

Educating Youth---A Constant Challenge

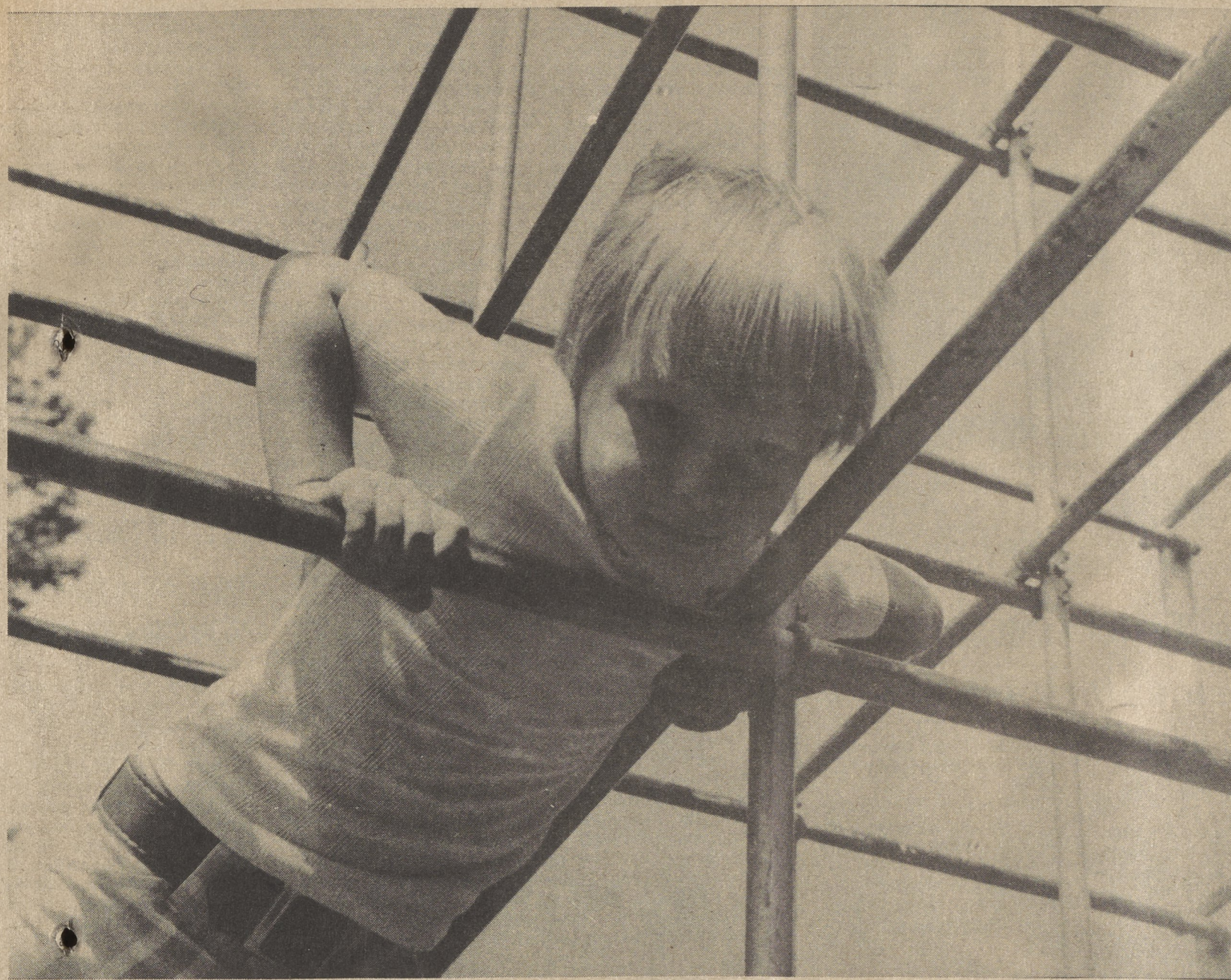


Photo by Mike Hendricks

From a lofty position on the monkey bars, Mike Davis looks down on an empty playground... dreaming of the weeks ahead when it will be filled with the laughter of children returning to school.

Teachers' Right to Bargain: Are the Kids Better Educated?

Pa. State Education Assn.: 'Yes'

Going into its fourth year, the Public Employees Relations Act has begun making changes in what happens in the classroom--changes that are now encouraging, if not yet pronounced. Indications of further improvements abound.

When Act 195 was passed, hopes were high, for teachers across the state foresaw an opportunity at last to work at improving just about every aspect of a child's education. The beginnings have been made; whether the act will measure

up to the hopes of educators will be determined over the next few years.

When the subject of collective bargaining for teachers is discussed it is most often in connection with teacher salaries--the one item in teacher contract that is measurable, concrete, and reportable. There is no question but that collective bargaining has improved teacher salaries, thus having an effect in stabilizing the teaching force. Able educators can now enter the profession with some

assurance of salary advancement and with the knowledge that their incomes will not be totally controlled by the whims of political bodies, their respective school boards.

Teacher stability, of which Pennsylvania's students have not had the benefit for a long time, has further improved with the negotiation in some school districts of health plans, life insurance, and other family security provisions already enjoyed by other occupations.

An abstract, yet noticeable, change in teachers since passage of the law has been their attitude toward their respective classroom problems. Before the act, a teacher who was concerned about a lack of classroom learning materials the insufficient time he had available for preparing lessons, or the excessive number of students in his classes which caused them all to be cheated--for voicing any of these concerns, he was labeled a "trouble maker."

Indeed, he still is labeled such to an extent, but now at least, instead of being forced to hear, "If you don't like it here, why don't you go somewhere else," he can take his teaching problems to the bargaining table.

Unfortunately, in these early years of the law, matters directly relating to students' education are being termed inappropriate for bargaining. In other words, the cry, "If you don't like it here--" has changed to "non-negotiable!"--the cry heard at tables across the state.

Teachers are frustrated and often angry about this aspect of the law; the first few years have shown that school boards are determined to trade off quality of teaching and learning for dollars. At one bargaining table after another, the school district negotiators are heard saying, "We don't want to talk about education--we want to talk money!"

Most public school educators, if asked what reforms are most needed to give kids the best break in their education, would probably name "time to teach;" sensible, down-to-earth curricula, formulated with teacher input; teacher income and stability; and personal and professional growth.

So far most of teachers' top priority concerns for students have been resisted by school boards as "non-negotiable." The courts over the next decade or so will have to decide whether the teacher will have a voice in improving his classroom performance, or whether he will be involved only in his own economic progress.

Total statewide expenditures, including state and local funds, have increased at almost \$165 million a year.

The per pupil cost, including all expenditures, has jumped almost 30 percent during the same period.

Over half of the state's 120,000 classroom teachers, now earn \$10,000 or more for a 185-day work year.

The average teaching salary for professional employees is now \$11,475, an increase of 19 percent in the same period.

Raising a body of 120,000 employees an average of \$1,842 during this period where a group of the highest paid employees retire and new employees begin at the entrance salary range requires yearly increases statewide of 10 to 12 percent and literally millions of dollars.

What those dollars do for the betterment of public education for Pennsylvania's youth is not as debatable a point as teacher spokesmen would have the public believe. Education is among the most intensive labor efforts in our society.

From 65 to 70 percent of a typical school district budget is made up of salary and wage costs. Granted, persons engaged in public education, as in other fields of public service, should be fairly compensated. It should be noted, however, that often artificial requirements established by state agencies, and other limitations vigorously pursued by teacher groups, greatly increase such costs.

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Threat of Teacher Strike: Does It Balance the Scales?

by Dr. Richard T. Rees
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"Strike!"
"Teachers Walk Out!"
"Teachers Threaten Job Action!"

These newspaper headlines and many like them are rapidly becoming more and more familiar to all as the process of collective bargaining in public education moves agonizingly along.

As teacher organizations continue to flex their newly found legal muscles, there appears to be a definite shift in the power alignment in public education. Teachers are gaining concessions in areas such as salaries, fringe benefits, course loads, class size, and in some cases, are invading policy-making territory long held by Boards of Education and Administrators.

The fact that teachers appear to be moving up the rungs of the hierarchical ladder and assuming positions alongside administrators and board members in terms of decision-making would seem to imply flexibility and broad input with respect to the formation of educational decisions. Few would argue that this is a most positive result in that there is ample theory and research to indicate that the more the subordinate is involved in the planning and implementation of programs which govern his work situation, the more satisfaction and commitment he will exhibit and theoretically the more effective he will be.

We know full well that if the relationship between employer and employee is democratic in nature, the lines of communication and interaction tend to remain open so that the organization and its participants may respond, react, and change as the situation warrants.

A close examination of the negotiation process in education seems to indicate an area for concern with regard to the maintenance of an open and flexible communication system. A review of contractual agreements which are emerging from the deliberations between teacher groups and boards of education provides some alarming findings. More and more elements of the work situation are being specified in formal rules and regulations.

This is not to suggest that an organiza-

tion should function without some rules and regulations to govern the behavior of its participants, for without institutional norms, anxiety levels of participants may be unusually high as they find difficulty in assuming their roles within the organization. But rather, the concern is with the degree to which the rules are overly restrictive. Teachers have been rebelling against the oppressiveness (perceived or actual) of hierarchically imposed demands but it appears that as contractual agreements become more complex and voluminous, the system may become every bit as bureaucratically confining even though the rules were developed "cooperatively."

Bureaucracy is defined as consisting of the following characteristics: hierarchy of authority, division of labor, uniformity of rules and regulations, and formalized, impersonal relationships. What is interesting to note is that the impetus in the development of bureaucracy, especially with respect to rules and regulations,

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Normal Ratio of College Bound Students Here

The number of high school graduates in Northeastern Pennsylvania enrolling in colleges and other degree-granting institutions compares favorably with those in Pennsylvania. 4,700 or 42 percent of the 11,000 public high school graduates in the region applied to some type of higher learning institution last year. In Pennsylvania 66,000 or 43 percent of the state's 154,000 public high school graduates planned to continue some type of formal education.

These figures were drawn from the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania's July "Data Notes," which highlights data from "Our Schools Today," an annual series of publications dealing with all facets of elementary and secondary education in Pennsylvania.

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Pa. School Boards Assn.: 'No'

The Question

Has the passage of Act 195 contributed to the betterment of public education for kids?

After four years of Act 195, passed in 1970, which granted collective bargaining rights, and a limited right to strike to public school teachers and other public employees, this question has been on the minds of the general public, the news media, and the state Legislature. The answer to the question is complex.

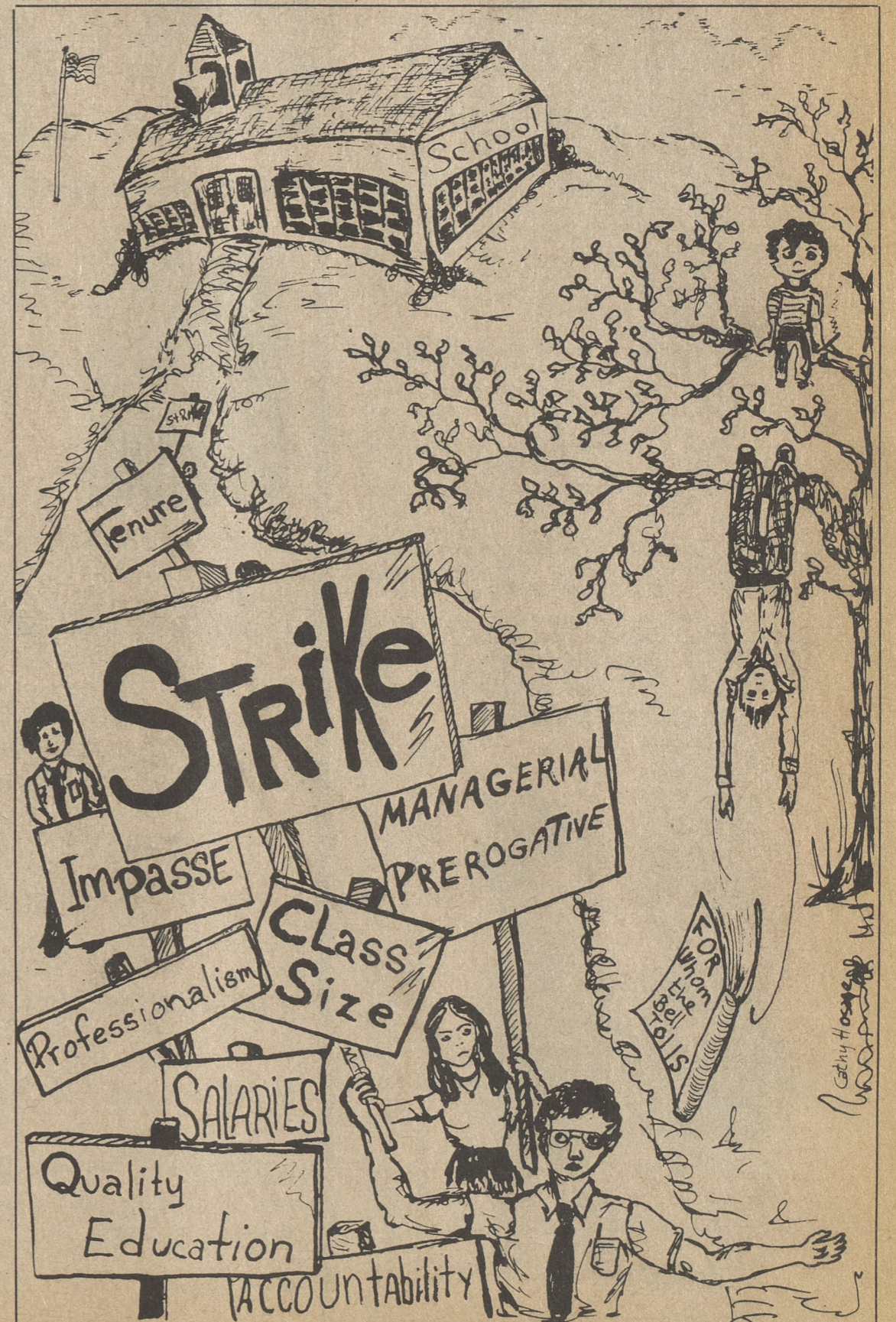
If the question is: has the cost of public education escalated in the past four years, the answer is definitely yes. Have teachers and other public employees gained materially in salaries and other fringe benefits - the answer is yes.

If you ask, have these additional dollars produced a better educated youngster, you'll get a mixed bag of answers. But the preponderance of evidence in all available studies indicates additional expenditures alone do not impact on the quality of the educational output.

And if you ask the question, has Act 195 provided the needed flexibility at the local level to provide the best possible education, based on local needs and public input, the answer would have to be that local control is being seriously eroded.

Let's look at the cost of Pennsylvania public education over the past four years, remembering that local and state support comes from the same pocketbook -- the citizen taxpayer. (See table 1)

While student enrollments have decreased over the past four years, the number of classroom teachers has increased. In fact, one teacher has been added for every 12 students no longer in



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