

The wartime boom in the birthrate, which has so often been hailed as a boon to business, will soon be revealing its burdensome side. Starting in 1958 the first of the war babies will be of college age, and because of the "burst-rate" in the birthrate, our college age population will be registering sharp increases every year thereafter. This will automatically create a greater demand for higher education, which will bring about a crisis.

Already our educational institutions, both public and private, are hard pressed by heavy enrollments. Today almost 20 out of 100 in the 18-to-21 age group go to college, and if this rate is maintained when the burst-rate group reaches eligibility, it will mean doubling of enrollments in many states. Moreover, if past experience is any guide, we can expect an even higher ratio of youngsters demanding education, for ever since 1900 the college population has doubled every 20 years.

The first problem is purely one of capacity. According to reliable estimates as much floor space will have to be provided for higher education in the next 15 years as all our colleges have built since Harvard was founded over 300 years ago. Obviously, this entails enormous outlays.

Then we will need teachers. The increase in the student body--and the replacement of present staff--calls for a doubling of faculties between now and 1970. Most of the new teachers will be drawn from the united group of people born in the 1930s. In addition, there will be spirited competition for those teachers who are available, and unless college salaries are somewhat commensurate with what can be earned in private industry, the shortage of teachers will be more serious than the shortage of space.

This situation cannot be expected to solve itself. If we wait until the colleges are engulfed by the burst-rate wave, the best we can expect is that some youngsters will get a poor education while others get none at all.

One solution might be to limit enrollments to those with the highest aptitudes. But even if this were done, it would not solve the problem. Of "the top 10% of young persons in terms of college aptitude", according to John A Perkins, president of the University of Delaware, "less than half go to college".

The Coming Crisis in Education

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