

Addendum 2: Establishing Balanced Curriculum in Our Classrooms
From The Crucial Voice of the People, Past and Present: Education's Missing
Ingredient, second edition by Victoria M. Young, DVM

A NATION AT RISK AND THE STORY OF THE EIGHT-YEAR
STUDY ANSWER THE QUESTIONS, WHAT TO TEACH AND
HOW TO TEACH

The history of these two commissioned research studies, *A Nation at Risk* and *The Eight-Year Study*, makes for good reading. But if you have a “side” in the curriculum wars, perhaps the history and the labels it would carry might add prejudice to your acceptance of the ideas. For those in the field of education, the titles may be enough to close your mind. Try harder.

Both studies focused on our secondary schools and their inadequacies in holding our students’ interest in school, preparing students for college, and preparing them for life in general. Or as Aikin stated, we need “to consider ways by which the secondary schools of the United States might better serve all our young people” (1942, 1). These two studies addressed the same issue forty years apart.

Unfortunately, for the sake of correctness, I must identify the quotes I draw from the work of Wilford M. Aikin as he presented the findings of *The Eight-Year Study*. My preference would have been to mix them in with the recommendations of the National Commission on Excellence in Education and have no one be the wiser. I trust everyone will be open-minded enough to look at the findings of both studies through the lens of *what is best for our students*.

The following is a summary of *A Nation at Risk* with quotes from Aikin as indicated. Much of the summary is verbatim without editorial exclusion of ideas that are contrary to my own. Words have been put in italics to draw attention to the common ground of these two studies. Edits were made for ease of reading in hopes of making the advice more readily available for consideration and use.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS (*A NATION AT RISK*, 1983, 23–33)

The recommendations are based on *the beliefs* that:

- Everyone can learn,
- Everyone is born with an urge to learn which can be nurtured,
- A solid high school education is within the reach of virtually all,
- Life-long learning will equip people with the skills required for new careers and for citizenship,
- The American people can begin to act now,
- These recommendations promise lasting reform,
- Schools, districts, and States plans may differ from our recommendations in some details,
- These recommendations apply to public, private, and parochial schools and colleges alike, all are valuable national resources,
- The variety of student aspirations, abilities, and preparation requires that appropriate content be available to satisfy diverse needs,
- Attention must be directed to both the nature of the content available and to the needs of particular learners, for example, gifted students may need a curriculum enriched and accelerated while educationally disadvantaged students may require special curriculum materials, smaller classes, or individual tutoring to help them master the material presented,
- We hold a common expectation, the best effort and performance from all students, whether they are gifted or less able, affluent or disadvantaged, whether destined for college, the farm, or industry. **“The democratic way of life is based upon the assumption of respect for human personality”* (Aikin, 31).

Recommendation A: Content

We recommend that State and local high school graduation requirements be strengthened and that, at a minimum, all students seeking a diploma be required to lay the foundations in the Five New Basics by taking the following curriculum during their 4 years of high school: (a) 4 years of English; (b) 3 years of mathematics; (c) 3 years of science; (d) 3 years of social studies; and (e) one-half year of computer science. For the college-bound, 2 years of foreign language in high school are strongly recommended in addition to those taken earlier.

These Basics, together with work in the fine and performing arts and foreign languages, constitute the mind and spirit of our culture. The following Implementing Recommendations are intended as illustrative descriptions to clarify what constitutes a strong curriculum.

Implementing Recommendations

1. The teaching of English in high school should equip graduates to: (a) Comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and use what they read; (b) Write well-organized, effective papers; (c) Listen effectively and discuss ideas intelligently; (d) Know our literary heritage and how it enhances imagination and ethical understanding, and how it relates to the customs, ideas, and values of today's life and culture.

2. The teaching of mathematics in high school should equip graduates to: (a) Understand geometric and algebraic concepts; (b) Understand elementary probability and statistics; (c) Apply mathematics in everyday situations; (d) Estimate, approximate, measure, and test the accuracy of their calculations.

NOTE: In addition to the traditional sequence of studies available for college-bound students, new, equally demanding mathematics curricula need to be developed for those who do not plan to continue their formal education immediately.

*“Every student should achieve competence in the essential skills of communication—reading, writing, oral expression—and in the use of quantitative concepts and symbols” (Aikin, 138).

3. The teaching of science in high school should provide graduates with

an introduction to:

(a) The concepts, laws, and processes of the physical and biological sciences; (b) The methods of scientific inquiry and reasoning; (c) The application of scientific knowledge to everyday life; (d) The social and environmental implications of scientific and technological development.

NOTE: Science courses must be revised and updated for both the college-bound and those not intending to go to college. An example of such work is the American Chemical Society's Chemistry in the Community program.

*“The immediate purpose is satisfaction of the pupil's desire to know and understand; but the larger purpose may be to develop habits of critical thinking and intellectual honesty, to search for true cause and effect relationships” (Aikin, 50).

4. The teaching of social studies in high school should be designed to: (a) Enable students to fix their places and possibilities within the larger social and cultural structure; (b) Understand the broad sweep of both ancient and contemporary ideas that have shaped our world; (c) Understand the fundamentals of how our economic system works and how our political system functions; (d) Grasp the difference between free and repressive societies.

NOTE: An understanding of each of these areas is *requisite to the informed and committed exercise of citizenship in our free society*.

*“Inert subject matter should give way to content that is live and pertinent to the problems of youth and modern civilization” (Aikin, 138).

5. The teaching of computer science in high school should equip graduates to: (a) Understand the computer as an information, computation, and communication device; (b) Use the computer in the study of the other Basics and for personal and work-related purposes; (c) Understand the world of computers, electronics, and related technologies.

In addition to the New Basics, other important curriculum matters must be addressed.

6. Achieving proficiency in a foreign language ordinarily requires from 4 to 6 years of study and should, therefore, be started in the elementary grades.

7. Provide students with programs that advance students' personal, educational, and occupational goals, such as the fine and performing arts and vocational education.

8. The curriculum leading to the high school years should provide a sound base in such areas as English language development and writing, computational and problem solving skills, science, social studies, foreign language, and the arts plus foster an enthusiasm for learning and the development of the individual's gifts and talents.

9. We encourage the continuation of efforts by groups to revise, update, improve, and make available new and more diverse curricular material and the consortia of educators and scientific, industrial, and scholarly societies that cooperate to improve the school curriculum.

*“No aspect of any school's work should be so firmly fixed in practice or tradition as to be immune from honest inquiry and possible improvement” (Aikin, 19).

Recommendation B: Standards and Expectations

We recommend that schools, colleges, and universities adopt more rigorous and measurable standards, and higher expectations, for academic performance and student conduct, and that 4-year colleges and universities raise their requirements for admission. This will help students do their best educationally with challenging materials in an environment that supports learning and authentic accomplishment.

Implementing Recommendations

1. Grades should be indicators of academic achievement so they can be relied on as evidence of a student's readiness for further study.

2. Four-year colleges and universities should raise their admissions requirements and advise all potential applicants of the standards for admission in terms of specific courses required, performance in these areas, and levels of achievement on standardized achievement tests in each of the five Basics and, where applicable, foreign languages.

3. Standardized tests of achievement (not to be confused with aptitude tests) should be administered at major transition points from one level of schooling to another and particularly from high school to college or work.

The purposes of these tests would be to:

(a) Certify the student's credentials; (b) Identify the need for remedial intervention; (c) Identify the opportunity for advanced or accelerated work.

NOTE: The tests should be administered as part of a nationwide (but not federal) system of State and local standardized tests. This system should include other diagnostic procedures that assist teachers and students to evaluate student progress.

4. Textbooks and other tools of learning and teaching should be upgraded and updated to assure more rigorous content.

5. In considering textbooks for adoption, States and school districts should: (a) Evaluate texts and other materials on their ability to present rigorous and challenging material clearly; (b) Require publishers to furnish evaluation data on the material's effectiveness.

6. Because no textbook in any subject can be geared to the needs of all students, funds should be made available to support text development in "thin-market" areas, such as those for disadvantaged students, the learning disabled, and the gifted and talented.

7. To assure quality, all publishers should furnish evidence of the quality and appropriateness of textbooks, based on results from field trials and credible evaluation. Widespread consumer information services for purchasers are badly needed.

8. New instructional materials should reflect the most current applications of technology in appropriate curriculum areas, the best scholarship in each discipline, and research in learning and teaching.

*“The Eight-Year Study has demonstrated beyond question that colleges can secure all the information they need for selection of candidates for admission without restricting the secondary school by prescribing the curriculum” (Aikin, 122).

Recommendation C: Time

We recommend that significantly more time be devoted to learning the New Basics. This will require more effective use of the existing school day, a longer school day, or a lengthened school year.

Implementing Recommendations

1. Students in high schools should be assigned far more homework than is now the case.
2. Instruction in effective study and work skills should be introduced in the early grades and continued throughout the student’s schooling.
3. School districts and State legislatures should strongly consider 7-hour school days, as well as a 200- to 220-day school year.
4. The time available for learning should be expanded through better classroom management and organization of the school day. If necessary, additional time should be found to meet the special needs of slow learners, the gifted, and others who need more instructional diversity.
5. The burden on teachers for maintaining discipline should be reduced through the development of firm and fair codes of student conduct that are enforced consistently, and by considering alternative classrooms, programs, and schools to meet the needs of continually disruptive students.
6. Attendance policies with clear incentives and sanctions should be used to reduce the amount of time lost through student absenteeism and

tardiness.

7. Administrative burdens on the teacher and related intrusions into the school day should be reduced to add time for teaching and learning.

8. Placement and grouping of students, as well as promotion and graduation policies, should be guided by the academic progress of students and their instructional needs, rather than by rigid adherence to age.

*“The Thirty Schools [in the Eight-Year Study] have tried to teach more important things in better ways” (85), “enriched content of traditional subjects” (47), recognized the “need of youth to do something useful in the adult world”. . . in their community (Aikin, 64).

Recommendation D: Teaching

This recommendation consists of seven parts. Each is intended to improve the preparation of teachers or to make teaching a more rewarding and respected profession. Each of the seven stands on its own and should not be considered solely as an implementing recommendation.

1. Persons preparing to teach should be required to meet high educational standards, to demonstrate an aptitude for teaching, and to demonstrate competence in an academic discipline. Colleges and universities offering teacher preparation programs should be judged by how well their graduates meet these criteria.

2. Salaries for the teaching profession should be increased and should be professionally competitive, market-sensitive, and performance-based. Salary, promotion, tenure, and retention decisions should be tied to an effective evaluation system that includes peer review so that superior teachers can be rewarded, average ones encouraged, and poor ones either improved or terminated.

3. School boards should adopt an 11-month contract for teachers. This would ensure time for curriculum and professional development, programs for students with special needs, and a more adequate level of

teacher compensation.

4. School boards, administrators, and teachers should cooperate to develop career ladders for teachers that distinguish among the beginning instructor, the experienced teacher, and the master teacher.

5. Substantial nonschool personnel resources should be employed to help solve the immediate problem of the shortage of mathematics and science teachers. Qualified individuals, including recent graduates with mathematics and science degrees, graduate students, and industrial and retired scientists could, with appropriate preparation, immediately begin teaching in these fields. A number of our leading science centers have the capacity to begin educating and retraining teachers immediately. Other areas of critical teacher need, such as English, must also be addressed.

6. Incentives, such as grants and loans, should be made available to attract outstanding students to the teaching profession, particularly in those areas of critical shortage.

7. Master teachers should be involved in designing teacher preparation programs and in supervising teachers during their probationary years.

*“The secondary school would be encouraged to know each student well and to provide experiences most suitable to his development . . . chief reason for confidence in the schools . . . the genuine sense of responsibility which most teachers feel” (Aikin, 124).

Recommendation E: Leadership and Fiscal Support

We recommend that citizens across the Nation hold educators and elected officials responsible for providing the leadership necessary to achieve these reforms, and those citizens provide the fiscal support and stability required to bring about the reforms we propose.

Implementing Recommendations

1. Principals and superintendents will play a crucial leadership role in developing school and community support for the reforms proposed, and school boards must provide them with the professional

development and other support required in performing their leadership role effectively.

2. State and local officials, including school board members, governors, and legislators, have the primary responsibility for financing and governing the schools, and should incorporate the reforms we propose in their educational policies and fiscal planning.

3. The Federal Government, in cooperation with States and localities, should help meet the needs of key groups of students such as the gifted and talented, the socioeconomically disadvantaged, minority and language minority students, and the handicapped. In combination these groups include both national resources and the Nation's youth who are most at risk.

4. In addition, we believe the Federal Government's role includes several functions of national consequence that States and localities alone are unlikely to be able to meet:

(a) Protecting constitutional and civil rights for students and school personnel;

(b) Collecting data, statistics, and information about education generally;

(c) Supporting curriculum improvement and research on teaching, learning, and the management of schools;

(d) Supporting teacher training in areas of critical shortage or key national needs;

(e) Providing student financial assistance and research and graduate training.

NOTE: We believe the assistance of the Federal Government should be provided with a minimum of administrative burden and intrusiveness.

5. The Federal Government has the primary responsibility to identify the national interest in education. It should also help fund and support efforts to protect and promote that interest. It must provide the nation-

al leadership to ensure that the Nation's public and private resources are marshaled to address the issues discussed in this report.

6. This Commission calls upon educators, parents, and public officials at all levels to assist in bringing about the educational reform proposed in this report. We also call upon citizens to provide the financial support necessary to accomplish these purposes.

*“The Thirty Schools [in the Eight-Year Study] have learned that effective democratic leadership is essential” (Aikin, 134).

A Final Word (p. 36)

“This is not the first or only commission on education, and some of our findings are surely not new, but old business that now at last must be done. For no one can doubt that the United States is under challenge from many quarters. . . . It is by our willingness to take up the challenge, and our resolve to see it through, that America's place in the world will be either secured or forfeited. Americans have succeeded before and so we shall again.”

“We are determined that the earth they [boys and girls now in high schools] inherit shall not be in chains. Theirs will be the task that only free men can perform in a world of freedom. It will be an even greater task than ours. To prepare them for it is the supreme opportunity of the schools of our democracy” (Aikin, 139).