Alert educators, when they sense a need, search for ways to meet it. Similarly, the teachers of New Milford, Connecticut, as they saw the need for greater lay participation, worked with citizens to do something about it. This report is written by Geoffrey Graham of the New Milford High School faculty. Says Mr. Graham: "In fairness to the others who spent so much time on the entire project exclusive of the writing of this particular article, it seems to me that credit should go to the group if possible." We want to say thank you to the New Milford teachers who made this article possible.

THE PRESENT FOCUS of concern over teachers' salaries is, we must admit, heart-warming. There is danger, however, that in our enthusiasm we shall lose sight of basic and even more significant aspects of educational importance which also need an emergence into the spotlight of public attention.

Changing values in a changing world require an alert, sensitive, and flexible educational program. Education today is more technical and diversified than in the past and, as such, demands that teachers have specialized training. For this reason many otherwise conscientious community members hesitate about participating in school matters.

However, it is just as true that "experience is the best teacher"—that education is a matter of learning through active experiences rather than through the passive infiltration of words. And this is why interest of the community in school affairs must be maintained. The total community should help to provide the right kind of learning experiences and activities, and its entire resources should be available toward this end. These resources are as much in the shape of guiding suggestions and active, equal participation in school functions as they are financial and material. Whereas localism can be a dangerous influence in education, nevertheless the opposite possibility of alienation of local interest and control is equally dangerous.

What Did We Do?

To foster this closer cooperation between school and community in facing the problems of developing a desirable curriculum, a group of New Milford, Connecticut, public school teachers last spring participated in a course offered by the University of Connecticut through its Extension Service. Using their own community of about 6,000 residents as a laboratory, this teacher group divided itself into three working committees. Each committee selected a problem of particular interest to its own members but of related interest to all.

What Do Past Students Think?

One committee chose a post-school follow-up study. The members wanted to obtain information useful for making the experiences offered by the school of greater value to those now in attendance. In the first organized pro-
gram of this type in New Milford, both graduates and drop-outs were reached by questionnaire, personal interview, observation, and indirect contact. Besides attempting to learn whether the school's curriculum adequately prepared the boys and girls for early post-school life, the committee selected and phrased the questions in order to gather as many suggestions as possible and also to sound out opinion on whether the responsibility of the school terminates when a pupil leaves or graduates.

The committee selected as its base for questioning the eighth grade class of 1941, thus contacting not only those whose experiences were recent and comparable, but also graduates and drop-outs alike. The latter few cases were of particular interest since it was believed that leads for constructive changes might be indicated in the reasons given for leaving school.

The first problem faced was that of creating the questionnaire itself. Questions of wording and intent arose and, from a conference of all group members, the following pertinent procedures were established:

- Group or list questions under topic headings
- Be sure each question seeks essential information and is so clearly and simply worded as to draw responses carrying only the information sought
- Prepare questions which bring easy-to-tabulate answers
- Give the questionnaire a try-out before making the final draft
- Justify all conclusions on the information obtained, but use group judgment in interpreting doubtful responses.

This they tell us

From the answers received it was evident that the questionnaire had been considered thoughtfully and that some weight could and should be attached to those answers where a definite consensus prevailed. Significant among the conclusions were:

A positive indication that sex education was desirable in the school
Flexibility in course selection should be increased
Club programs should be better organized, better utilized
For some reason—perhaps indifference or other preoccupations or adjustments—participation in community and church organizations was undesirably small
The sports and social programs, in which all children have the opportunity to participate, were considered notably effective
A program of vocational guidance was strongly urged, with aid in job placement if possible.

So we suggest—

Recommendations which followed naturally from these conclusions included:

- Study further the plausibility of introducing sex instruction into the curriculum
- Investigate the possibilities of supporting a full-time guidance counselor either solely or in cooperation with a neighboring town
- Review physical facilities to determine how greater flexibility of program could be arranged with present staff and buildings
- Increase meaning and scope of club influence.

—and further examine

Even more challenging than the above are a few questions brought out by the questionnaire, or magnified by the very fact that they remained still unsolved. As a basis for further group
What should be our main goal as a school? How much should we concentrate on specific job preparation activity and to what extent on a broad, general education to prepare for life? What should the school, the parents, and the community do to encourage participation in community activities during and immediately after the school years?

Is the offering of the community adequate in terms of meeting the needs of students during and after the close of school days?

How Can Business Help?

Another committee chose an industry-school survey with the two-fold purpose of seeking an evaluation of the community's occupational requirements and of endeavoring thereby to further stimulate the interest and cooperation of business and industry with the school. To advance these purposes a local Businessmen's Advisory Committee, composed of key men in local business establishments, was chosen to assist and advise in conducting the survey. Another feature of this committee's program was the utilization of high school seniors to carry the survey form to the businessmen and assist them in its completion. Thus they were provided with one or more instructive interview opportunities as additional school experience. It was felt, too, that this double source of information added to and validated the material assembled.

Business tells us its needs

Basically the survey form was divided into four groups of questions relating to industry's present role in job preparation and training, personnel requirements, outlook for the future, and free response inquiries concerning the entire school program. From all of these we learned that a liberal arts or general education, even through college, meant little in our trade-filled town where technical know-how and experience are preferred; that most starting jobs open to new graduates are, essentially, of the apprentice type; that even basic high school training in merchandising, salesmanship and economics would be helpful; that the ability to meet people far outranked above-normal intelligence as a stepping-stone to employment; that adult recreational and educational programs might reasonably expect sound support; and that a school-managed placement bureau would be well patronized.

Mentioned to be considered for inclusion in the curriculum were such suggestions as—extend typing facilities to accommodate all; extend manual training programs; develop vocabulary, spelling, and speech; and promote a willingness and aptitude for shouldering responsibility.

The committee's recommendations were:

Establish a placement bureau for high school students, run by the commercial department.

Place special emphasis among all departments of the school to develop responsibility, courtesy, efficiency, and neatness. These characteristics can be fostered by increasing the role of the students in planning class work, by allowing the student council definite participation in the operation of the school, such as supervisory control over
playground, tardiness, passing between classes, and cleanliness.
Economics should be introduced into the curriculum, to cover basic business and sales principles and the distributive enterprises, and should include studies of the local establishments.
Public speaking for teachers as well as for pupils should be stressed.
There should be a further study made of the need for adult education and recreation in the community.
There should be a review of the class-scheduling procedures to ascertain whether or not there is any way by which at least some single periods weekly can be set aside to accommodate the above recommended additions and substitutions in the curriculum.

What Does New Milford Have?
A third group chose as their field of study The Utilization and Study of Community Resources. Their work was culminated with the compilation of an indexed, fifty-page pamphlet listing twenty-four field trips to resource centers and thirty interesting people who, as resource visitors, graciously agreed to visit the school to discuss their special fields of knowledge and experience. Each teacher in the system received a copy of this publication.

Numerous questions arise in connection with the use of field trips. There is, for example, the problem of making a child community-conscious without making him provincial. A constant balancing of values is necessary. Is it as important for a child to spend an hour inspecting the town’s water supply as to spend equivalent time learning of the wonders of Boulder Dam? The answer undoubtedly is that a good teacher will find time for both types of learning experiences, but in practice this does not always prove easy.

Any field trip divides into three steps:—joint class planning by teacher and children, conducting the trip, and interpreting the experience. It is in the latter aspect that students may be challenged to evaluate the experience in terms of observation, understanding, and critical thinking. Well planned excursions can also be of great value in promoting better school-community relationships.

We go into the community

In approaching their problem, this committee, as a first step, sent questionnaires to each faculty member asking each to list fields of special interest in the year’s work. With this information as a basis, a list of manufacturing and business concerns in the immediate vicinity was compiled and a letter was sent to each explaining the plans and purposes of the group, and appointments were made. Each resource center was visited and the information gathered was organized under the following outline:

Name of firm, location, and how reached (car, walking)
Units or grades for which visits recommended
Preferred visiting hours, and time consumed by visit
Person in charge to contact
Number of children who can be accommodated
Special instructions to children regarding behavior, safety
Suggestions by person in charge
Things to be pointed out to the children.

... and find transportation

Where previously lack of transportation had been the cause for more than one field trip’s cancellation, the Parent Teachers Association was contacted and
they appointed a transportation chairman. Although it was late in the school year, the service was put to prompt use and the results were splendid.

... as well as people

New Milford and the surrounding area, rapidly becoming a suburban community, has attracted many who have had unusual training and experience in widely varied fields such as the arts, sciences, history, and travel. From among this group the resource visitors were contacted and the following information about each was listed:

Subject or subjects of particular interest
Grade or unit for which topics best suited
Background of the resource visitor.

In addition to the resource centers and visitors, the booklet lists Connecticut state agencies which will furnish speakers upon request. Among these are the Connecticut Inter-Racial Commission (on such subjects as anti-discrimination laws and brotherhood); the Connecticut Merit Association (good government); and the State Police (driver education and safety).

How Far Have We Come?

Thus far we have emphasized only the separate results of the investigations of the three working committees. In the over-all picture there have been some results already achieved, while many more await further study and action during the 1947-48 school year. Perhaps the chief among those ends accomplished to date is the fact that a wholesome and enthusiastic spirit of inter-faculty fraternization has replaced the previous tendencies toward individual actions; that to each of us within the group there came a growth arising from the stimulating interchange of ideas among ourselves, and the folks contacted in the community; and that the very contacts essential to the projects helped us all to obtain a more truly objective outlook in our roles as community citizens.

That the gains are not at all one-sided is indicated by this remark: “Why, I haven’t visited the school since I graduated. This survey of yours is a double-barreled chance to learn what goes on today and to add my bit to the joint cooperative efforts to do our best for our own children!”

So it went through the community, where we were met with real cooperation and a genuine friendliness. From the superintendent of schools, the principals, departments, teachers, and students came readiness to share and to do. That nothing startling was suggested is perhaps some indication that our sense of direction in the past has not been too far afield.

And Where Can We Go?

If we now can look forward to continuing and expanding upon the fine start in this joint community-school program, the New Milford public school system will grow in the future at a pace which can surpass that of the past. The more we can do to graduate from our system young men and women who are better qualified citizens and sound employee investments, the better will our community be. Also, in a much larger sense, as we interchange ideas to improve both school and township, as we share responsibilities and privileges of community citizenship, we are just as certainly doing our bit to strengthen America—the America of thousands of communities such as ours!