

SOCIETY

eligible for Home Relief grants of up to \$152 per month to cover rent, but life in the shelters—with free food and medical services—is easier.

In fact, few of the “homeless” actually live day after day on the street. A second 1982 HRA survey of 681 new arrivals at the shelters revealed that, while 38 percent had spent the previous night outdoors, only five percent said that was their “usual” residence. Forty percent had been in their own apartments or with family or friends the night before.

Main warns that recognizing a “right to shelter” for all comers and spending more on the shelter system will encourage more of the jobless to seek aid. Needed, he says, is a work requirement, along with an emphasis on rehabilitation for the able-bodied, and better facilities for the mentally ill. Otherwise, the truly homeless may get lost in the shuffle.

Second Thoughts On School Reform

“Great Hopes May Go Unfulfilled” by Robert J. Samuelson, in *National Journal* (July 9, 1983), Government Research Corporation, 1730 M St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Behind today’s grassroots push for reform of the public schools is “the faith that strong schools represent a fundamental source of the nation’s prosperity and international competitiveness,” notes Samuelson, a *National Journal* contributing editor. He suggests that such faith may be a prescription for dashed hopes.

SOCIETY

After World War II, Americans' educational attainment and standard of living rose in tandem. Hence, many economists concluded that more education brought both personal prosperity and national economic growth. Economist Edward Denison of the Brookings Institution attributed 20 percent of U.S. productivity gains between 1948 and 1973 to increased schooling.

But contradictory evidence also exists. Economic growth has been highest in the South, where local schools are poorest. Michigan, whose public schools and universities are among the nation's best, has suffered chronic unemployment (an average rate of 9.2 percent since 1970). Abroad, such economic successes as Japan and West Germany badly trail the United States in average levels of formal education. In 1979, 5.2 percent of the U.S. population was attending college, compared to 1.9 percent in West Germany and 2.1 percent in Japan.

The trouble, says Samuelson, is that "no one really knows how much formal schooling is necessary to sustain a suitable work force or, for that matter, precisely what skills it requires."

The question of what makes an effective school is equally perplexing. A recent study of 30 elementary schools by Gilbert Austin of the University of Maryland suggests, however, that successful schools share these common features: strong principals, parents actively engaged in their children's education, firm discipline, and high teacher expectations of their pupils' performance.

"To a considerable degree," concludes Samuelson, "education is and must be an act of faith." Schooling cannot be regarded "as a mechanical process leading to automatic rewards." Schools, he believes, "are being asked to cure problems of employment and economic stagnation . . . beyond their power to remedy." The old danger remains: Citizens of a nation confused about what schools *can* provide always risk being disappointed by what they get.

Black Income Vs. Black Wealth

"Wealth and Economic Status" by William P. O'Hare, in *Focus* (June 1983), Joint Center for Political Studies, 1301 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20004.

Americans usually compare the relative well-being of whites and blacks by looking at statistics on annual income. Measuring personal wealth—real estate, stocks, bonds—yields a slightly different picture.

The good news, according to O'Hare, a Joint Center for Political Studies researcher, is that, nationwide, blacks narrowed the "wealth gap" during the last two decades. While black families' incomes hovered at about 60 percent of that of white families between 1967 and 1979, their wealth doubled in comparison to whites'. The bad news: The wealth gap remains wider than the income gap. At \$24,608 in 1979, the average wealth of black families was still only 36 percent of that of white families (\$68,891).

Viewed another way, black households in 1979 held assets equal to