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# Economics Newsletter

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## ECONOMIC EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS



This Newsletter is concerned with an overview of economic education in the public schools. The classroom situation is meant to emphasize the expanding challenges that teachers face because of the complex and dynamic nature of our economy and the questions students are asking about how the economy operates.

If students in the public schools have questions about economics they often turn to their teacher. The question is, can the teacher provide satisfactory answers? Or perhaps even more important, are teachers prepared to be able to discuss the economic aspects of other subjects as they are covered?

According to a national study completed in the late 1960's about 50 percent of social studies teachers had completed at least one course in economics. Also 50 percent of social-studies-teacher-training programs in the United States required economics as part of their curriculum. Further, a 1972 study by the national Joint Council on Economic Education found that the economic obligation for secondary

teachers of economics differed between states having formal credit requirements. The requirements varied from 3 to 24 college credit hours of economics, with an average of 9.5 credits. South Dakota, with an 8 credit-hour requirement in 1972, fell slightly below this average.

The 1972 Joint Council study determined that 49 percent of the secondary schools in the United States offered economics. The economics course offering was somewhat higher in South Dakota. In the same year, it was estimated that 60 percent or 117 of the 195 secondary schools in South Dakota offered economics.

Of the schools offering economics in the United States, the Council estimated on the basis of a small sample

that 28 percent that offered economics also required it. If the same percentage is used for South Dakota then 33 of the secondary schools in South Dakota may have required economics in 1972.

Whether economics is a tiny segment of some primary school class, a component of a secondary school curriculum, or a part of the core requirement for a college or university degree, a logical supposition is that formal or informal exposure to economic concepts aids both in the understanding and the solution of economic problems.

Because of the increasing emphasis on economics in the public schools, it's becoming a much more likely prospect that people who never take an economics course in college will still be exposed to economics in the public schools.

Business firms and public and semi-public agencies are showing increasing willingness to provide necessary funding to encourage more economic education which includes publications that appeal to younger people. Use of such materials can make learning of a complex subject much more of a rewarding experience.

Each of us at some time has listened to a speaker or read an article or editorial which "seemed to make a lot of sense," but upon reflection found that the issue was made even more confusing. Or, more to the point of

this Newsletter, have you ever wondered if the complex problems currently facing the people of the United States might be better understood and better policies developed to deal with such questions if there were a higher level of economic literacy? Those interested in economic education apparently would answer the question in the affirmative.

The Joint Council on Economic Education has over 100 affiliated centers for economic education spread across the United States. The centers at Brookings and Vermillion are available to aid teachers in gaining access to essential educational materials and to provide some assistance when a school makes the commitment to raise its level of economic awareness.

The message of the drawing at the beginning of this Newsletter suggests that the economic questions being asked by many are complex and because of this there is a need for a high level of understanding in the subject matter. For South Dakota a larger proportion of secondary schools offer economics when compared to the national situation. But it is also true that secondary teachers have not been exposed to as much formal training in economics. College students who plan to teach economics or social studies should ask themselves whether their formal economic preparation will be adequate to meet the demands of their students.

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