
Defense Report

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Transfer of the Military Dependent's Education System—A Move Which Gets Poor Grades from Nearly Everyone

When Congress in 1979 created the Department of Education they ordered the transfer of the Defense Department's overseas dependents schools to flesh out the new cabinet-level organization. After all, the DoD's 11,000 educators and administrators would constitute nearly two-thirds of the Education Department's strength. Some cooler heads prevailed however, and delayed the actual transfer for three years. Since then the Congress has twice dealt with the controversial measure so that now there will probably be no move prior to May 1986.

Presently the DoD Dependent Schools System provides quality education to 136,000 students at 270 schools in 20 countries around the world. The Scholastic Aptitude Test scores of the overseas students are better on a comparative basis than those in the public schools here at home.

Those favoring the transfer argue that education is not the primary mission of the DoD, that such a large educational enterprise should be administered by an educational agency and, besides, Public Law 96-88 has already legislated the move. These pleas are endorsed by the National Education Association's headquarters but not by all its members.

Retention of the schools in the Defense Department is supported by Defense Secretary Weinberger, Education Secretary Bell and Budget Director Stockman. Secretary Bell wrote to the Senate saying that major inefficiencies would result from insertion of his department into the system and that the Education Department is ill-equipped to handle the logistical arrangements of the far-flung school system.

At a time when the Armed Forces and the Congress are expending tremendous efforts to insure the effectiveness of our volunteer forces and the quality of life of the men and women therein, we can ill afford the turbulence and gross inefficiencies which would inevitably accompany this transfer.

The Congress should repeal this transfer and retain the overseas schools in the Defense Department, insuring a quality education for these students and reassuring service families that we will continue to meet this obligation in a professional manner.