

THE WHITE MOUNTAIN NEWS ASSOCIATION

WORKING PAPER #1

A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NEW HAMPSHIRE
INCLUDING A DETAILED STUDY OF COSTS, CURRICULUM, AND SPECIAL EDUCATION
IN THE TOWN OF CORNISH; A MODEL, RURAL COMMUNITY

PRODUCED AS A PUBLIC SERVICE FROM INFORMATION GATHERED AND COMPILED
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The White Mountain News Association is a private, not for profit data collection and analysis service. We specialize in research of historical and present day public policy. We compile complex information gathered from government documents, various media, and personal contacts, and distribute concise reports and studies to the public.

A Message To Parents

The education of your children is among the most critical issues you are faced with as parents. The globalization of trade and the competitive nature of our market economy make it imperative that your children receive the best possible educational experience. As we reviewed the costs and content of the educational program in Cornish we devoted special attention to the nature of the curriculum and the style of instruction that is being provided. Because those of us associated with White Mountain News are generally aged 40 and older, our educational experiences were comprised of radically different approaches and teaching styles than those currently in use. We were "students" expected to acquire and master the skills that were necessary to prosper and contribute to society, as opposed to today's "learners" who, it is understood, will grow and achieve at their own unique pace, if exposed to *holistic instructional experiences*. We were conditioned to compete academically and physically, creating a natural order of higher and lower achievers. Memorization and drill were employed as learning tools and repetitions were increased if a student was failing. Contemporary approaches to instruction and learning discourage individual academic competition, generally avoid memorization and drill, and promote team based processes that are intended to create an environment in which slower learners can prosper and be comfortable in the classroom. This produces a less stressful instructional setting, and is believed by modern educational theorists to produce the greatest potential for academic success for the largest number of learners. This is no guarantee that your child will thrive academically or acquire the skills necessary to insure his or her ultimate material success. The contemporary approach is radically different from centuries old, classical theories of education which suggest that competition between students and the resulting stressful, stratification of individuals from lower to higher achievement levels was healthy and natural, and should be encouraged.

The world in which we came of age required a combination of personal initiative, discipline and good fortune to achieve success. We were taught that the harder we worked, the greater advantage we would gain, and the better we would feel about ourselves and our world. It was up to us to get motivated and avoid failure. Modern educational strategies are designed to promote "positive self esteem" that is not contingent on the level of "success" one achieves in the classroom. Contemporary student evaluation systems having replaced the letter grades of the past is just one of the more visible indications of this change in philosophy. Modern theorists postulate that when a *learner* is ashamed he or she "shuts down" and is less likely to learn. Classical educational theory suggests that individual failure and recovery from the experience of failure are natural, necessary steps in intellectual development that ultimately result in the student striving to achieve at his or her maximum ability. Most modern educators promote the notion that "everybody's a winner" and discourage individuals from being prideful about their academic prowess.

Our investigation uncovered no villains, scandals or systemic corruption in Cornish. These would have been easier to handle than what we did discover. We found that everyone involved in the process of education in the community believes emphatically in what they are doing, *and* that they are doing the best they can with what they describe as limited resources. What we also discovered is that few parents attend school board meetings to offer input or ask questions. Clearly, there is a widening divide between the taxpaying community and the education establishment that should be an item of profound concern to parents. Our findings suggest that most taxpayers believe that too much is being spent on education, and that the quality of the service isn't worth the cost. We have provided this report so that you can gain a clear understanding of costs, policy and curriculum, and how these factors impact your children. We have copied information including federal statutes, and state and local curriculum, and will provide limited numbers of our documents to interested parents.

This report features summaries of our data in each section, so if you're pressed for time you can quickly scan the study for specific information. We strongly recommend that parents thoroughly read the section on curriculum, and present any questions or concerns to the Cornish School Board which traditionally meets on the third Monday of each month at 7:00 P.M. at the Cornish School.

Background

Our organization has typically been involved in research of Federal policy. Several people from across the region contacted us last year requesting information about the public education system. They cited experiences with local educators that left them with questions and concerns. Two of these requests were of particular interest to us because of the Constitutional implications regarding privacy, and the moral implications of public officials interfering with parental rights. Neither of these instances occurred in Cornish, but both were important in triggering our further research of the Cornish School System and SAU #6. These are the instances in question:

Our contact, alarmed, revealed that public school teachers were attempting to compel her to have a psychological evaluation performed on her 6 year old. The teachers asserted that his "hyperactive behavior" was symptomatic of *Attention Deficit Disorder* (one of many recently defined psychological problems leading to *learning disability*) and that he may need to be placed on medication. Our contact did not believe it was the province of educators to make such judgments, and has refused to comply. She has since experienced what she and her husband describe as continual harassment from public school officials. They are considering home schooling their children next year.

Another contact told us of a set of journals his third grader was instructed to keep. One was for school only, the other could be brought home for discussion with parents. The journal in school included information regarding what most would consider private attitudes and family activities (weekend trips, drawings of the home floor plan, descriptions of the parents "feelings" about smoking, the environment and firearms). Our contact said she felt as though this type of assignment was invasive of her privacy but did not feel it would be in the interest of her child to force the issue with school officials. These people are also considering home schooling for their three children.

In the latter part of last year several Cornish residents contacted our answering service with concerns about a "film showing masturbation" being used as a teaching tool at Cornish Elementary School. They also alleged that alternative sexual lifestyles were being promoted through the health care curriculum. We queried the school board and were assured that parents were informed of the course's content and gave permission for their children to attend the class. We were told that the course was standard fare, that the film was merely a cartoon that dealt with the issue of shame, and that the Principal had addressed the questions of parents and reconfigured the course to meet their guidelines. Our interest in this issue was piqued because the private, subjective nature of these subjects places them within the lawful and moral province of parents, not public educators. Ideological biases, whether "conservative" or "liberal," should not be imposed upon children in publicly funded schools.

A widely published report surfaced in December of 1996 regarding the academic performance of students across the region. Cornish students turned in average and below average scores in English Grammar and Science. At about the same time we were informed by the school board that at least a 10% tax increase would be proposed to fund the school system next year.

In view of the lackluster academic showing of Cornish Elementary School Students, the proposed tax increase, and the growing concern townspeople have expressed about all of these topics, we decided to conduct thorough research, into several specific issues relevant to the Cornish School system and SAU #6, and publish our findings. Our intention is to offer detailed, logical input that will assist people in determining a realistic course of action that will produce higher quality education at reduced costs.

The balance of this report is the result of our three month study.

Discretionary Factors That Drive Costs

Town reports are published annually and several, important trends in education that have developed over the past 40 years (and more) can be readily identified through their review. The following section of this report is based largely on data compiled from these reports.

In the first 20 years of service, (1955 through 1975) Cornish Elementary and Middle School provided what was apparently a quality education to students while staying within a limited budget. The number of tuition (high school) students varied from 87 to 107 and the number of elementary pupils ranged from 158 to 227. (see chart #1). Early records reveal that one school superintendent and several clerical workers, rather than the SAU of today, administered school services. There was no Special Education, at least as we have it today, but disadvantaged children were taught to the *assumed* level of their abilities; some were sent to schools especially designed for their particular needs at minimal cost to the community.

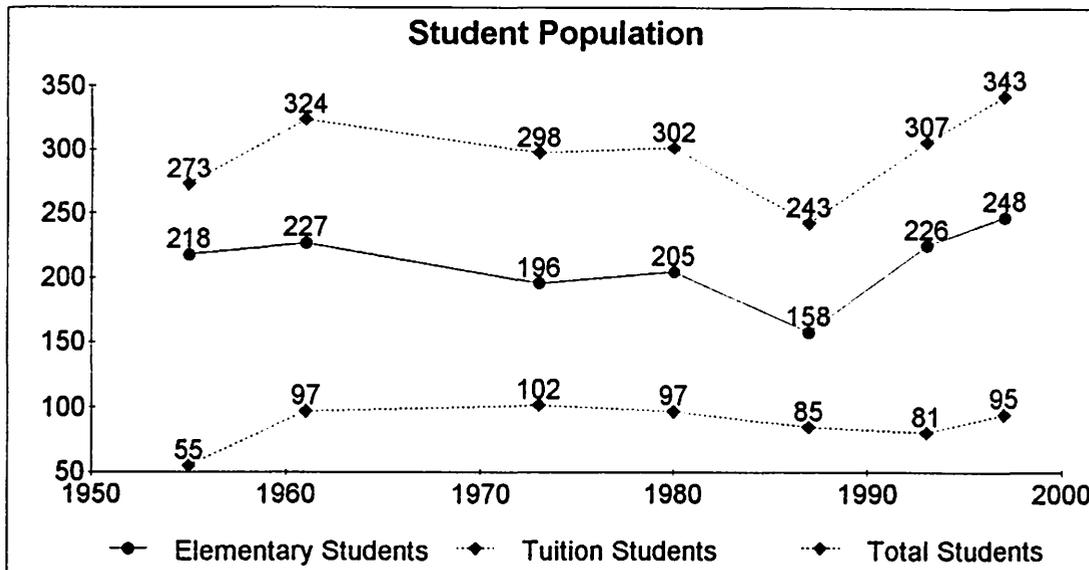


Chart #1 depicts the number of students, including the number of tuition students, enrolled in The Cornish Public School System. Projected elementary school enrollment for this year (1997) is only 10% higher than in 1960 and is expected to fall in the next several years.

The cost of education in Cornish went from \$110,000 in 1961 to \$560,000 by 1980, a five fold cost increase in less than 20 years. (see chart #2) Inflation contributed significantly to this increase, but other discretionary factors including but not limited to building maintenance and expansion, modernization, Federally mandated Special Education, additional staff both locally and at SAU #6, and the tenure (seniority) system. Note that the number of teachers was between 8 and 11 for many years. Sometimes people volunteered as school aids and there was a "recess supervisor" and part time nurse. In some years the principal taught classes, and provided leadership and school management services.

In 1987 with enrollment of only 158 elementary school students and 85 tuition pupils, there were 15 full time teachers (remember that in this study we've assigned a value of .5 units for those teachers and aides that worked half time only) including Special Education. Of course, there was a full time principal, guidance services and a nurse. (Not included in graphic analysis) There were 2 regular ed para-professionals and two Special Education aids (chart #2 PSG.6). With enrollment lower than the previous year, and an equivalent of 1 less full time teacher, school taxes were raised 12% in 1987, with the total for education coming in at \$965,000 (chart #2). By 1993 Cornish elementary had 205 students and 81 tuition pupils. There were 17 teachers 4 paraprofessionals, and part time guidance and nurse services. The SAU, by this time, included a representative for Special Education and three other professional administrators at a cost

of to the town of Cornish \$64,500 (See chart #3 pg. 7).

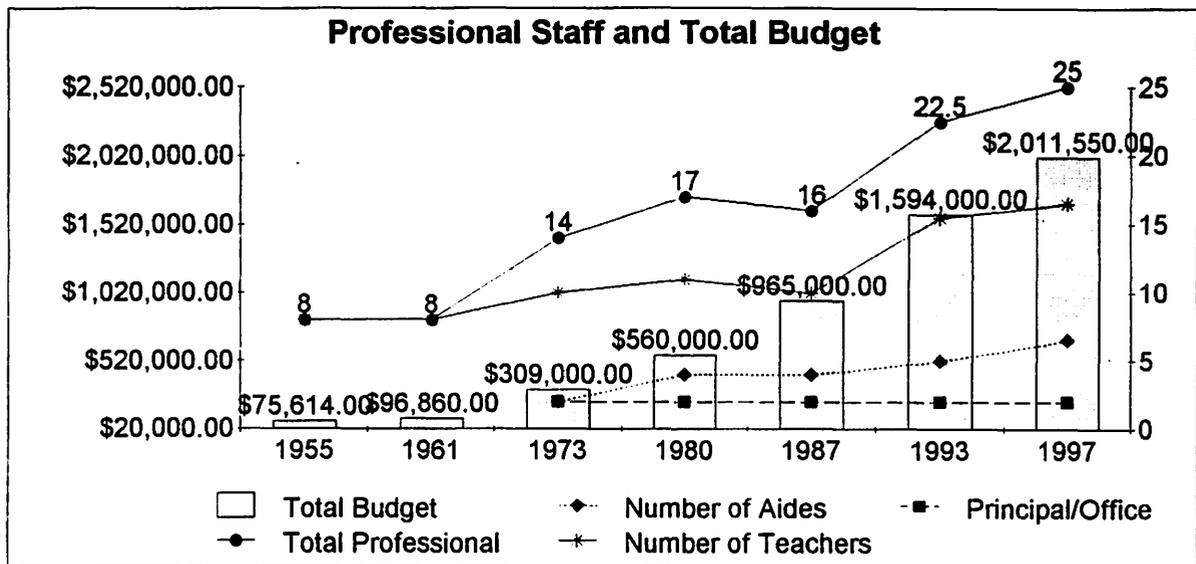


Chart #2 relates the number of staff (where 1=a full time position) to the increases in costs since the construction of the Cornish Elementary and Middle School in 1955. Note that overall costs are indicated by the broad vertical bars, and roughly correspond to increases in staff.

Taking the average rate of inflation into account the salaries and benefits for professionals in education are somewhat more attractive than those earned by other professionals. Salaries for registered nurses in the Upper Valley, for example, presently range from approximately \$14.00 hourly for those new to the field to as much as \$50,000 annually for administrative or specialized nurses. Accountants earn from \$18,000 annually at entry level, to \$50,000 when experienced and licensed as CPA's. It is important to recognize that unlike teaching, these professions offer the options of entrepreneurship and specialization that can increase earning potential considerably. Of course, these fields generally involve year-round employment as opposed to the 185 day work schedule enjoyed by teachers. Moreover, these are competitive, private sector jobs that do not feature the comparative security of a tenured (seniority based) teaching position.

Because of the monopolistic nature of the statutorily enforced collective bargaining process it is impossible to accurately judge what *fair market value* is for the services educators and administrators render. The current collective bargaining process typically relies on comparisons of salary and benefits packages offered to other teachers in the region. The introduction of the argument suggesting teachers are overpaid is generally countered with the observation that Cornish teachers have less attractive salary and benefits packages overall, than educators in other nearby communities. This type of comparison allows costs be ratcheted up in an exaggerated fashion *because* it is difficult to provide valid comparisons to similar, professional private sector occupations.

When we asked Cornish educators and school board personnel why classes are smaller today, we were advised that higher standards require smaller classrooms and that the quality of educational experience increases as class sizes decrease. We were also advised that with a smaller pool of students it is sometimes difficult to create "optimum" class size. One example was that of a class of 35; too large by Cornish' standards, to teach as one group. So we were told a split to 17 and 18 is *necessary*. In fact, regular education class size is neither mandated nor *necessary*. Cornish student data currently available reveals that these numerical inconveniences have resulted in some classes having as few as 14 students present. Widely published, up-to-date studies of independent, inner city, government supported, Catholic Schools delivering basic skills instruction indicate that children in classrooms with as many 44 students in atten-

dance demonstrate *higher* scores on achievement tests than their counterparts attending classrooms where enrollment is lower. Such studies prove that curriculum, teaching techniques, and most importantly, student initiative are the preeminent factors effecting learning and comprehension.

Another discretionary expense that must be carefully considered is the School Administrative Unit, SAU #6. (Chart #3) Salaries for school administrators have advanced significantly and add considerably to the cost of local education. Most businesses have experienced a reduction in clerical costs and have downsized accordingly due to widespread use of computers. The SAU serves numerous, valuable administrative functions but is an unchallenged monopoly. Our sources within the Cornish education system suggest that as much as 30% could be saved by retaining a private contractor to act as the district business administrator. A collaborative effort between the elementary school principal and a professional school business administrator has in fact, been privately discussed.

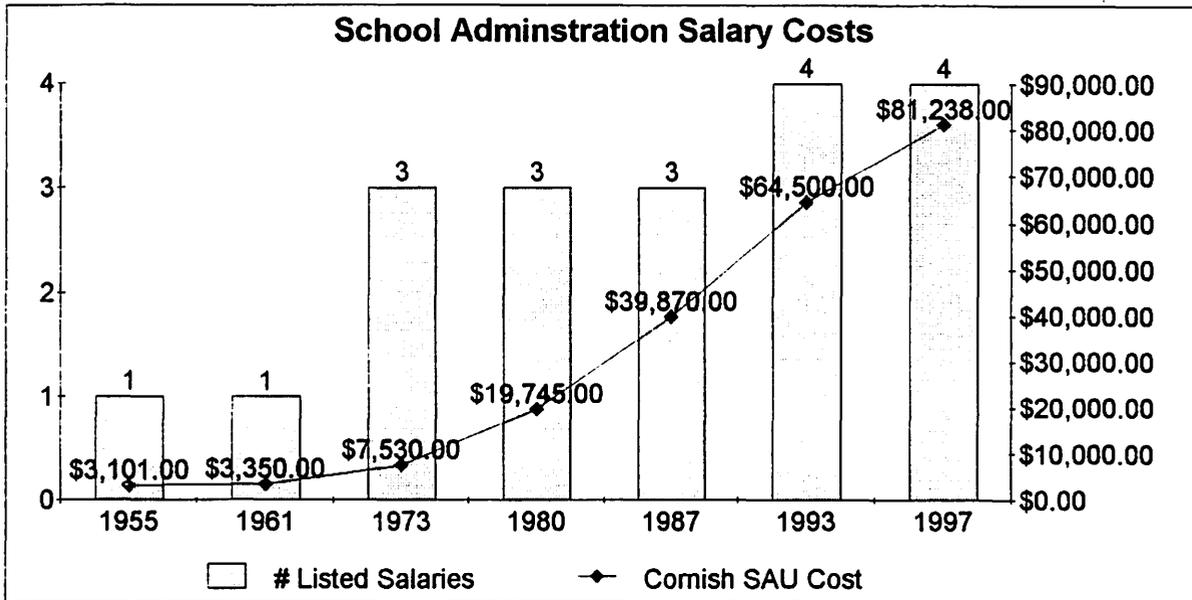


Chart #3 shows the cost of SAU services to Cornish on the right scale and the number of listed salaried personnel on the left.

The year over year explanation for soaring costs and demands for more space is typically based on increased enrolment and unavoidable tuition expenses. Clearly, as charts #1 and #2 reveal, the number of students has not been the **main** factor driving staffing and cost increases. Our study suggests that enrollment is not meaningfully related to real (Inflation adjusted) cost increases. While the number of students varies considerably, (including tuition and elementary enrollment) the rates of staffing and budget increases consistently out paced inflation and mandated class sizes respectively. Clearly, increased staffing and a pronounced increase in the number of teachers at the *upper end* of the pay-scale are the primary, discretionary factors driving the cost of education higher. (chart #4 pg. 8) Under the current statutory regulations the practise of laying off teachers at the high end of the pay scale and replacing them with equally qualified professionals that would negotiate more reasonable terms is forbidden. This is significant, because out of district tuition costs are driven skyward by these same factors. Other communities grapple with the same statutorily enforced, tenure based collective bargaining arrangements. So when school board personal or educators present increased enrollment as a *primary* cause of increasing costs they are either attempting to deceive the public or are deceiving themselves.

Only Special Education (which is covered in detail in another section of this report) class size is regulated by law: Under New Hampshire Standards for the Education of Students With Disabilities (Here after NHed) section 1119.05b(3) class sizes are limited to 8 pupils without a paraprofessional assistant and 12 with a "para." The only limitation of class size we were able to uncover for regular education was in the

collective bargaining agreement between the school board and the local teachers collective bargaining unit. The number of students your school board, and the local union have agreed upon is 25. (We are informed that some classes are presently larger than 25, but are unaware of any effort by the school board to increase this number and enforce the increase. Under current law they have the power to do this at the bargaining table.

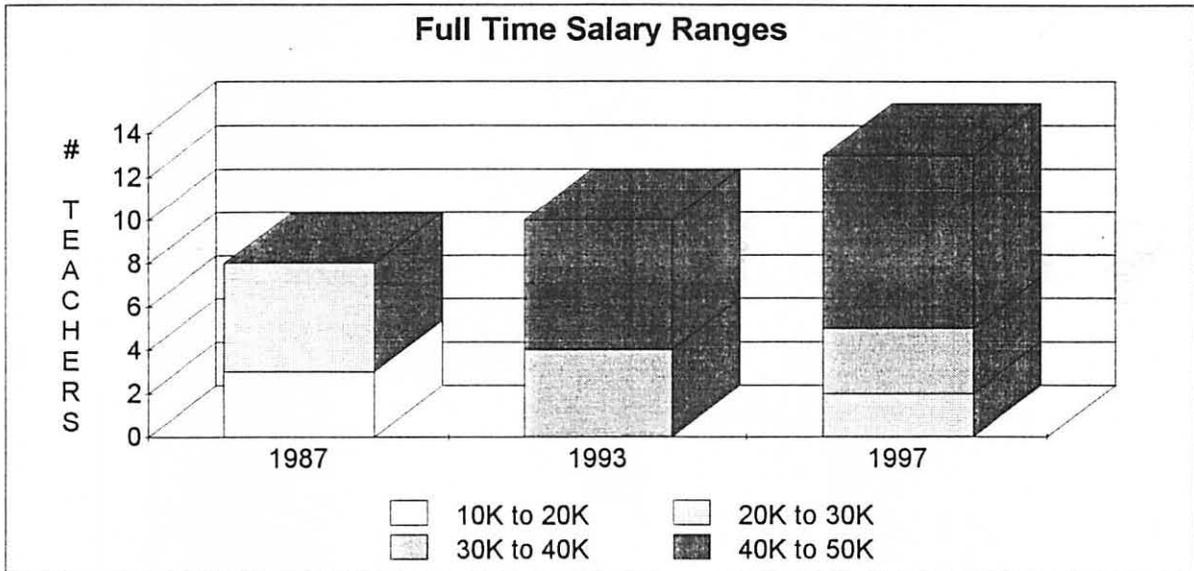


Chart #4 illustrates the changes, from 1987 to the present, in the total number of full time teachers, receiving various compensation and benefits. As shown, most teachers in 1987, were at the lowest pay rate; today the great majority are at the top pay rate. Next to the increase in overall staff this is the most significant factor contributing to increased costs.

All of the above mentioned issues can and should be addressed by the Cornish School Board. That body has the legal authority to structure the collective bargaining agreement to meet the communities expectations. As such, they have the power to create a cost effective, positive education experience for Cornish children.

Summary:

- Increased costs are partially a function of wage inflation.
- Learning is more directly related to course content and student initiative than class size.
- Discretionary costs can best be reduced by reducing staff.
- The 185 day work year wage and benefits packages are somewhat more attractive than those available to salaried professionals with similar training requirements.
- Tenure results in a large portion of teaching staff being at the upper end of the pay scale and is the most important factor driving school costs higher.
- Student population has been used to excuse increased costs but the record shows costs increased even when enrollment was down.
- Class sizes can be increased under the conditions of the union contract.
- Competitive bids for SAU services can be sought if approved by the voters.
- The School Board is **YOUR** agent, and has the power to bring about positive change.

An Overview of State and Local Curriculum

Sources and Contacts

The majority of source materials for this section were obtained from Cornish School Principal, Scott Kalter and are readily available to the public. Mr. Kalter was receptive to the information gathering process, and dedicated a number of hours to answering questions. He provided numerous, interesting insights regarding the programs at The Cornish School, and is an able, articulate advocate of modern education practise and theory. Among his latest programing additions is a system designed to acquaint upper wing students with the relationship between responsibilities, rights and privileges. Although some teachers did not agree with his idea, Mr. Kalter felt it was important for eighth graders to understand this important civic dynamic. He recently came under fire for his positions regarding certain aspects of health education in Cornish, and has answered parents' criticism by establishing more conservative, written guidelines for the program. Mr. Kalter expressed concerns about children being exposed to sexually explicit material in movies and television, and believes that more time should be devoted to the health curriculum to explain misconceptions that originate with such sources. He has said that because young adults remain unmarried for much longer today than in the past, and due to diseases such as AIDS, a variety of approaches, including masturbation, should be discussed in the health curriculum. He made it clear that his opinion would not interfere with his carrying out the wishes of parents regarding this sensitive issue. While seeming to understand the concerns of taxpayers, he maintains that meeting educational standards will require significant increases in funding and expanded curriculum. He has requested funds for second language instruction, expanding guidance services, and additional classroom space among other things. Mr. Kalter suggests that the financial situation here, as in many local communities, has created stresses that adversely effect the education system, and is both concerned and somewhat pessimistic as to how these factors will ultimately be resolved.

New Hampshire education guidelines published in 1995 in accordance with RSA 193-C, are integrated with this analysis of the Cornish school program. When compared with curriculum in Cornish, the state guidelines place more emphasis on individual achievement and precise standards of evaluation. The synopses we've received on the course content for Cornish are brief, and the scope of this report covers only the details contained therein. We have not had an opportunity to attend any of the classes at the elementary school so we can not assert with certainty that the course frameworks presented are being followed by instructors. Because we have not met with individual teachers to discuss their varied approaches to the education process, we are not in a position to offer any judgment as to their proficiency and efficacy in their classrooms.

The Whole Language Approach to Reading and Writing Instruction

Our preliminary examination of the teaching techniques and course materials at Cornish Elementary School reveals that practises based on modern theories have replaced traditional approaches to education. The predominant themes of the contemporary education establishment's chosen curriculum are the creation of a positive learning environment, and the integration of subjects with one another. Emphasis is placed on the notion that "the whole learning experience" must be properly integrated and relate to the life experience of children in order for them to acquire a positive attitude about learning, and develop self esteem. Most modern education theory is based on the idea that children learn best "from the whole to the part," as contrasted with the classical approach in which "building blocks" of knowledge are understood, one piece at a time, and assembled into an expanding cognitive whole as children mature. Traditional ideas of *failure* and *punishment* for the most part, are not present in the modern classroom environment, in that various levels of achievement result in praise from instructors.

According to the 1991 Educational Research Service report entitled "The Whole Language Approach to Reading and Writing Instruction," skills based teaching of "bite-size" portions of language is "unrelated to the needs and experience of children" and should be replaced with strategies that are based on the notion that children learn to read through the same mental processes by which they learn to speak. "Skills based approaches are based on the premise that young children learn to read and write best when taught specific skills in controlled sequential steps," and learn to speak in a different way, by practising saying words to which whole concepts are attached. In whole language classrooms "learners" are encouraged to write stories and create journals that are relevant to their experiences. Skills based instruction begins by teaching the alphabet, then simple spelling and vocabulary classes are combined with the teaching principles of basic grammar into courses that encourage students to practise composition and sentence structure. Students' retention of basic principles is assured by drills or writing exercises in skills based programs. When enrolled in whole language programs learners are encouraged to use "Invented Spelling" to convey their ideas in writing, and knowledge of sentence structure is gained through "collaborative reading and writing." The ERS report confirms that these teaching techniques discourage students from "working on assignments individually, [because] activities in whole language classrooms are often socially-oriented and interactive. Classroom peers are used as mentors, sounding boards, sources of knowledge, and supporters in the enterprise of learning rather than someone to compete with for grades or rewards." The classical approach to education is based on the creation of a competitive classroom environment as a means of student motivation. Students are expected to compete for positive feedback in school, much the same way that adults compete in the marketplace for wages.

Phonics instruction (in which words are sounded out letter by letter) is not completely omitted from the whole language classroom. But the use of "mini-lessons," rather than entire courses on phonetics practice, is not uncommon. Proponents of the whole language approach emphasize the idea that all children learn language arts differently, and that whole language programs are readily adaptable to individual needs. The ERS report on this subject features a section on learning disabled children suggesting that whole language addresses their needs more completely. Classical theorists argue that *all children* learn higher language arts bit-by-bit but at different rates. Even supporters of whole language agree that "phonetic learners often have great difficulty with nonphonetic approaches. [But] these students, when changed to a systematic phonics program, often make dramatic gains." Some traditional teaching professionals assert that whole language is simply a method by which modern educators avoid certain difficulties naturally associated with skills based language arts instruction. These include but are not limited to uncooperative students that refuse to practise, students who refuse to pay attention, and students that have difficulty mastering phonetic relationships in written form. Our research suggests that placement of children in special education due to their inability to grasp language arts in the whole language classroom is common. Twenty two students attending Cornish Elementary School are "coded" (enrolled in Special Education) learning disabled. The privacy of coded

students is protected under the law, so it is impossible to accurately determine whether or not the whole language approach assists students described as learning disabled or adds to their confusion.

Whole language detractors adamantly proclaim that the absence of systematic phonetic instruction can, in fact *create* learning disabilities that are outwardly similar to dyslexia. (Symptoms of dyslexia include routinely misplaced letters, an inability to recognize written letters, and in severe cases, reading or writing backwards; Today, specialized schools and teaching strategies address dyslexia, a serious learning disability which in the past, often resulted in adult illiteracy) Many whole language proponents advocate early intervention and an "*open list* of learning disabilities" (emphasis mine) for which special teaching strategies (as in the case of serious dyslexia) would be developed. This lends credence to opponents' positions citing the frequency with which modern educators and social psychologists create "psycho-social" categories that seem to excuse poor performance. They say this sometimes masks the real causes of students' learning difficulties which according to traditionalists, most often relate to a lack of self discipline. Traditionalists also argue that several years of whole language instruction causes significant numbers of young students to develop incorrect reading and writing habits that are difficult for transescents (10 to 14 year olds) to unlearn.

The most revolutionary aspect of the whole language approach involves the various methods of student evaluation. "Kid watching", "portfolios", "tape recording", and "running records" have replaced testing, evaluation and the grading of empirical data. The "quality" of a student's work is based on the teachers *knowledge* of children's abilities as determined by their *perceptions* of "appearance and actions, their overt behavior as well as their written work." According to the 1990 Education Research Services report "[s]kills based assessment methods such as formal, written tests are ideally not used in whole language classrooms." One proponent rationalizes the lack of testing and traditional evaluations as follows: "When teachers attempt to translate what children do with language into levels or scores, they often distort and devalue the process of learning to read and write." According to course synopses Cornish Middle School evaluation procedures "minimize comparisons between students" and emphasize ..."warmth, caring and respect. COMPASSION" (emphasis in original)

The most outspoken critics of the whole language approach contend that setting high standards for personal achievement and placing *real value* on *real results* is what teaching is all about. Many suggest that the absence of traditional forms of structure and discipline from some modern classrooms results in lower levels of knowledge retention for numerous students. They charge that by creating an artificial environment in which "everybody's a winner" and excusing poor performance on the basis of apparent psychological disfunction, modern social scientists and educators are unwittingly handicapping vast numbers of children while undermining the traditional, American social order based on individual accomplishment.

Cornish Elementary School Curriculum Review

English Language Arts

New Hampshire Educational Improvement and Assessment Program (NHEIAP) guidelines present a series of achievement goals for English language instruction that suggest a return to an emphasis on phonics based programs and basic skills may be on the horizon. The first proficiency standard listed for third grade students is "[d]etermine the pronunciation and meaning of words using phonics (matching letters and combinations of letters with sounds), semantics (language sense and meaning), syntactics (sentence structure), graphics, pictures and context as well as knowledge of roots, prefixes, and suffixes." These guidelines are suggested only, and are not a *state curriculum*. A further review of this framework reveals that whole language principles remain predominant at this time, and these principles, based in psychological and developmental theory, permeate state, national and local public school curriculum, and are emphasized to varying degrees in every subject of study.

The materials presented for review on language arts in Cornish were concise and reasonably clear. Scott Kalter is an unabashed advocate of what he labels as "a blend" of whole language and basic skills for local students. The lower wing program is geared to smoothly transition toward the more traditional sixth, seventh and eighth grade courses. Materials recently distributed to the staff (one article is entitled "Phonics Phacts") suggest that phonics should only be used to supplement whole language instruction. Among the highlights of this piece are accolades for the process of "psycholinguistic research" that demonstrates *prediction* as an important factor in learning. (Prediction means that children's readers should contain stories that have *predictable outcomes and sequences of events relevant to the reader*). "Phonics Phacts" is critical of teaching processes through which the learning of language arts had been "reduced to component mechanics: handwriting, spelling, and grammar." According to this article what is referred to as the "process writing *movement*" (emphasis mine) has swept English speaking countries such as Australia and New Zealand, replacing the traditional model that involves learning by drill or rote memorization, and the structured evaluation of individual achievement.

The synopses we've reviewed indicate that the whole language approach is in fact, the process of choice in Cornish, and that only limited, superficial "integration" of skills based teaching strategies is underway. There is no clear indication that traditional teaching styles are returning here, especially in the lower wing. Children are "immersed" in the reading and writing process in the earliest grades, and skills based instruction can be integrated with the whole language approach if instructors desire. Writing assignments displayed prominently on bulletin boards at Cornish Elementary School composed by lower wing students reveal some of the predictable effects of this system of instruction. Students are encouraged to write about things that effect them and little emphasis is placed on spelling, grammar or structure. The ability to communicate in the written word and articulate ideas pertinent to individual students is being cultivated while strict guidelines and empirical evaluations of the quality of the work, in terms that traditional educators believe to be extremely important, are de-emphasized for younger pupils. Cornish students are encouraged to write about personal events, and as long as they write and seem to be interested (this is determined by the teachers' practice of *kid-watching*, whole language's apparently subjective vernacular for establishing whether a child is in fact, learning) they are praised and encouraged. Because we have not yet sat-in on any actual classrooms we can not be certain whether or not students are being "corrected" in the traditional sense, if they misspell words, for example. The course synopses do suggest that instructors at the fifth grade level encourage some basic skills practise.

Fifth grade guidelines indicate that children apparently read, write and discuss an array of literary materials, that include mystery, biography, historical fiction and fantasy novels. We have not yet requested a "recommended reading list" but we encourage parents to review the materials that are being used. Sources outside the Cornish school system have raised questions about in school reading materials that include politically, ethically and morally biased perspectives, and our multiple, private inquiries suggest these concerns

are well founded. The whole language approach assumes that children need to be exposed to "predictable literary events." Predictability can be innocuous as in "The rain is falling and everything is wet," or personal as in "My parents made me go to bed early so they were mean" or political, as in "Cars make smog so they are bad."

In grades 6, 7 and 8 (the upper wing) students continue to be encouraged to read and write about things that interest them. The theory is, the more interested a child is in a subject, the more he or she will *want* to write and read about it. Science fiction is introduced as an appropriate genre at the sixth grade level as well as plays, poetry and short stories. Clearly, more emphasis is placed on skills and grammar in the upper wing, with standard texts such as "Classical Roots" and "Wariners" being used as teaching tools. More serious attention is paid to students' ability to write about and comprehend complex material, and the whole language strategy, "The Writing Process," is reinforced. Steps in the writing process include drafting, prewriting, conferencing, revising, editing and publishing. Emphasis remains on the team effort and "collaborative" learning. Punctuation, parts of speech, sentence structure, vocabulary and a host of other traditional concepts are presented as children develop their writing skills in groups. The concept of "evaluation" (testing) on some of these subjects is introduced.

All of the course descriptions we've reviewed have homework guidelines attached that offer a suggested framework for in home study. Parents are encouraged to become involved with the students homework assignments and see that they are accomplished. We did not find any such frame work for grades 1-4, but cannot assume non exists. For grades 5 and 6, 30 to 60 minutes 3 to 5 times per week total study time at home is recommended. In grades 7 and 8, 60 to 90 minutes 5 times per week and weekend assignments are given. The amount of homework is age related and appropriately geared to increase personal responsibility and accountability for results.

Mathematics

According to the New Hampshire Educational Improvement and Assessment Program (NHEIAP) "Students learn Mathematics well only when they construct their own mathematical understanding." This view of mathematics instruction is called *constructivism*, and like the whole language approach, is based on the notion that children should be taught mathematics in the context of its relationship to their lives. The so-called reform movement in mathematics is based upon teaching from the whole to the part, and employs curriculum and materials that are "conceptually focused." There is at least as much emphasis on application as on acquisition of knowledge and skills. Like their counterparts in the whole language movement, proponents of this revolutionary teaching strategy are more concerned with exposing children to the everyday uses of knowledge than compelling them to learn the basic skills necessary for the application of knowledge. According to the overview of the state guidelines, the creation of a positive learning experience is more important than any empirical indications of knowledge retention, as demonstrated by testing. Again, the traditional program in which students are disciplined to practise and/or memorize in order to acquire and master basic skills is not emphasized in the modern mathematics classroom. The evaluation process, as described in the NHEIAP, seems to contradict this overview, as do the course outlines of Cornish Elementary Mathematics programs which list certain basic math skills.

Lower wing guidelines for Cornish mathematics curriculum include basic operations (Add, Subtract, Multiply, and Divide) with higher order skills (Multiplication and Division) emphasized in fourth and fifth grade. We assume that some memorization and subsequent testing for retention is underway. There is an emphasis on patterns and patterning that is not part of traditional mathematics programs, but is apparently employed as a tool to teach the relevance of math to real world events.

Fifth grade curriculum subjects of study include Place Value, Decimal Notation, Least Common Multiples, Percent, and basic principles of Geometry including Perimeter and Basic Shapes. Real world problems are emphasized as with other whole-to-part education strategies. By grade 6, students are practising basic computation of 4 and 5 digit numbers, and being taught to handle fractional and decimal equivalents. Under-

standing of Geometry is expanded through the analysis of basic shapes, and surface area of Rectangles, Circles and Triangles is covered. Grades 7 and 8 guidelines at Cornish Middle School include continued practise of basic skills, and review of material presented earlier. In addition students are taught Ratios, Simple Variable Equations, Associative, Cumulative, Distributive, Multiplicative and Zero Properties, Signed Numbers, Basic Statistics and Graphs, Exponents; and in the eighth grade exclusively: Simplifying Complex Fractions, Quadratic Equations, Rational and Irrational Numbers and Factoring Binomial, Trinomial, and Polynomial expressions. Basic trigonometric functions are introduced including Sine, Cosine and Tangent, as well as Graphing Straight Lines, Parabolas and Slope.

Based on our snapshot of The Mathematics Curriculum at Cornish Elementary School, the program appears to meet or exceed the standards set fourth by the NHEIAP.

Science

As with the previous sections on curriculum we find that a set of principles based in current psychoanalytical, psychosocial, and psycholinguistic assumptions have essentially replaced the traditional approach to teaching and learning. The NHEIAP forward for these standards states that the guidelines "incorporate current theory on essential science teaching." According to the frame work "[c]urrent cognitive research suggests students learn best by constructing their own knowledge." The evaluation process recommended includes not just traditional testing but "a variety of assessment tools, which reflect a variety of teaching methods." Unlike the other state guidelines we've examined, we found no specific proficiency recommendations listed for grades K-3.

Science curriculum in the fifth through eighth grades at Cornish Elementary School includes the core areas of Earth Science, Physical Science, Life Science and Technology. These basic programs are presented through AIMS, Delta, NASA and National Geographic materials. Students are expected to be familiar with scientific developments in the news and are required to produce a science project once a year that will use material from diverse sources including but not limited to computer CD's and the internet.

Both state guidelines and local curriculum emphasize measuring, recording, and presentation of data as essential skills. At the seventh grade level students are covering topics that include Ecology, Physiology of Humans, Nutrition, and Simple Genetics; Basic Geology, Gravity, and Space Technology are also featured as well as the Solar System and Beyond. As with other holistic teaching strategies, emphasis is placed on relating science to the real life experience of the learner. In the eighth grade students are encouraged to "tie together" principles covered in lower grades and consider high school science course alternatives that fit their interests. Subjects such as the Ozone and Acid Rain are included in the meteorology section of the eighth grade curriculum.

Our personal contacts across the region have provided information regarding instances in which unverified theories are presented as facts by public school science instructors. One of our sources (not a Cornish resident) who is now Home Schooling furnished this story:

The loss of what some studies estimate at three million human lives per year is attributed to Malaria, a disease that can best be controlled (with present technology) by eradicating mosquitos with potent pesticides that negatively impact bird, fish and animal species. A student that advanced the argument that the preservation of vast numbers of human lives at the expense of animal life makes some sense, was chastised for offering this opinion.

Another incident that has been brought to our attention:

The theory that ozone depletion is specifically related to the use of the refrigerant, Freon was presented as fact. Readily accessible data suggest that climatic change and seasonal ozone depletion are naturally occurring phenomena. Chemical companies have derived huge financial benefits from the forced change over from inexpensive Freon to the more costly chemicals that will replace it. A growing body of scientists conclude that collusion between these companies and national as well as international regulatory agencies resulted in prematurely banning cheap Freon. Third world countries will suffer the greatest impact, in human terms, due to these regulations because of the greater expense of the newer refrigerants.

The existence of these examples of inaccurate presentation of data in some public schools does not necessarily imply that such situations are occurring locally. But these examples do demonstrate the danger, in a rapidly changing world, of misconstruction of information. It is important to recognize that among the most serious shortcomings of the holistic learning approaches we have documented herein (especially in science and social studies) is the natural tendency of the ideology or political views of instructors to be imposed upon students. The theory that supposes that students learn from the whole to the part, rather than bit by bit, also supposes that the "whole" is technically or historically accurate when presented as such. Science instruction in Cornish (as in any school system) should be thoroughly and thoughtfully examined by parents, to assure that fashionable but inaccurate theories and politically biased suppositions are not being presented as facts.

Social Studies

The NHEIAP curriculum framework for Social Studies is based on "the powerful ideas and experiences of the world." The framework cites areas of inquiry that include but are not limited to, social sciences, economics, political science, geography and philosophy. It is clearly and succinctly geared to creating state wide program guidelines which will allow the "principles and ideals of good citizenship" to be conveyed to students. This includes the extensive study of New Hampshire and United States government operation and organization. According to this framework, by the end of grade six participating students should be able to "[d]escribe the major things governments do in their school, community, state and nation," and be able to effectively discuss concepts such as fairness under the law. Students should be able to "[e]xplain that the basic purposes of government in the United States are to protect the inalienable rights of individuals and promote the common good." Concepts relating to market versus command economies are prevalent. For example, sixth graders should be able to "[d]istinguish between economic needs and wants." The framework also contends that sixth graders should be able to "[i]dentify the role played by banks, stock markets, and other financial institutions in market economies." The primary focus of this particular set of guidelines is the unique, American system of government and laissez-faire economics, and the dominant role that the development of these related systems has played in world affairs.

We found that fifth graders were acquainted with United States History in units listed in the curriculum synopsis as Early Man, Explorers, Colonial America, American Revolution and Westward Movement. The text "The United States, Its History and Neighbors." was used as a study guide and as a tool for developing research skills. (Due to our findings regarding the Social Studies Curriculum we intend to review this text as soon as possible)

The sixth grade social studies curriculum emphasizes the study of ancient civilizations and integrates topics with the language arts curriculum. Along with Geography, students study Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome and the Middle Ages. Cornish course outlines, when compared with the guidelines recommended in the NHEIAP, are strikingly different. As demonstrated in the section on Science, under the tenets of teaching the whole to the part, in this area of study it is quite possible that the ideological biases of instructors will be imposed upon impressionable youngsters. Our inquiry reveals that in many public school classrooms purely subjective ideas and positions are presented as facts.

Among the most subjective areas of study outlined for sixth graders are: Impact of Culture and Beliefs, Cultural Equity and awareness of other civilizations. All of these subjects have underlying premises that are purely arbitrary in nature. The New Hampshire Education Improvement and Assessment program guidelines clearly indicate that the focus of elementary school Social Studies Programs should be the *unique nature* and structure of the United States system of Republican Government, Democratic Principles, and Market Based Economics. It is impossible to create factual comparisons that demonstrate equity with other governments and cultures because no other system has *ever* been based upon *Unalienable Rights*. (unalienable means can not be separated from) According to the guidelines proposed by the state board of education this issue should be understood clearly by sixth graders. In Cornish Elementary School we can find no evidence that this information has been introduced, let alone mastered.

The New Hampshire Education Improvement and Assessment Program guidelines include under proficiency standards for sixth grade students: "Discuss the importance of the following to the creation and preservation of American Constitutional Democracy--the Declaration of Independence; the United States Constitution; The Bill of Rights; The Constitution of New Hampshire; and the Pledge of Allegiance. Explain that the United States Constitution, including the Bill of Rights and other amendments, and the New Hampshire Constitution, including its amendments are written documents that set forth the purposes and organization of the federal and state government" None of these guidelines are included in the synopsis of sixth grade Social Studies Curriculum at Cornish Elementary School. At the February 17th, (1997) hearing, held by the school board, regarding Senate Bill 2 (The Official Ballot) a Cornish resident asked whether or not The Pledge of Allegiance was said in their classrooms. The teachers present at the hearing all said that The Pledge was not recited.

Among the areas of study listed in the Cornish Social Studies Curriculum for the seventh grade are: Causes of the Civil War, Boom and Bust of the 1920's to 1930's, FDR, and an awareness of the Changes in our Constitution and America Since the Civil War. These are integral periods in the history of the Nation, and it is important for young historians to examine each period objectively. Absent a basic knowledge of the state and National Constitutions it is impossible to understand, even in the most elementary sense, the changes that took place during these periods. For example: The boom of the 1920's can be proven to be related to the unbridled extension of bank credit to individuals for the purchase of common stocks. The economic contraction known as "The Great Depression" can be shown to have been triggered by banks calling the "margins" (loans) on the stocks, thus radically contracting the money supply. Article I, Sections 8 and 10 of the National Constitution deal with the nature of our monetary system, and have serious implications regarding the actions undertaken by FDR in the period just after the depression. According to the NHEIAP guide lines cited previously, students should be familiar with these ideas, especially those expressed in the National Constitution, by the sixth grade. The information that has been furnished to us suggests that little about any of these fundamental concepts is understood at the Cornish School.

When one of our associates asked an eighth grader attending Cornish Elementary and Middle School if he had ever read the Constitution for the United States or the Bill of Rights, he replied that he knew about "freedom of the press." When I interviewed Scott Kalter I asked him specifically whether the uniqueness of the American experiment and the issue of unalienable rights were presented at Cornish School. His reply was that "our students cannot relate to that kind of idea."

Based on the New Hampshire Department of Education Improvement and Assessment Program, the Cornish Elementary School Social Studies Program, as outlined in the course synopses is seriously deficient. Mr. Kalter's answer to our pointed question reaffirms this fact.

Conclusion

In closing this section, we remind parents and taxpayers that the programs in place at The Cornish Elementary School can be altered and amended based on public input. The Cornish School Board, under Title XXIII Chapter 273-A is empowered to compel local educators to meet the requirements of the community as provided under the Collective Bargaining Agreement. The School Board is **YOUR** agent, and is accountable to **YOU**. In the event you have concerns about curriculum you should make them known, preferably in writing, to any member of the board. Our experience has been that they are responsive only when public pressure is sufficiently present.

We remind readers that this study is based on course synopses and articles furnished by local educators. We have not yet attended any class periods, so we can offer no judgment at this time, as to the actual content of the courses. We highly recommend that parents submit questions and concerns about this report to the Principal, Scott Kalter and to the School Board.

Special Education and Forced Compliance

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act is the framework and for what most people know as Special Education. Under 34 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) Parts 300 and 301, each state is compelled to create programs that meet the federally mandated guidelines. Among the provisions of IDEA is that a *free and appropriate public education (FAPE)* shall be provided for all children with disabilities. These regulations also mandate that special psychological services be provided for family members of children classified as learning disabled. Any child, "aged 3 to 21 years is eligible for education and related services for learning disabilities, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, blindness, hearing impairment, or other significant physical disabilities that interfere with the education process."

The original legislation called for the federal government to meet 40% of the costs associated with this program but our sources report that the typical funding rate is as little as 4%. There is no authority in the National Constitution for the imposition of a law that forces a state to finance health care or education for selected individuals. The fact that the states have complied notwithstanding, our research suggests that this law could be effectively challenged if a state Attorney General filed a suit against the federal government in a Federal District Court. Such a suit would have to be authorized by the state's legislature to go forward. Presently, United States Senator from New Hampshire, Judd Gregg, is pressing the current administration to fully fund this onerous federal shakedown of the states and local communities.

The federal regulations demand that the state government assist the local communities when costs for an individual exceed certain limits. "Catastrophic Aid" is funded by the state in the year *following* the local expenditure. To receive this assistance the local costs must exceed \$16,000. The local community can be compelled to provide funding for FAPE even if the associated costs are *predominately medical* in nature, and would be covered by private insurance or medicaid outside the classroom. Medicaid and related state and federal programs generally only cover medical costs related to education if the patient is placed in a residential program and requires round-the-clock care. For this reason even severely disabled individuals, requiring thousands of dollars in related medical care, *must* be placed in local public education settings whenever possible. One report from a source in southern New Hampshire revealed that a single case cost her local district \$130,000 in one year.

When asked whether or not they approved of personal medical expenses being handled in this matter all the members of SAU #6 and Cornish School Board Chairman Ray Evans responded in the negative. They explained that the laws were constructed in such a way as to create a system of forced compliance. Representatives of SAU #6 and members of the school board regularly point to Special Education costs as a key factor in the overall costs of local public education. Special Ed is mandatory, so it's a handy way to shift responsibility for soaring costs.

The average cost per year for a Special Education student locally is \$5,700, compared to the national average of \$9,000. Total costs of Special Education for Cornish this year are estimated at \$194,563. There are 34 coded students in the district, so roughly 10% of the budget is devoted to about 10% of the (estimated) 343 students enrolled for classes in 1997. With several notable exceptions, the escalation of costs associated with the Special Education program in Cornish are predominately related to federally mandated staffing requirements and inflated salaries as described in the section on *Discretionary Factors That Drive Costs*. These exceptions include the extraordinary costs of several students, and the costs of counseling and medical treatments delivered *in* school. Outlays for these services under the present circumstances are beyond the control of the school board but the salaries of the instructors and aides and councilors are not.

While Cornish has kept Special Education costs comparatively low, there are a number of serious problems with this program that significantly effect the overall budget. According to SAU #6 personnel, the number of emotional, and learning disorders that qualify for coding (placement in Special Education programs) is increasing rapidly. NHed 1102.31(J) lists among the definitions of Serious Emotional Disturbance

"an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health factors". This "disability" could just as easily be "laziness" or a simple lack of self discipline, as some more profound psychological disfunction. NHEd 1107.08(b)1(b) suggests that failure to "achieve commensurate with his/her age and ability levels" in one of several educational subjects indicates the student may have a *learning disability*. Learning disabilities such as the pandemic, Attention Deficit Disorder are often pointed out to parents by teachers and sometimes "diagnosed" by school psychologists. The findings are then routinely confirmed by the Education Evaluation Team. (This is a group of professionals including psychologists, teachers, administrators and if necessary, medical specialists.) An Individual Education Plan (IEP) is created for the student by the EET that can include an array of services for learning disabilities as described above.

Our investigation reveals that in some school districts, the plight of profoundly disadvantaged students has at times been trivialized, due to the use of arbitrary or poorly defined psychological "standards" as justification for coding students. Certainly the compelling needs of the severely handicapped child should not be treated by the same standards as a difficult youngster who will not behave in class. But a large body of evidence suggests this is happening in some jurisdictions. Special education has become the accepted panacea, in some schools, for all manner of uncooperative, disruptive students. The nature of the modern classroom in which "everybody's a winner" is such that discipline involving confrontations with such children is somewhat rare. Instead, chronic misbehavior leading to poor performance often results in students being coded as learning disabled. After all, misbehavior and genuine learning disability both result in lowered achievement, and outward symptoms can be similar.

We've spoken with two educators directly involved in the Special Education process in two separate school systems. One teacher has been in the profession for just over a decade, and the other for over two decades. The less senior teacher reveals that the doctrine of "uniform inclusion" has been employed with regard to most coded students. She contends that it is reasonable to provide students, whenever humanly possible, with a regular public educational setting (FAPE). Even those students with profound disabilities should be included in as many regular ed activities as possible, and should be integrated with coded students with less serious problems. Medical costs of this integration, she contends, should be covered by the federal government or failing that, by local communities. When we inquired about the costs of these extraordinary efforts and the potentially negative effects on non-coded students she acknowledged that these concerns are not easily dismissed. She recognized that competition for limited resources (including teacher time) should not detract from the learning experience provided to the average student but was unclear as to how resources could be fairly distributed and what criteria might be employed in defining "fairness."

Our second direct inquiry provided interesting answers to both of these questions. The veteran educator (on the condition of anonymity) expressed frustration about the amount of resources being apportioned to "profoundly disabled" students that "may never be able to care for themselves or make any contributions to the community." She found that great benefits were possible for learning disabled students through numerous, low cost teaching approaches that deal with their problems specifically. She was very positive about recent, in service training dealing with learning difficulties, that she had received. She suggested that cost effective, early intervention programs for slower learners be implemented locally, perhaps outside the Special Education System. This in her estimation, would save a tremendous amount of money, and reduce the size of the Special Education juggernaut. According to this locally based professional, by placing children with minor learning difficulties in non-Special Ed programs, and reducing expenses for profoundly disabled students (structuring their IEP's to more realistically correspond with their realistic, long-term potential) Special Ed costs could be significantly reduced.

In Cornish 22 of the 34 students enrolled in Special Education are coded as LD, (learning disabled) and we are assured by Michael Harris, SAU #6 Director of Special Education, that they are all legitimately in need of the programs provided. The privacy of coded students and their families is appropriately protected under NHEd 1123 making further specific details regarding these students inaccessible.

While the tendency of educators to overuse coding as a means to an end has been reported by a number of parents, we have recently been informed of a much more troubling abuse of the system. We contacted a source at a private university in the Boston area, and inquired about special needs students applying for

admission and financial aid. She revealed that increasing numbers of coded students and their parents are pressuring university officials to create programs geared to such learning disabilities as Attention Deficit Disorder. IDEA regulations can be applied to private institutions provided they meet certain requirements. College level students with learning disabilities can allege and easily prove discrimination if a university fails to provide for their needs. A public school official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, revealed that he had encountered parents eager to have their children coded, perhaps for financial benefit. Because IDEA covers education costs for children ages 3 to 21 years, some unscrupulous parents may view the program as a potential college scholarship for their children. This type of abuse reduces the overall funding potential for more serious disabilities, and resources available for regular education as well.

Summary

- Special Education is enforced under 34 CFR Sections 300 to 301, The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act.
- The National Constitution does not authorize the federal government to create systems of forced compliance for the states.
- United States Senator from New Hampshire, Judd Gregg is pressing for legislation that will fully fund Special Ed.
- The law may be vulnerable to challenge if brought before a Federal District Court by a state Attorney General authorized by a state legislative initiative.
- Federal law forces the states to provide "catastrophic aid" to communities saddled with costs exceeding \$16,000 for one individual.
- Many students are "coded" for Special Education due to mild or arbitrarily defined psychological disorders whose outward symptoms are similar to simple, chronic discipline problems.
- Seriously disabled students are treated under the same guidelines as those that are only mildly disabled.
- Medical costs relating to education are paid by the local community under IDEA.
- Abuses of the system range from teachers placing students in special ed for poor behavior to parents requesting Special Ed in order to fund their children's college education.

Conclusions

The reliance of the teaching professions on theoretical models originating in the field of psychology has resulted in revolutionary changes occurring in public education over the past 35 years. Programs based on an array of disputed ideas have replaced teaching techniques that were employed for decades, perhaps centuries. Traditional techniques are thought by many modern educators to have failed students that experienced even moderate difficulties learning basic skills. The learning process, according to modern theorists, can best be understood through psychological studies conducted by researchers at the various teaching colleges. The vast majority of these research projects are geared to producing a "comfortable, inclusive learning experience" that is believed to be the best assurance of soliciting positive responses from students.

Any system of instruction that imposes concrete guidelines or rigidly enforces discipline and encourages excellence is considered anachronistic. Common sense and real-world experiences beg many serious questions of the now widely employed, contemporary model. The world places serious stresses on adults that are not included in most modern, government funded classroom settings. The so-called positive learning experience cheats youngsters of an opportunity to learn to compete aggressively for rewards that can only be gained through intellectual successes.

The costs of adapting programs based on psychological theories to the public education system have been prohibitive. Social workers, guidance councillors, and administrators with masters or doctorate degrees, are well compensated. It is not possible to determine whether or not the efforts of these highly trained specialists are cost effective. The work being conducted by these well meaning individuals is often one-on-one, and most classrooms based on theoretical, holistic models are much smaller than the basic skills models typical of the traditional system. There is a point where further reduction of class size becomes impractical, and it is already proving to be an unacceptable burden to taxpayers. Many private studies suggest that the emotional and learning gains achieved in the smaller classroom are imagined, and that basic skills programs absent psychological theories produce the best learning experience for the greatest numbers of children. Inner city schools experiencing overcrowding are sending students to less expensive parochial schools and achieving unexpected results. These semi-private (often Catholic) schools are typically providing a structured environment, and basic skills programs. The students within these systems are scoring higher on achievement tests *and* feeling better about themselves, modern theories notwithstanding.

Parents must take responsibility for understanding how education is being delivered to their children. Those whose children are experiencing learning difficulties should not take for granted that teachers "know what they are doing." Common sense may force them to conclude serious changes are necessary to assure their youngsters' success. Home Schooling is one of many choices they might consider. Proposed legislation will add to parents options at the state level, allowing the restructuring of teachers contracts locally, among other things. Our research demonstrates clearly that parents and taxpayers can already demand changes in contract structure and local curriculum through their school board. Charter Schools can be created in communities where people are completely dissatisfied with public education policies. We conclude that absent increased citizen involvement, the public education system will bankrupt many communities before it improves significantly.

As this report is being completed information has surfaced regarding children in the care of Cornish School professionals smoking dope on the weekly ski excursions. Clearly, the feel good environment at the school is producing what is quite predictable. The children involved were suspended for several days and allowed to make up missed work. If it were you, you would be in jail; There would be **real consequences**. So are we imparting real skills in public schools or providing an expensive, comfortable diversion for children, encouraging them to remain in the world of fairy tales once reserved exclusively for infants???

You be the judge.

Scott Stevens for the
White Mountain News Association