

THE LISTENING POST

School Opportunities for Young Children

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES have occurred in state legislation and additional reports have been received since the November 1944 *Listening Post* review of laws affecting schools for children under the traditional school entrance age of six. Existing laws concerned with kindergarten and nursery school education have been liberalized in some of the states and in other states new laws have been enacted to authorize school officials to provide these school programs for young children. Public opinion is recognizing the need for these provisions.

Current interest supporting such legislative action has come from several sources; the federally aided nursery school programs initiated at the time of the economic depression and adjusted and expanded during the war period to release women for essential work; the continuing emphasis upon early childhood as the strategic period for behavior guidance and health protection; the public interest in young children evidenced by statements and action in their behalf from community, state, and national groups of lay, civic, and professional people; and the present challenge of a three million birth rate, acute family housing conditions, and increased numbers of families with a woman as the responsible head.

Not only more schools for young children are needed but more legal security to assure permanence of publicly supported schools despite possible future economic emergencies. More assistance with standards of operation is also needed for the privately conducted schools which are now helping to meet the demands for group service for young children. The following brief summary indicates both the breadth and depth of current action being taken to meet these needs.

General legislation: With the passage in Tennessee of a law authorizing school boards to operate schools for children under the age of six, there now remains

but one state without such a provision. In the 1945 modifications of their respective state constitution, Missouri and Georgia removed age limitations from the states' obligation to educate their citizens. In California, Connecticut, and New York, and possibly in other states for which records are not available, the increases in teachers' salaries and in state aid for local schools include provisions for children below the age of six.

Statewide surveys: The 1946 legislatures in California and in Louisiana authorized and appropriated funds for special statewide studies now being conducted by committees of their legislative bodies. The *California Joint Commission on Preschool and Primary Training* is studying the relative advantages and costs of different types of educational programs for young children. The *Special Educational Committee* of Louisiana includes kindergartens in its general study of the needs of the schools and higher education institutions of the state.

Exceptional children: Several states have lowered the ages at which publicly supported classes may receive children having certain types of physical and mental handicaps. The laws of Illinois and Ohio admit at the age of three those children having difficulties in hearing and sight and those who are crippled. No age limit is placed in the legal provisions for schools for these children in Connecticut, Iowa, New York, and Pennsylvania and it is considered possible that the laws of some of the other states may be so interpreted.

Registration of private schools: Three states, New York, New Jersey, and Louisiana, are now authorized to establish standards of operation for schools receiving young children and to register such privately conducted schools as meet these required standards. The New York service

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Brief Notes

Last year the California Congress of Parents and Teachers established a fund of \$50,000 for teacher education scholarships to attract to the teaching profession students of outstanding ability and sincerity of purpose. Seventy-two scholarships were awarded in 1945.

A program of curriculum revision was projected by a committee of the Central Costa County California Principals' Association under the chairmanship of Fred S. Ramsdell, with members representing the various county elementary and secondary schools.

A student council conference lasting one day was held at St. Mary's Lake Camp for representatives of student councils in the Battle Creek (Mich.) area. Roland Faunce of Wayne University and Frances Martin of Central Michigan College served as consultants.

The Ventura County California Secondary Schools are in the exploratory stage of a comprehensive study program which will be conducted in cooperation with the California State Department of Education.

A conference on recreation, camping and conservation education was held in Albany, N. Y. sponsored by the joint committee on recreation, camping, and conservation education of the state conservation and education departments. The group approved a platform which would extend the camping opportunities to more individuals; provide for the professional training of personnel for these programs; set up camp demonstration centers; and secure increased funds for such services.

The Michigan Study of the Secondary School Curriculum recently held a conference of teachers of core curriculum at St. Mary's Lake Camp, near Battle Creek. Among those participating were teachers of unified studies, integrated programs, social living programs, and block schedules.

The Malden (Mass.) Public Schools have opened a veterans high school center in its high school, staffed and maintained, however, entirely apart from that school.

The instructional plan is largely tutorial, each veteran progressing at his own rate of speed. All high school courses will be offered.

A science committee in the Cranston (R. I.) Public Schools is reviewing the course of study from the first to the twelfth grades. Revisions will be made in accordance with the committee's recommendations.

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operates under the law of 1939, Louisiana's program was authorized in 1945 under the legally authorized administrative responsibility of the state board of education, and legislative authorization for the New Jersey service was given in the Spring of 1946.

State departments of education: To aid in the development of state programs now authorized by law for children under six, the state boards of education in at least eleven states have to date employed a supervisor or director of early childhood education. For the most part these staff officers are responsible for the full primary unit of the school program. They are working both to assure a continuing guidance program appropriate for children and their parents and to explain the values of the program to the average citizen concerned with the tax dollar.

Many problems lie ahead in terms of state aid, age levels to be included, class size, appropriate equipment, and staff preparation. Yet major progressive steps have been taken in the past two years through the cooperating efforts of state and community workers actively concerned with the family welfare, the health, and the education of young children. Continued cooperation with community agencies and with the lay public as well as a well-planned public information program are essential to extend the school facilities for this younger age level.—MARY DABNEY DAVIS, *ASCD Legislative Committee.*

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