

# Recent Growth Patterns of Accreditation of Secondary Schools by the Regional Accrediting Associations

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ACCREDITATION of secondary schools by the regional accrediting association has experienced both horizontal and vertical growth within the recent period, 1949-1960. The *horizontal* extension of the development is exemplified by an ever increasing number of secondary schools being accredited by four of the six regional accrediting associations and by an increasing number of states and associations who are entering into the formal process of school recognition known as *accreditation*. Vertical growth of regional accreditation is discernible in the increasing levels of education that are being accredited by these associations.

The horizontal growth has been an on-going trend of more than a half-century; the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools began accreditation of secondary educational institutions in 1906 followed by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in 1912, the Northwest Association of Secondary and Higher Schools in 1918 and the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in 1923. While the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools has had member schools, they have not formally accredited secondary schools although they have been attempting to arrive at the requisite criteria or standards since 1954. California's high schools are not accredited by the Western College Association (recognition group for higher institutions in the state) and may be said to be the only state whose high schools are not regionally recognized.

Today, therefore, the secondary schools of only seven states are beyond the regional fold of accreditation and regional accreditation has grown in recent years to embrace the armed services dependency schools by the North Central Association; American Secondary Schools in Latin American states by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, and American Schools in Switzerland, the Panama Canal Zone, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia by the Middle States Association.

Table 1 shows the growth pattern of regional accreditation by secondary organizations during the period 1949-1960. The data has been compiled by the investigator from the annual reports of secondary-school

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commissions and correspondence from the four regional associations which currently accredit secondary schools. The Southern Association comprised of twelve states and some schools in Latin America has had the greatest growth during the period. Part of this phenomenal expansion in numbers of accredited secondary schools, 73.88 per cent, is explainable by the fact that in 1958 the Association formally listed qualified Negro schools as accredited rather than merely approved as previously done.

TABLE 1. Growth Pattern of Accreditation

Year	<i>Numbers of Schools Accredited by Associations</i>				Totals
	<i>North Central</i>	<i>North-west</i>	<i>Middle States</i>	<i>Southern States</i>	
1949 . . . . .	3,047	574	761	1,386	5,768
1950 . . . . .	3,130	587	770	1,422	5,909
1951 . . . . .	3,089	592	768	1,472	5,921
1952 . . . . .	3,130	602	777	1,514	6,023
1953 . . . . .	3,158	512	853	1,579	6,102
1954 . . . . .	3,227	626	813	1,648	6,314
1955 . . . . .	3,277	640	836	1,719	6,472
1956 . . . . .	3,343	637	848	1,790	6,618
1957 . . . . .	3,398	642	906	1,852	6,798
1958 . . . . .	3,416	653	868	2,258	7,195
1959 . . . . .	3,474	663	925	2,322	7,384
1960 . . . . .	3,580	673	968	2,410	7,631
<i>Percentage of increase</i> 1949-1960 . . . . .	17.49	17.25	27.20	73.88	32.29

Despite the direct factor of integration of listing, the Southern Association's growth during the fifth decade of this century has been spectacular as compared to the others. An indirect factor may have contributed to this growth. The concept "separate but equal" as a policy regarding the apartheid in our Southern educational systems may have exercised a counteracting force in that when many Negro schools appeared to be better in many respects, as compared to white institutions, the competitive counteraction caused an upgrading of white schools. Hence improved quality of education resulted in increased accession of schools into the accredited listing. Another possibility is that the increased growth followed on the heels of the highly significant Southern Study,<sup>1</sup> the research of which stimulated action and growth. Still another stimulus may have been part of an entire chain reaction—the renaissance in public education in the southern states growing out of the stimulating activity of the work of the General Education Board which was reaping with full swath by the fifties.

The writer is wont to depart to affirm that, as a result of his entire study, the Southern Association would appear to be the most *research-*

<sup>1</sup> Jenkins, Frank C., *et al. Cooperative Study for the Improvement of Education*. The Southern Association. 1946.

*mind*ed accrediting group and the one which has given the greatest emphasis in the process of assisting the local school community in picking itself up by its bootstraps, coming to grips with local educational necessity and bringing about improved educational experiences for youth. Not only does the report of the Southern Study support this contention, but also, in practice, the use of *action-research* methods in the recommended year-long school-community self-study prerequisite to application of the *Evaluative Criteria* by the visiting evaluation committees.<sup>2</sup> Such activity is a type of research which involves an entire community. Moreover, this evaluation is now required for initial accreditation of secondary schools in the eleven member states of the Southern Association as well as for subsequent and continued accreditation. This, of course, leads directly to the premise that growth is healthy and based upon comprehensive research techniques rather than assumed quality based upon mere judgment. Be it further submitted that "re-evaluation," periodically, preserves healthy organic health for the Association.

It is with similar gravity that the Middle States Association practice provides for healthy growth and maintenance of its organic strength. This Association, whose basic membership encompasses five states, has the second highest though less spectacular growth. It too requires a local school to be evaluated by application of the *Criteria* for initial and continued accreditation of a member secondary institution.

Growth in numbers of accredited secondary schools has been slower in the sprawling North Central Association whose basic membership is within the confines of twenty states—not always *North* nor always *Central*—and slowest in the seven state Northwest Association. The former has part of its growth stemming from accredited recognition of overseas dependency schools and is 17.49 per cent while the latter, Northwest organization, has experienced a 17.25 per cent growth within the decade 1949-1959. It is highly significant to point out that in both of these associations, use of the *Evaluative Criteria* is only recommended and is integral with neither initial nor continued accreditation of secondary schools. One leader of the North Central Association has informed the writer that application of the *Evaluative Criteria* as a requisite for membership is overly time-consuming and expensive. However, it is possible to hypothesize that recent growth of the North Central membership could have been enhanced by greater use of the *Criteria*.

Mathews reported use of the *Evaluative Criteria* among regional associations for the years 1950-1956.<sup>3</sup> The present investigator computed the percentages from Mathews' data and they are as follows:

<sup>2</sup> Cooperative Study of Secondary-School Standards. *Evaluative Criteria*. Washington: Cooperative Study, 1950. The name of the study has been changed to the National Study of Secondary-School Evaluation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, Northwest, Washington 6, D. C. The 1960 edition became available July 1, 1960.

<sup>3</sup> Mathews, Roderic D. "Reactions of Administrators After Evaluation with Materials Developed by the Cooperative Study of Secondary-School Standards." *The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals*, XXXXII, No. 238, May 1958, p. 8.

## Percentage of Accredited Secondary Schools Evaluated, 1950-56

North Central Association	20.7
Southern Association	68.6
Middle States Association	71.4
Northwest Association	15.6

These percentages provide further credence for the writer's assumption; preponderate percentages attributable to the Middle States and Southern Associations result from established policy of initial and periodic comprehensive evaluation and this policy has contributed to a healthy growth in these accrediting associations.

Of course, it could be submitted that both the Northwest Association and its *godparent*, the North Central Association, had earlier heavy growth which slowed during the decade of increased school consolidation. Consolidation would tend to reduce apparent growth because over-all numbers of high schools decrease. On the other hand, consolidations should contribute to accredited membership because the resulting schools have requisite strengths. Despite these phenomena, Ohio has reduced its high schools with pupil populations of one hundred or fewer in the upper four grades by 23.5 per cent between 1957 and 1959, while increase in the state's list of North Central Association accredited high schools has increased little more than one per cent during the same period.

The vertical trend in regional accreditation is interesting phenomena. Early regional accreditation was, by and large, that of higher institutions and grew downward to embrace the secondary school. It is to be remembered that the New England and Western Associations have accredited higher institutions and that the former is moving vertically to accredit secondary schools, if private school membership and concepts of autonomy will allow. But the vertical growth downward continues.

The most significant vertical movement in accreditation has been into the accreditation of the junior high schools by the Southern Association, 1954, as well as the more recent movement toward elementary-school accreditation and now development of standards or criteria for system-wide evaluation. While *tremors* have been felt in some activities of the North Central Association, no *quaking* movement into junior high-school accreditation seems imminent.<sup>4</sup> There is practically no evidence of such movement in the remaining organizations. This condition obtains, perhaps, because the junior high-school program is as yet not *standardized*—or some might impute, *strangleized*—by the so-called Carnegie unit. Perhaps the ultimate recognition which may stem from the latest report of James Bryant Conant may provide the requisite stimulation.<sup>5</sup> Only the Southern Association seems to be considering elementary and system-wide evaluation. Their *frontier* activity accepts the premise that all levels of education are important and the ultimate strength of a chain or total

<sup>4</sup> "N.C.A. May Expand to Junior High Schools." *Today*, IV, No. 1, May 1959, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Conant, James Bryant. *A Memorandum to School Boards: Education in the Junior High-School Years*. Princeton: Educational Testing Service. 1960.

institution is equal only to that of its weakest link. It becomes apparent also, from the literature available, that the Southern movement is based upon research.

Current pilot studies with regard to system-wide evaluation will help lead the way to established criteria for system-wide accreditation—and improvement of education. Such qualitative approaches to the problems of education of society's youth seems a far cry and a noble movement from the original quantitative approach to accreditation. To the extent that the associations can develop and utilize qualitative standards for evaluation and accreditation will the process continue improvement—or it may be to the extent to which sound research may produce the accurate quantification of quality for easy objective measurement for evaluation that quality will be achieved. The trend to qualitative standards has been enhanced by the Middle States' complete abdication of collateral quantitative standards during recent years as well as similar but less significant efforts of the Southern Association. The North Central and Northwest Associations hold to many quantitative measures and current North Central movement into use of its 1960 secondary standards and no more significant use of the *Evaluative Criteria* bespeaks a reactionary trend to qualitative approaches to accreditation. Perhaps to the extent that the *Criteria*, brainchild of the cooperative movement among Associations in the 1930's, is used will growth in accreditation of secondary schools be qualitative and healthy.

Lest the conclusion be drawn that the accreditation movement is complete and that all secondary schools will soon find their names ensconced on the accredited lists, Table 2 is submitted to indicate the contrary. This tabulation results from the writer's survey<sup>6</sup> of the forty-four states within the regional *folds* to which thirty-one state departments of education submitted the data. It can be noted that barely one third of the secondary schools in the total number of states are regionally accredited. Moreover, it can be assumed that only one third can measure up to association standards for accreditation—it would, therefore, seem that if these standards are valid for judgment, the quality of education in some two thirds of the high schools falls short of optimal levels. The data affords another inference; maintenance of quality education is not the problem of any particular region or state—populous or sparsely peopled commonwealth. It is a national problem.

### CONCLUSIONS

The foregoing data indicates the following:

1. Regional accreditation of secondary schools continues to show horizontal as well as vertical growth.

<sup>6</sup> Statler, Ellsworth Sheldon. *An Analysis of Current Secondary-School Standards of State Agencies and Regional Accrediting Associations*. Columbus: The Ohio State University, Ph.D. dissertation. 1960.

TABLE 2. Proportion of Schools Regionally Accredited in Thirty-one Member States of Four Regions

State	No. Secondary Schools	No. Regionally Accredited	%	State	No. Secondary Schools	No. Regionally Accredited	%
Alabama . . . . .	213	152	71.36	Nevada . . . . .	34	20	58.82
Alaska . . . . .	43	18	41.86	New Jersey—No's not given—% was	..	..	82.00
Arizona . . . . .	94	60	63.82	New Mexico . . . . .	195	49	25.12
California* . . . . .	860	126	14.65	N. Carolina . . . . .	863	163	18.88
Colorado . . . . .	284	99	34.85	North Dakota . . . . .	233	67	28.75
Delaware . . . . .	68	29	42.64	Ohio . . . . .	1113	507	45.55
Florida . . . . .	330	240	72.72	Oklahoma . . . . .	665	170	25.56
Georgia . . . . .	464	256	55.17	Oregon . . . . .	219	159	72.60
Idaho . . . . .	134	98	73.13	Pennsylvania . . . . .	1240	150	12.09
Indiana . . . . .	680	200	29.41	S. Carolina . . . . .	430	111	25.81
Kansas . . . . .	704	222	31.53	South Dakota . . . . .	282	81	28.72
Kentucky . . . . .	533	142	26.64	Texas . . . . .	1195	455	38.07
Maryland . . . . .	313	108	35.64	Washington . . . . .	299	157	52.50
Michigan . . . . .	682	282	41.34	W. Virginia . . . . .	367	177	48.22
Missouri . . . . .	553	185	33.45	Wyoming . . . . .	83	35	42.16
Montana . . . . .	212	121	57.07				

Total Secondary Schools 13,385

Total Regionally Accredited 4,639

Total per cent of Schools Accredited by Regional Associations 34.66

\*California accredited schools in this case are those recognized by the state principals' association.

2. Growth within the 1949-1960 period shows tremendous horizontal growth in the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, less, but appreciable growth in the Middle States Association and continued though less spectacular growth in the North Central and Northwest Associations.

3. The phenomenal growth in the Southern Association may be explainable because of its apparent orientation to extensive research techniques.

4. Both the Middle States Association and Southern Association make the use of the *Evaluative Criteria* an integral activity consonant with initial and continued accreditation. This makes for healthy growth.

5. Vertical growth in accreditation is extremely evident in the Southern Association and of no significance in the other associations with the exception of the New England Association's overtures or efforts to accredit high schools. The Southern processes include junior high-school accreditation and movement toward elementary levels and efforts to make system-wide accreditation the pattern.

6. There is much to be done; slightly more than one third of the secondary schools in thirty-one states merit accreditation by the four regional associations which currently have the standards for evaluation.

Finally, such study seems to show that while our nation lacks, in the central government, a guiding force lodged for the promotion of sound educational practice, regional associations may serve to take the place of such an agency. To the extent that regional policy is above and beyond

the dictates of individual state political folly will it be able to promote the quality of education that state policy may tend to hinder. One association, the Middle States, assumes that it has this requisite position with reference to the state governments. Examination of organization of the other associations shows considerable inter-locking direction so that regional policy may be negated—or a state official may hold regional standards as a level of attainment above and beyond those minimums established by his state. So often state minimums become maximums. To the extent that regional policy and standards are based upon valid research, then will these promote a better educational opportunity for American youth.

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