

# Education: Weakness and Hope

The five-part series of articles on Hamilton High School, which we published last week, told a story of enormous consequence for each citizen. For this was the story of a failure of American society, or, if not a failure, a weakness; public education is not what it should be. But it was also a story of remarkable achievements—some by gifted and dedicated teachers, some by a tough and committed principal, some by students unimpressed by the boredom and malaise so pervasive on campuses today.

Some things must be kept in mind. Hamilton's problems are the problems of most if not all public high schools. Public schools are mirrors of the society they serve; they cannot substitute for the home, they cannot rival the influence of parents. If there is anything unusual about Hamilton, it was the willingness of its staff and faculty to open its doors to a full year of close examination by three reporters, an examination that was never restricted in any way.

In reading this intimate portrait of Hamilton, we were struck by what a relatively fortunate place it is, with a favorable ratio of teachers to students; good facilities, a reasonable choice of courses. And yet, despite its achievements, it emerges as a place of mediocrity that seems deprived of the kind of spirit that money or electric typewriters or cur-

riculum coordinators or administrative memoranda simply cannot provide.

We now know what terrible problems assail many of the young people. And yet the response to disciplinary problems is largely a one-dimensional police response. That minimizes disruption, which is good, but it ignores the deeper problems that no society can afford to ignore.

We now know what problems beset the teachers, both good teachers and bad. And yet we find inadequate provisions to support and reward the good, and no provisions to get rid of the bad.

And we now know how bad the district administration is. It diverts teachers from what they should be doing, intrudes where it should not, discourages innovation, celebrates the obvious—imagine how the teachers felt when handed a memo from downtown headquarters reminding them that reading is their first priority—and suffocates the local school with such secrecy, confusion and red tape that Hamilton's principal does not yet know how many teachers she will be allowed next September.

The story of Hamilton is the story of public education, far short of the goals set for it by society. But it is a story that identifies things that can be done to help mediocrity yield to excellence, the excellence already manifest in the work of some teachers in some classes.