

**can
we
afford
to
close
our
public
schools?**

THIS statement on the consequences of the closing of our public schools was prepared by the southern educators whose names appear on the last pages. This is a personal statement. Positions and institutions are indicated only for the information of the reader. Additional copies may be secured by writing to any of the persons listed.

December, 1959



can we afford to close our public schools?

WE in America are a proud people, proud of our high standards of living, of our stable family structure, of our social institutions organized to promote the welfare of mankind, of our competitive private economy, and of our freedom to think, to speak, and to vote. Undergirding and guaranteeing this way of life is our system of free public education. **Without our public schools our democratic society would collapse.**

People throughout America have said this time and time again as they voted upon themselves taxes to build the finest system of free public education found anywhere in the world. Now the South is facing a serious crisis, and **may lose its public schools.** A few communities have already experienced this tragedy.

Believing that the welfare of the South and the preservation of our democratic heritage is dependent upon our ability to maintain a free and educated citizenry, we, a group of southern educators, have prepared this statement. We hope it will be read by every person concerned with the preservation of our American way of life. It represents our sincere and earnest belief. The democracy in which we live gives us, each of us, the right to say and fight for what we believe. If we lose this democracy, we will lose this freedom.



consequences of closing the public schools

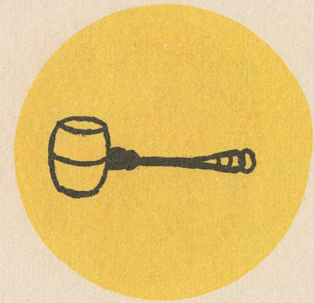
WHEN intelligent people face a choice, they look at both sides of the issue. What are the chances of gain and what are the chances of loss? No one can predict with complete accuracy what would happen in a community or a state if the public schools were closed and a system of private schools undertaken. However, we know enough to project with some degree of accuracy what the situation might be.

A state or community which discards its public schools for a system of private schools* would gain the privilege of allowing some parents (those who could afford it) to choose the schools to which their children would go. Obviously, this would be possible only for the more favorably situated parents; the great majority would find themselves unable to provide educational opportunities for their children. One private school, recently organized, has indicated its annual tuition would be \$800.

However, besides the losses experienced by individuals, let's examine what the situation might be on a wider front. How would it affect the community and the state?

** Our country has many private schools with high standards and effective programs. In the South about 3 per cent of the pupils are enrolled in private schools. The statements in this document about private schools are referring to a system of private schools designed to take over the task of the public schools. No reflection is intended against the many private schools which are rendering a valuable service to the youth of our land.*

loss of democratic freedom



THE people of every state in the nation have said that for the preservation of our democracy every child must attend school until he reaches a certain age. Thomas Jefferson said, "Enlighten the people generally and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day." Civic and political leaders have demanded that the schools assume the responsibility for developing an informed electorate, aware and proud of our cultural heritage, committed to the values, ideals and practice of democracy. However, we are moving away from this ideal. A number of states have already **repealed** their compulsory attendance laws and others are planning to do so. These states are preparing for a system of private schools, obviously not intended to reach all of the children.

The concept of democracy which we cherish is the heart of our American philosophy of education. From the beginning it has been the public school which has nurtured this ideal.

How can this ideal possibly live on in a society that abolishes the principal institution established to preserve it? **Every democratic nation in the world has a tax supported system of public schools.**

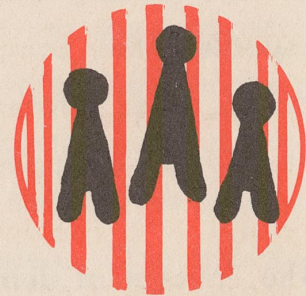
The proposal that we abandon the public schools and set up private ones cuts deep into the very heart of what we believe necessary to preserve our democracy.



increase in unemployment

WITH compulsory attendance laws repealed and schools not available for many of our youth, the labor market will be flooded with unskilled and untrained young people seeking employment. How will the communities face this situation? Will they be added to relief rolls? Will they draw unemployment compensation? It will be revealing to make an estimate of the number of such youth that may be in your community when the public schools are closed and compulsory attendance laws repealed.

increase in juvenile delinquency



IT is clearly obvious that juvenile delinquency will increase if we have a large number of unemployed youth. No community can absorb large numbers of teenagers in gainful occupations, neither can it provide youth services and recreational facilities which can take care of the daytime hours of so large a number. It is reasonable, therefore, to expect that when hundreds of school age boys and girls are without employment many will drift into crime and delinquency.

This fact is supported further by a study of one thousand teen-aged

delinquents which revealed that only one in three was attending school.¹ In *Search Light on Delinquency* the author says, "One of the best methods of preventing delinquency is to keep children within the framework of a good educational system during the most restless adolescent years."²

damage to our economy

MANY studies have shown that the economic status of a state or community is closely related to the education of its people. People who are well educated are more intelligent consumers, have greater income, and spend more per capita. Thus there is a direct relationship between the level of education and economic well being of a community.



Figures taken from Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1957, show that the per capita income of people who complete the secondary school is approximately one-third more than those who complete eight years of elementary school. The per capita income of those who complete college is almost twice that of the elementary school graduates.

Many civic organizations have recognized the connection between the level of education of a community and its economy, and have been strong supporters for public education. To illustrate, in March, 1959, the Miami Beach Junior Chamber of Commerce sent a petition to the Florida Legislature urging it to "enact no legislation which would close or weaken schools." Similarly, on March 22, 1959, the Miami News said editorially, "Destruction of the Florida Public School System, or any part of it, means just one thing—economic suicide."

Look at what has happened in Little Rock, Arkansas, during the first year that the public high schools were closed. A survey made by the American Association of University Women of 85 Little Rock business men revealed that over one-half said that their businesses had been hurt. The study revealed further that no new business had moved into the city. Seven out of eight real estate dealers said that they had been hurt because many people were moving away and few were buying homes. Two out of three moving companies reported improvement in their business, saying "We are moving families away faster than ever before."

Richard Butler, special attorney for the Little Rock School Board and a past president of the Chamber of Commerce stated, "We are losing industrial prospects. Little Rock has not gotten a new industry in a year."³ In 1957, the year prior to the closing of the schools, eight new industries had located in Little Rock.

Dr. Louis T. Rader, General Manager, Special Control Department, General Electric Co., Inc., Waynesboro, Virginia said, "A strong system of public education is very important among those factors that attract new industry into a state and that keep industry already here from moving away. . . . The education climate and business climate are interdependent . . . and the weakening of our free public school system will adversely affect Virginia's economy. . . ."⁴

The tremendous progress which the South has made in the past decade in attracting new industry is on the brink of a serious setback. Malcom B. Seawell, the Attorney General of North Carolina said, "I do not believe that industry or business will care to locate in a state wherein its employees will be denied free public education."⁵

damage to teacher supply

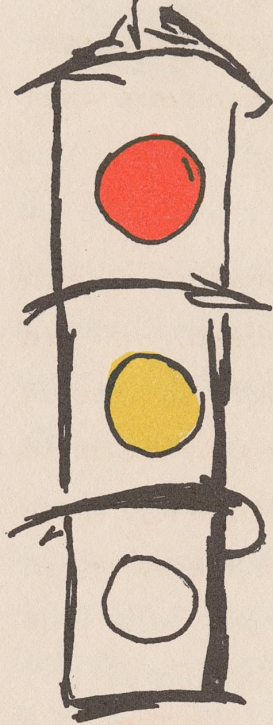


WHAT about teachers? Suppose that many private schools are organized. Where will the teachers come from? Is it reasonable to suppose that young people who have spent a number of years preparing for the teaching profession are going to sign up for teaching in poorly financed, haphazardly organized private schools, with little hope for tenure, for promotion, for career increments in salary?

With the entire nation clamoring for competent teachers there are too many free systems of public education, with all of the advantages they have, to attract these young people. Relatively few private schools will be financially able to pay salaries sufficient to attract competent teachers. These will be schools with high fees which will be available only to children of the wealthy.

A disbanded system of public education will not encourage young people to choose teaching as a profession and greater shortages of competent teaching personnel are certain to materialize.

damage to taxpayers



THE taxpayers of the South have invested billions of dollars in school plants. Are these expensive plants to be left empty and idle and allowed to suffer the ravages of vandalism and decay?

In 1958-59 nine schools in Virginia were closed for part of the year and four schools in Arkansas were closed for the year. The taxpayers continued to pay the 734 teachers who were under contract, but were unable to perform the function for which they were being paid.

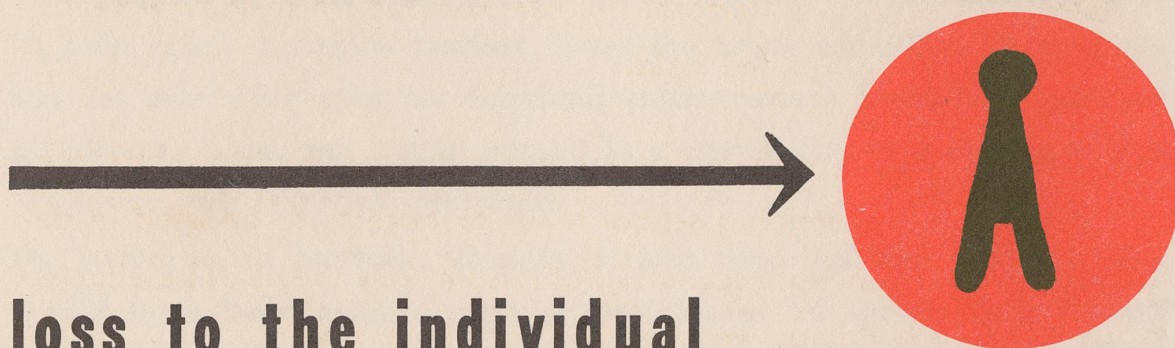
Proposals connected with legislation for closing schools usually contain provisions for remitting school taxes to parents to be used in defraying the cost of private schools. But it is unlikely they will be allowed to use the fine buildings we have built at public expense.

In many cases the sums paid by the state will not meet the cost of private schools. Thus, the parents' outlay for education will be materially increased. No one seems to have really studied this aspect of the problem.

There will be other losses. Many public schools have excellent opportunities for adult education. Shops, art studios, kitchens, clothing rooms, music studios provided with trained instructors are open to the adult public in the evenings. Large numbers of taxpayers have thus availed themselves of the opportunity to acquire new vocations, add

avocational pursuits, bring their skills to a higher level, and acquire new ones. Also they have found among the adult educational programs opportunities for discussion of serious civic and social issues confronting our society. These opportunities will be lost to taxpayers when the doors of the public schools are closed.

It is impossible to estimate the mounting costs to a community in which the children of the poor do not go to school. This, indeed, will turn the clock back, reducing the cities, towns and rural areas to an increasing condition of poverty. With poverty comes increasing deterioration of the individual, resulting in ill health, crime and delinquency. These conditions will increase the cost to the individual and to the taxpayer.

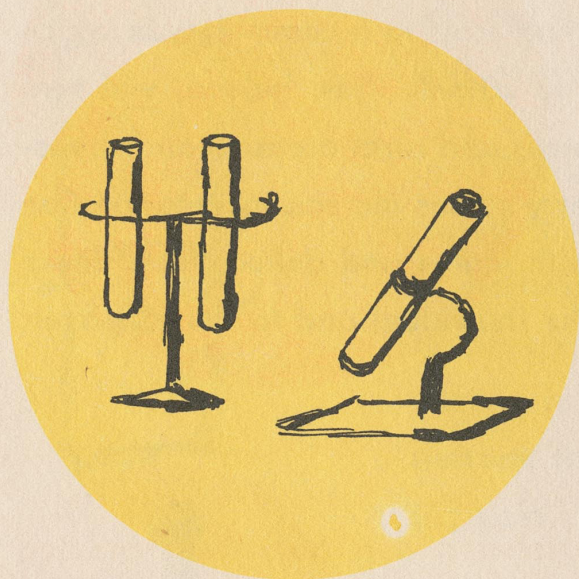


loss to the individual

ATTENTION has been given to what it would do to a community to lose its public schools. It seems unnecessary to review the loss that would come to the individual child who is forced through no fault of his own to go to a private school which will most likely have limited equipment and may be inferior; or the loss to the child who may not have the privilege of attending school at all.

None of us think this could happen to our children. But it did happen to 16,300 children and youth in Little Rock and in Virginia. Newspapers

and magazines over the nation have coined the phrase, "The South's 'lost class' of 1959" in referring to the students who **should** have graduated from high school in Little Rock and Virginia, **but didn't**. Such loss is tragic to those who see it or who experience it.



loss of future scientists and mathematicians

THE nation is straining every nerve to encourage able boys and girls to continue their schooling so that those who have ability in science and mathematics can share in developing the technology of our country. We must win the race against communism, and we cannot afford the loss of one person who has the potential to become a great scientist.

When an able student does not complete high school or go to college, the nation, as well as the individual, suffers a great loss. If securing a high school education is made more difficult or limited to those who are able to pay the extra cost, this loss will increase significantly.

The United States Congress feels so strongly about this that it is appropriating millions of dollars annually to help increase the opportunities for our youth to study science and mathematics.

loss of leaders



FOR years, the South has been concerned about the fact that many of its able youth, potential leaders, leave the South annually. Opportunities for education and for economic advancement have been greater elsewhere. Close the public schools in a community or a state and this migration will increase manyfold.

For example, in Norfolk, Virginia, it was reported that students who would have been seniors were scattered over 16 states, from Florida to Montana, from New York to California.⁶ The Superintendent of Norfolk Schools reported of 1,048 seniors in the three white high schools which were closed; only 487 graduated.⁷

Not only will communities lose the leadership of its promising youth, but they will find it difficult to attract able leaders from the outside. Just as business men refuse to take a business to a community which has closed its public schools, professional people refuse to take their families into such communities. Such communities would become poverty stricken for the services of doctors, ministers, lawyers, teachers and college professors. To illustrate, Emory University tried to employ two chairmen of important departments in 1958. Those approached "declined to bring their families into the muddled Georgia school situation."⁸



the tide is turning

THROUGHOUT the South many groups are taking a positive stand and publishing strong statements supporting the preservation of public education. An actual count of such groups would run into the hundreds. When we understand what we would lose if the public schools were closed, a way will be found to keep them open!

Issued by:

Wallace M. Alston, President
Agnes Scott College
Decatur, Georgia

Vernon E. Anderson, Dean
College of Education
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland

J. A. Battle, Dean
Florida Southern College
Lakeland, Florida

John R. Beery, Dean
School of Education
University of Miami
Coral Gables, Florida

Witt Blair, Dean
School of Education
North Texas State College
Denton, Texas

J. L. Blair Buck, President
Virginia Committee for Public Schools
Broad-Grace Arcade, Richmond, Virginia

William Cartwright, Chairman
Department of Education
Duke University
Durham, North Carolina

Ralph Cherry, Dean
School of Education
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia

Dennis H. Cooke,
Director of Teacher Education
High Point College
High Point, North Carolina

M. P. Davis
Dean of the Faculty
East Tennessee State College
Johnson City, Tennessee

A. N. Donner, Dean
College of Education
University of Houston
Houston 4, Texas

Harley Fite, President
Carson-Newman College
Jefferson City, Tennessee

Charles R. Foster, Assistant Dean
College of Education
University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida

Lyman V. Ginger, Dean
College of Education
University of Kentucky
Lexington, Kentucky

Halbert Harvill, President
Austin Peay State College
Clarksville, Tennessee

L. D. Haskew, Dean
College of Education
The University of Texas
Austin, Texas

Earle T. Hawkins, President
State Teachers College
Towson, Maryland

Kenneth E. Howe, Dean
School of Education
Woman's College, University of N. C.
Greensboro, North Carolina

A. K. King, Director
Summer Session
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

J. Bryant Kirkland, Dean
School of Education
North Carolina State College
Raleigh, North Carolina

Howard Kirksey,
Dean of Faculty
Middle Tennessee State College
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Hugh McEniry, Dean
College of Arts and Sciences
Stetson University
Deland, Florida

W. J. Moore, Dean
Eastern Kentucky State College
Richmond, Kentucky

J. J. Oppenheimer, Chairman
Department of Education
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

Arnold Perry, Dean
School of Education
University of North Carolina
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Truman M. Pierce, Dean
School of Education
Alabama Polytechnic Institute
Auburn, Alabama

Ray Sowers, Chairman
Division of Education
Stetson University
Deland, Florida

Mode L. Stone, Dean
School of Education
Florida State University
Tallahassee, Florida

J. G. Umstatted
Professor of Education
The University of Texas
Austin, Texas

O. W. Wake, President
Lynchburg College
Lynchburg, Virginia

J. B. White, Dean
College of Education
University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida

Kimball Wiles, Assistant Dean
College of Education
University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida

F. G. Woodward
Dean of Faculty
Austin Peay State College
Clarksville, Tennessee

references

1. Glueck, Sheldon, *Juvenile Delinquents - Grown Up*, Harvard University Press, 1940.
2. Archibald et al., *Searchlight on Delinquency*, International University Press, 1949.
3. New York Herald Tribune, June 14, 1959.
4. From an address at Thomas Jefferson High School Auditorium, Richmond, Virginia, March 15, 1959.
5. Seawell, Malcom B., "Public Education Must be Preserved", reported in the Miami Herald, April 15, 1959.
6. New York Herald Tribune, April 5, 1959.
7. Figures from office of Superintendent of Norfolk Schools.
8. "Crisis in the Schools", The Emory Alumnus, February 1959.