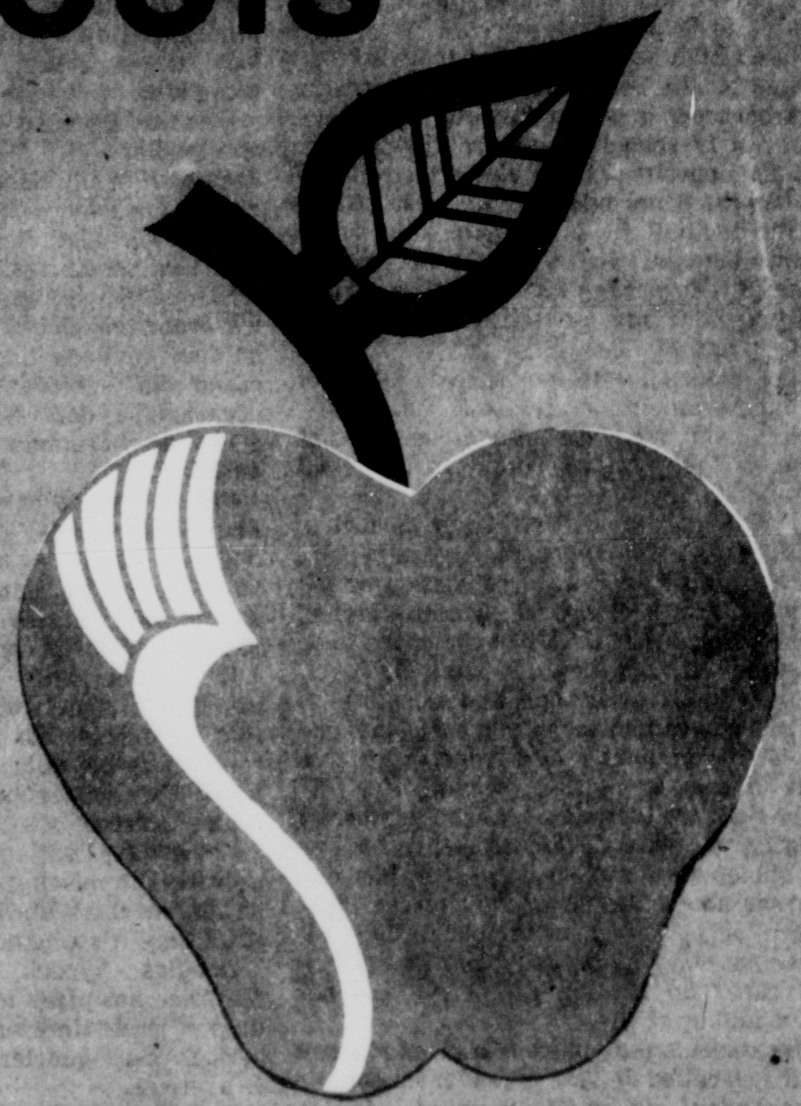


Our troubled schools



Education dangles from ideological seesaw

By W.R. Deener III
Dallas Morning News

DALLAS — The American public school system, almost from its beginning in the 1600s, has been the target of well-intentioned reformers and the tool of politicians and clergy trying to change society, education experts say.

From the Puritan belief in the depravity of man to the U.S. Supreme Court's belief in racial integration, public schools have been the stages for struggle.

Many experts believe today's calls for reform are rooted in a 100-year-old tug of war over the purpose of public education and the services it should provide. Some of the problems in the public school system are reflective of society in general and must be resolved outside the schools, not in them, educators said.

Public schools are pushed and pulled toward one educational theory, then another, said Joseph Adelson, a psychology professor at the University of Michigan.

Public education has shifted from a rigid back-to-basics theme to a more relaxed self-expressive theme four times since 1900. Each group has claimed to know the true purpose of the public school.

What most educators call the present weakness of public school

curriculums, for example, is the result of a swing in the late 1960s toward progressivism, said Dr. Diane Ravitch, professor of education at Columbia University. The central themes of progressivism, a movement that originated in the early 1900s, are self-expression and self-pacing and not strict adherence to academic courses by all students, Dr. Ravitch said.

Many educators, including Dr. Ravitch, blame today's decline in student achievement scores and literacy in part on the move away from more rigid academic curriculums.

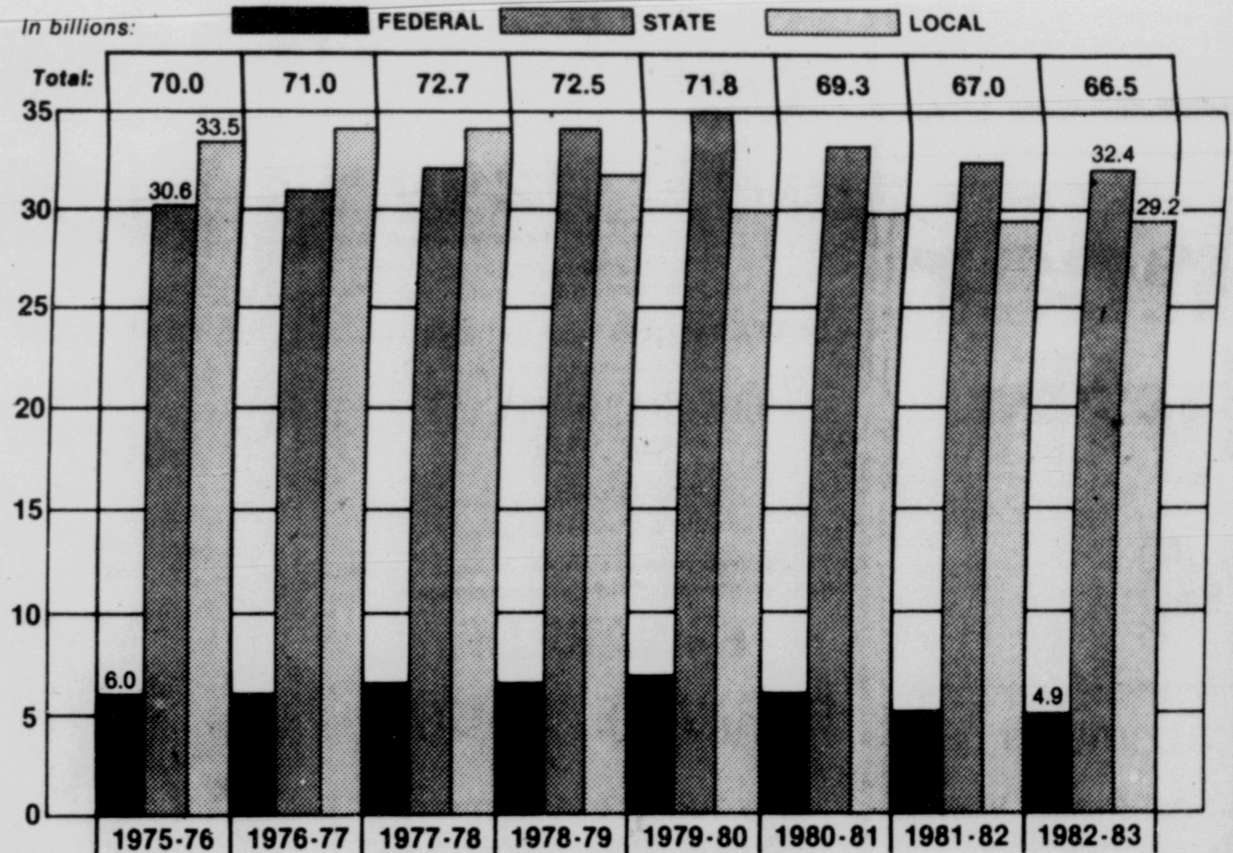
She said she believes the present concerns about education are justified — and significant. But it is important, she said, to remember the cyclical nature of these crises and educational theories.

The latest call for reform came in late 1970s and early 1980s, as achievement scores fell and U.S. technology began lagging behind Japan's. Confidence in public schools plummeted, and critics began to complain of a lack of student discipline, teacher incompetence and academic softness.

"So where we are now is a kind of replay of the post-Sputnik period — a back to the basics movement

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Education spending

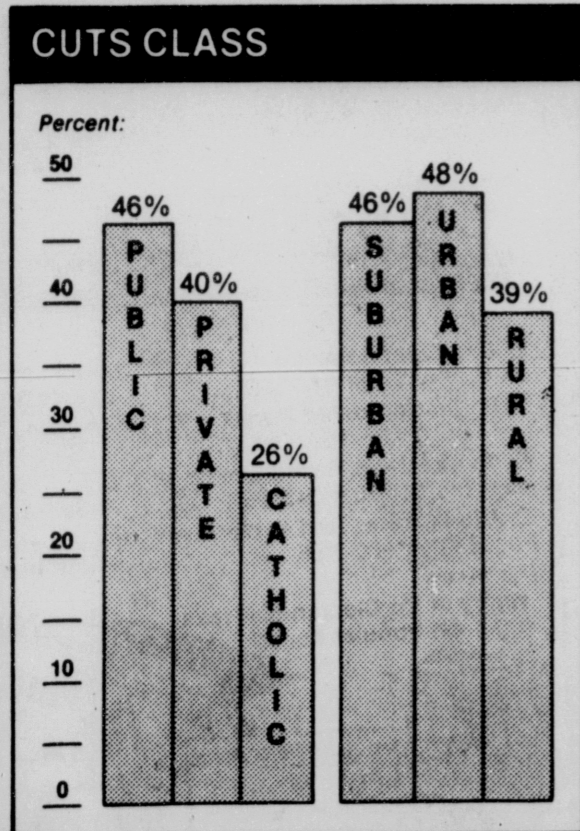


SOURCE: National Education Association. Figures are in 1975 constant dollars. © InfoGraphics 1983

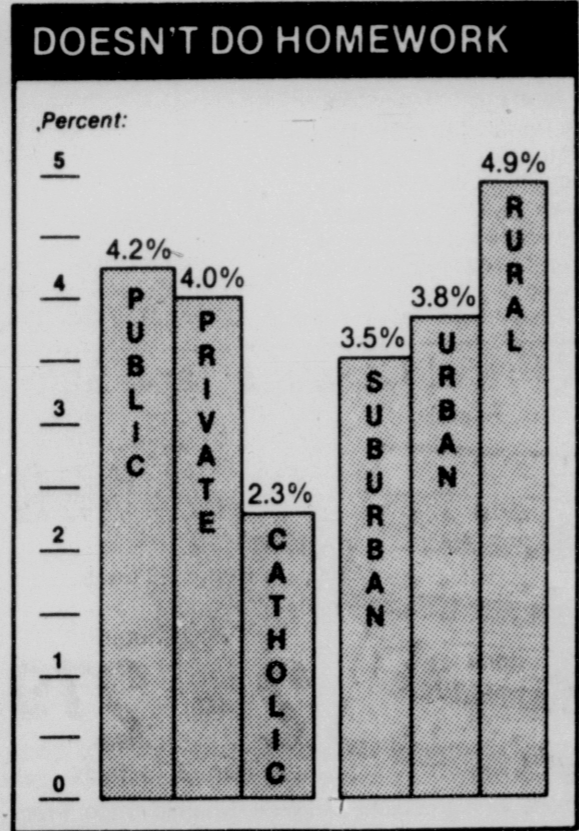
Student misbehavior

A recent report on discipline in American schools shows a relationship between student misbehavior and the type and situation of schools. Overall, public schools in urban or suburban areas have most problems with students cutting class, while rural

schools have slightly less homework completed. Only a small percentage of students from all types of schools have been involved in genuinely criminal activities.



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, National Opinion Research Center



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Current alarm result of ongoing problems

By David Real
and Terrence Stutz
Dallas Morning News

Evidence of declining academic performance has been mounting for nearly two decades. But only this year has the alarm sounded in a way not heard since the post-Sputnik days of the late 1950s.

Ineffective teachers, flabby course offerings, a lack of discipline and parental indifference did not spring up overnight. They have been growing problems in American education since the 1960s.

What appears to be different in 1983 is public awareness of those issues, thanks to a series of reports that — while finding some bright spots — have generally offered a bleak assessment of the nation's schools.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education captured national attention in April with its widely quoted report, "A Nation at Risk." The report used strong lan-

guage, referring to "a rising tide of mediocrity," to drive home the point that U.S. schools are inferior.

And after the publication of a half-dozen major reports and numerous other studies, education finds itself coming into the election-year spotlight as well.

"I think our nation has become genuinely alarmed about the gap between the U.S. and other industrialized nations," said Ernest Boyer, former U.S. commissioner of education and author of one of the studies on education this year. "There is a growing anxiety about whether we are losing our cutting edge economically. And whenever we have begun to worry about ourselves as a nation, we have always turned to the schools," Boyer said.

The nation's confidence in its public school system has been eroded by an almost unbroken decline in scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, used for admission

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