

## Laymen Point the Way

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WE BELIEVE that modern schools can do their jobs only if . . .

—all community agencies, including our homes and schools, work together for better education.

—parents and citizens are helped to understand what their youngsters need to learn and how it can be taught.

The statements above are part of the eleven-point platform of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. If all schools and all members of ASCD were to resolve to see such statements result in action in hundreds of schools throughout the country, a major step ahead in lay-professional planning for the school program might well be the result. In the effort to provide guides for increased work in this area of joint participation, we present here statements from parents and teachers from every part of the country.



*Courtesy of NEA Journal*

George Van Anders was spending a lazy summer afternoon at his desk in Holcomb High School. "Not many more afternoons like this," he mused.

It was August 25. In ten days the corridors would be filled with five hundred youngsters, and, he hoped, parents would be there often as well. How would this next school year go? It could be an exciting new adventure—at least they would do their best. But that best would mean a careful analysis of those processes which make for desirable co-operative planning. It meant genuine lay-professional working together—not the kind (they'd been guilty of this) in

which school people came to decisions and gently maneuvered parents into following them.

It meant, rather, a joint attack upon problems—and many of the problems would come directly from parents and other lay people. It meant working them through together and arriving at solutions which were truly group decisions.

It wasn't going to be easy. There would be mistakes—but there would be gains as well. George Van Anders was not a man to shrink from the reality of error, but, it must be admitted, he could see the bright spots just as quickly and knew how to use them.

## Another Step Along the Way

A year ago the community and its school would not have been ready for it. But now they were. It started last year when Jim Black, the insurance man, and Harold Ellers, owner of Ellers' Department Store and city councilman, got going on this matter of increased salaries and status for teachers. Soon it was a community project with laymen carrying the ball; and increased salaries became an accomplished fact. The people had known, actually, that their financial responsibility for education was a mere pittance in comparison with what they wanted for their children. And now they were really underwriting education in Holcomb.

But it hadn't stopped there. Teachers and parents alike began to ask:

"Why can't we go on together and look at this matter of what's happening to children in our schools?"

"Why do we go on kidding ourselves? Our schools could be a lot better."

"How about this business of a new investment? We'd like to know what we're getting—or could get—for it."

And so George and some of his staff and a committee of citizens had begun a study of the matter. There wasn't much in books about it, but they found what they could and studied what other communities had done and were doing.<sup>1</sup>

## Parents Talk About Participation

And parents from all parts of the country had things to say.

Mrs. Robert P. Wight of Cairo, Georgia, a parent and former teacher, attended a regular teachers' workshop during the summer—not because she

<sup>1</sup> Helen F. Storen, *Laymen Help Plan the Curriculum*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1946.

planned to teach again, but for the purpose of acquainting herself with what the schools are doing. Says Mrs. Wight:

As a parent, convinced of the increased importance of the school in the community and concerned about my individual duty toward helping realize the ultimate aim of adequate education for all, I have two primary responsibilities.

*First, I must become informed.* I must acquaint myself with the actual situation in the schools of my community, their aims and the strengths and weaknesses of their program in the light of educational emphases. I must learn both the general and specific objectives of democratic education so that my understanding of local conditions will be a just evaluation. I must try to know my community as a whole.

*Finally, I must be enthusiastically active.* I must exert more effort toward making my home a worthy family unit and always be alert for opportunities to promote the "gospel" of the family as the educational foundation of society. I must be a loyal supporter of my school and an active member of such school organizations as the P.T.A. I must be community-minded and by my interest and participation in school and community projects help encourage other parents to join in real civic planning for better schools.

## *We have a unique problem*

Mrs. Roe Fulkerson of Hollywood, Florida looks at the specific problems of her own community in terms of parent responsibilities:

Every locality has specialized problems in its schools. Ours are probably no worse—only different. The number of tourist pupils who register—and leave—during our school year is so great that interruptions to classes are a daily occurrence, resulting in disrupted classwork, overcrowded classrooms, and upset discipline.

The children who register to spend only a few weeks in school here do not have a very serious attitude toward their work—they are on vacation!—and this attitude

does not help the local children to do their best. And our children have this broken routine each year, every year of their grade and high school career!

Because our teachers have more irritations and more interruptions to bear than most, I believe that our parents' responsibilities toward our schools are correspondingly greater.

I believe that our parents must cooperate in providing adequate classrooms, properly equipped, and try to prevent the overcrowding of those classrooms and the daily interruptions of classes. They must help to maintain pleasant conditions for the teachers at the school, including comfortable rest rooms and a good cafeteria. They must do everything in their power to influence the attitude of the community toward feeling responsible for the happiness of its teachers.

Parents should send their children to school in good physical condition, and in a cooperative frame of mind, that our teachers may not have to divert time from a roomful of children to give individual attention to needs of one child which should have been taken care of at home. We expect great things of our teachers. I believe we should give them a fair chance to show what wonders they can work.

### *Three-way participation*

Or there was Mrs. V. Kouba of Cicero, Illinois who wrote about *Schools I Want and How to Get Them*. Relative to the latter point she says:

One way of obtaining the ideal schools, and I believe it to be an important one, is by more active participation of the parents in school affairs. So many parents have the mistaken idea that their duty is finished when they have registered their child in kindergarten. From there on the teacher is to take over and complete the task of rearing the child. Nice in a way to have that much confidence! I, for one, don't feel that way. I like to know more personally the kind of people to whom I am entrusting my children. I like to know what they are teaching, how they are teaching,

and why. I like to know what kind of building my children are living in a good part of their time away from home. Is the atmosphere friendly or austere—does it meet prevailing health standards.

We hear a lot about adult education, or the lack of it. Formal education for most of us parents ended many, many years ago, but it does not necessarily mean that we have learned all there is to know, particularly relative to the training and rearing of children. Child guidance and discussion groups should play an important part in the program of all local P.T.A. units.

The parents should be more interested in the administration of their schools—Who controls the board of education, the superintendent, the teachers? Is it the local political faction then in power? How are the finances administered? Is a sufficient percent of the town or city's revenue allocated to the educational fund? Does the state provide its share of financial aid? What laws on education are up before the state assemblies? Are they detrimental or beneficial to the progress of education? All these and many more questions that may arise in various localities should be of prime importance to each and every taxpayer and parent.

### *Learn to know each other*

And Mrs. Louise B. Hansmann, her neighbor in Highland Park, Illinois believes, too, in knowing school people and doing something about it:

I believe that I can help schools in my community to realize their aims by exhibiting a proper, intelligent interest in those aims and trying to interpret them to my children, my husband, and to the community. In order to do this I must work in the school and with the parent-teacher organization. I must know the school administrators and teachers. I should know who is on the school board and whether the members of the board are interested and qualified to hold positions which determine the educational policy in our community.

When there is a vacancy on the board I must work for the election of the best person to fill that vacancy. If I talk to my friends and neighbors sympathetically about the problems of our schools, making certain always that I am using facts, not fiction, in my discussions, I hope to create an interest in the schools and their aims in the community.

#### *To sum it up*

Mrs. Opal Frazer of Battle Creek, Michigan, in a statement that might well be a guide to thoughtful lay participation, writes:

Since learning is so constantly allied with attitudes, lay efforts to assist the public schools realize their maximum effectiveness should be directed largely toward creating right attitudes both in the young and in the public at large. Given a competent and sympathetic administrative and teaching staff, the community leaders can do much toward interpreting their system to their fellow citizens and gaining their support. Once cooperative attitudes are created the individual can maintain high educational standards by:

- I. Informing himself of aims and objectives of education in general and in his community in particular, considering the types of business and social life prevailing therein.
  - A. Becoming personally acquainted with school people in general and children's teachers and principals in particular, treating them like family friends (which they are), including them in one's own social and civic life.
  - B. Attending P.T.A. or home council meetings *regularly* and helping to improve and promote various forms of communication between home and school.
  - C. Participating in adult education programs of schools.
  - D. Reading educational literature in periodicals, books, pamphlets, and seeing educational movies and exhibits.

- II. Upholding the school's efforts to gain its objectives.
  - A. Supporting its financial program and helping sell it to others.
  - B. Cooperating with the teachers in establishing proper attitudes in the young toward educational values and human relations.
    1. Taking definite stands on current practices which are against educational and human welfare, such as membership in undemocratic youth organizations, drinking and carousing, and other forms of leisure-time dissipation.
    2. Allowing students to explore subject matter under school's guidance program rather than insisting on set traditional "courses."
    3. Giving youngsters interesting out-of-school experiences to supplement and illustrate school learning.
  - C. Bringing school people into the community's civic and social life—their trained minds can contribute much, their morale can be boosted by these contacts, and their knowledge of the community will reflect in their classroom teaching and curriculum building.
- III. Helping to establish and maintain auxiliary services in the community to which schools can refer their problem cases—such as family counseling services, mental hygiene and crippled children clinics, visiting teacher programs, social welfare agencies, assistance to exceptional children.
- IV. Growing and maturing with own children.
  - A. Working and playing with them as they grow. Adjusting own ideas to the new generation.
  - B. Broadening provincial outlooks and experiences so children can grow emotionally without battling their way at every step.

#### **They Have Ideas About the Curriculum**

But parents don't stop at that point. They're thinking about the kind of ex-

periences they want their children to have. Mrs. Kouba has ideas about the schools she wants:

A very grave question confronts the parents of today's children. *What kind of schools do we want? Are fine buildings the answer?* To this I say No! True enough, we would like to see modern, well-equipped buildings in all our communities, rooms that are well-lighted, ventilated, correctly heated, good desks, libraries, supplies, and landscaped grounds. This would give us the physical angle, the walls and surroundings of the school.

The school I want for my three children needs something more—something precious and necessary to guide them on the interesting road of Life. That something is a staff of teachers with hearts filled with love and understanding of children. Teachers who are well-qualified as to education, well-paid, with a feeling of security, and inspiring friendliness instead of awe and fear. Teachers who are able to guide the child through the right channels, that he may discriminate between right and wrong. Teachers who will command the respect of the children whether the occasion is one of lightness or seriousness. Teachers who are not cynical, but broad-minded enough to understand and take pains to investigate the behavior of the child. I want teachers who will train a child to be useful, regardless of his ability or handicaps, so that he may hold up his head proudly in this ever-changing world. All children are not born bookworms. Many become skillful craftsmen because of proper understanding. I want teachers who will treat and respect a child as an individual with reasoning power. And last but not least, I want teachers who will make school a happy and pleasant place.

I want a school principal who will command the respect of the teachers, who by his or her integrity will inspire the teachers to give their best to the children. I want a principal who will merit the position by education and experience and not because of prominent or influential friends. I want a principal who will be a good administrator of his school.

I want supervisors or counselors of education who are all that the name implies—not just overseers, but leaders and kindly guides of teachers who often have many knotty problems to solve.

School can be fascinating for a great number of youngsters when given a chance to create with their hands. The ideal school should be equipped with workshops and competent teachers. Reading, writing, and arithmetic will open new horizons and assume new meanings for these children.

In recent years statements have been made that children of grammar and high school age do not know how to read. Shocking to find out that a child can't read after twelve years of schooling! The printed page has left no meaning, no impression in the growing mind. Today, with its radio, movies, and so-called comic strips, it is more important than ever before that good books be brought to the attention of young people. Good books will entertain and will introduce the child to the peoples of foreign lands, lead him back into history, into the land of science or into the everyday world of school, home, or work. They will inspire his manners, broaden his knowledge, teach him many lessons, and prepare him for various experiences when they come.

Books will take a child into the mystic land of make-believe, help him to lose himself out of the realistic world. The child will lose his tenseness and become relaxed. There is in all of us a latent desire to create. There are books that stimulate this power, will allow the mind to imagine, expand and give it wings. But the books must be well chosen.

The ideal schools will have well-stocked shelves of thoughtfully chosen books that are not only attractive with pictures, color, and good print, but also with material that will help mold the character of the growing child. We will need teachers who are able to guide the child in his choice of books, teach him how to read, how to build his own personal reservoir of knowledge and enjoyment. It is the responsibility of all of us to get these good books into the hands

of the children, to get these teachers for the children, who will guide them in the quest for knowledge and creativeness, and ability to incorporate ideals into everyday living.

### *Education for living*

Mrs. Roe Fulkerson also expresses briefly and pointedly what she expects schools to do for her child:

I would like the teachers of my child to make her realize that education is the Great Adventure. That with it, all things are possible; and without it, many roads to success and happiness are blocked entirely—and all roads are more difficult to travel. That with it, her horizons are ever-widening. This realization will give her an enthusiasm for education which will bring with it a respect and admiration for the teachers who make this education possible, and result in a finer spirit of comradeship with other children who are sharing in the exploration of knowledge.

I want my child to learn in public school the fun of working with others, and of working for others, that all her life she may know the happiness that comes from cooperation.

### *Values take first place*

From Webster Groves, Missouri Mrs. Joseph Mares gives the teachers of her youngsters suggestions to think about and act on:

Having served my apprenticeship for parenthood as a classroom teacher, I know that what the school can do for my children depends largely upon what I have already done for them. If I have not succeeded in helping them be responsible, honest, tolerant, and friendly, I do not expect the school to make up for my failures. But teachers and principals can encourage certain attitudes, and develop others, by creating the circumstances in which tolerance, honesty, responsibility, and friendliness may become intelligently effective.

In three ways the school is equipped

to supplement and improve upon what parents have already done. First, we look to the school to sharpen that inquiring habit of mind which is the birthright of every child. Out of the natural curiosity of childhood has come every advance of the human race, and so instinctive is the desire to find out that even adults who have long since stopped inquiring and are contented to accept can be aroused by a gifted teacher or a startling experience to ask questions once more, even as they did in childhood. Surely the school has the obligation, as well as the opportunity, to nurture that open mind.

Second, it is in school that children have the best chance to learn the satisfaction of completing a workmanlike task. The pendulum of educational theory which recently has swung markedly toward encouraging the child, even at the expense of his objective achievement, should probably now swing back to the greater emphasis upon a good job, well done. Try as parents may to develop responsibility in their children their efforts need the reinforcements of the school's insistence upon performance, whether judged by competitive or individual standards. In the concrete tasks of school work, the child feels the clearest challenge to do his best.

Finally, because the school gives the child his first experience of people with diverse backgrounds, interests, and values, it must be the primary training ground for the social disciplines of democracy in the United States and for the United Nations. In the classroom where the children learn the basis of parliamentary procedure, on the playground where they learn the essentials of teamwork, in their clubs and activities where they learn to organize each other's abilities for some common goal, they are learning the indispensable techniques of a democratic society. If the public schools had no other function than this, they would be essential to our freedom.

### *Suggestions from Kentucky*

Fathers, too, are ready to express their views. French Holbrook of

Breathitt County, Kentucky has some specifics that he feels are important: better teachers—teachers who love children, not merely tolerate them.

### *Education for group living*

I would like the school to build in my child a likable attitude for school and to stimulate his social traits enough to make him presentable to any group. I want my child to have a wholesome attitude toward the rights of all people, and the ability to give to any specific problem thorough, intelligent consideration before attempting to solve it. I want the school to give him the necessary training it takes to stimulate his moral characteristics. He needs to learn to make the best of what he has to do with, and to depend upon himself. The school should provide every possible opportunity to develop initiative.

More specifically speaking, I would like the school to teach him to speak and write correctly; to build for him a vocabulary that will take care of his needs through high school, college, and life; to instill in him a love for good, wholesome literature; and to enjoy all things of nature.

### *More than the three R's*

And Ernie Slone from Jackson, Kentucky puts the three R's at the head of the list, but he doesn't stop there:

First of all, I expect the school to teach my children the three R's—reading, writing, and arithmetic. Certainly they are highly important and hence are the basis of the curriculum of all elementary schools. Yet, these are not enough!

I want my children to learn to work and play with other youngsters—and grown-ups as well. I want them to learn the true values of everyday life; that a friend is more important than being first in line or first to the water fountain. I want them to learn respect and obedience, but I also want them to know when they must stand up and fight for their rights. And last, but far from unimportant, I want them to learn the value of true religion—whatever the chosen faith.

Thus it is openly apparent that, in order for the teacher to teach this code of values, he or she must possess these values. What I have tried to say is that we must have

That parents today believe the job of the school is to give attention to skill in human relationships is further emphasized by parents from both east and west. A Denver parent says:

My hope for my son is that he will take his place in the world when his education is finished as a happy, well-adjusted individual, imbued with a zest for living, a sense of fair play, and a sense of humor—the qualities necessary for getting along with others, without prejudice and bias, with the facility for using the basic skills, plus enough specialized knowledge to aid him in his chosen work. I hope further that he will have a deep appreciation of the arts and music; that he will be true to his religion and the traditions of his family; that he will be articulate about the privileges of being born into and continuing to live in a democracy such as ours where he will be ready and eager to accept the responsibilities that freedom brings, without denying to any man its privileges and its blessings.

I think the school, through its teachers, should train him well in the so-called basic skills by whatever method is deemed wise for his generation, to give him the facility necessary to go on to higher education with ever-increasing interest; to teach him, through working in either large or small groups, the ability to work together harmoniously with different types of children, to learn to give and take. In athletics, whether he plays or is a spectator, he should recognize the importance of playing the game fairly, and being a good sport when he loses, if lose he must, and to take his defeat gracefully. It should teach him, insofar as possible, that prejudices and bias have no place in America, stimulate his love of country by teaching him the greatness of our founders, the necessity of love of freedom, an appreciation of our democracy, with an active participation in civic affairs.

Specialized training in music, the arts, and the encouragement of whatever special talent or interest he displays is an important factor in stimulating his interest in developing a well-rounded individual. Time out for play and fun will help in the process of growing skillful in getting on with his fellows, and exercising poise and ability to think quickly.

I think, too, a real affection can be developed between him and his teachers so that he will understand the real service they render him in patiently teaching him day after day the things he will need to know all his life, in stimulating his imagination, and developing his understanding of music and the arts. I hope he, in turn, will show courtesy, good conduct, eager interest, and a willingness to enter into whatever they propose.

#### *Joint effort is the answer*

And from New Jersey Mrs. Marion Courtney Wallace brings to this emphasis still another point of view:

Because the schools do so much for our children, many parents have fallen into the habit of expecting them to do more than a fair share of the job. We all subscribe to the idea that education is necessary for the young—and then proceed to lean too heavily on our educators. A child needs help in building character towards usefulness and personal satisfaction through the combined effort of the home, the school, and the church.

If the school is called upon to train children in behavior and responsibility beyond a reasonable measure, it cannot fully serve its special function as well. Religious teachers should take on a larger share of ethical training; parents need to establish and maintain wholesome patterns of behavior so that our educators will be freer to stimulate young minds to a full realization of the power and use of knowledge.

There is, however, a field where schools, homes, and churches can all do a better job—and this is in the field of human relations. Our children are growing up in an

ever-diminishing world. Since distances are shrinking, differences must be understood and diversity must serve to enrich our common culture.

It has been established that prejudice has its roots in the home. Children often experience the first unpleasant shock of difference from other people through careless expressions of prejudice on the part of parents and adults in the home. The teaching of brotherhood in the church will not mean much to a child if those he loves and respects indulge in and express stereotype thinking.

The school is perhaps the best medium to project the dynamic of democracy, and while parents may look to the school for leadership, they must also participate and follow through.

#### **Rural Leaders Have Suggestions**

The people of Holcomb found further evidence to prove that lay leaders are not far behind professional leadership—or are they ahead of it?—in defining a modern curriculum for today's schools. Take, for example, sample statements from *Farm Leaders and Teachers Plan Together*.<sup>2</sup>

From the Northwest people are saying:

Greater emphasis should be placed in our educational program on the development of human resources. Better preparation for family life and rural-community living should be provided. Improvements in agricultural production and marketing and conservation of our national resources should contribute to better individual and community life. Schools should prepare young people so that they can choose their future life-work wisely and participate in it effectively whether in city or country.

Schools should teach about fundamentals of democracy and the American economic system, including problems of agriculture, business, labor, cooperatives, and the like.

More research should be done which

<sup>2</sup> American Institute of Cooperation and the Department of Rural Education, NEA, 1947.

would improve methods of teaching. Facts should be made available so that current controversial issues are presented fairly and common problems of living are more completely understood.

Leaders in the Mid-South touch upon a major problem when they state:

Problems arising from misunderstanding between individuals, between special-interest groups, between communities, and between nations, are created by failure to recognize the basic principles which are involved in cooperative human effort. The science and ethics of human relationships are, and must continue to be, a proper phase of the educational program in the public school if people are to learn efficient ways of living and working together in a complex and constantly changing world.

In the North Atlantic States there is a similar point of view:

Education in a democracy should provide a way for every individual to reach his greatest potential growth as a person and as a citizen. Educational programs, whether in school or out, should be judged as to their influence upon the total growth of each participant, and the group as a whole, towards greater social understanding. This criterion is not a new one, but the atomic age has made it one of the chief imperatives of the present.

And how could they better state the program of the three R's in our schools of today than leaders in the Great Lakes area do:

The basic skills, including reading, writing, and arithmetic, and the skills of communication, should be mastered and should be so taught that they contribute to the art of living. This includes teaching the methods and skills needed by individuals and groups in communicating their aims and purposes to others so as to reach a common understanding and course of action.

From New England, the South Atlantic States, and the Mid-West come the following suggestions:

Since the American home is the most important unit of living, education should stem from the needs of family life and the relation of its members to the outside world.

The rural school should provide an adequate guidance program which will enable young people to make wise vocational decisions.

Appreciation of beauty in all its forms should be a goal of good education, and rural children should not be deprived of it. Music, art, and drama should be provided in the program of every rural school.

Conference participants in the Western and Rocky Mountain States are concerned, as well, about the learning experiences of those who teach boys and girls. They state:

The preparation of teachers for positions in rural schools should give them better acquaintance with the basic elements of rural social and economic life. Persons who are not thoroughly familiar with the problems of rural people, the values that shape their way of living, and the forces with which they must deal, cannot make much contribution to the improvement of rural living.

#### Graduates Give Guides

They thought, too, about finding out what their own graduates had to say. Others had tried it and found guides for action. Graduates from Highlands High School in Fort Thomas, Kentucky<sup>3</sup> had made suggestions:

For any girl who plans to be a housewife and mother I think a thorough course in home economics should be im-

<sup>3</sup> Evan L. Jones, director, Pupil Personnel, Highlands High School, Fort Thomas, Kentucky.

perative—including buying, budgeting, first aid, and the care of infants. My education sadly lacked all those important requirements for home making.

High schools should offer a course covering industrial vocations—the average graduate does not know what is expected of an industrial engineer, a secretary, plumber, saleslady, etc. One cannot choose wisely if he or she does not know about many vocations.

The class I remember being most helpful was on current events—it was a free discussion class and no credit was given. Our only text was *Current Events and Time*. I have thanked the instructor often for the spark of inquisitiveness and tolerance of other nationalities he instilled within me.

It is my opinion that the curriculum should be elective with the exception of some mathematics, English, first year science and biology. Because many homes are not fulfilling their job, the school should put more stress on citizenship, politics, religion, dancing, etiquette, mar-

riage and sex, and the practical economics.

Only maturity seems to teach us that learning for yourself and not for the teacher is the thing. There is too much learning for the examinations—then forgetting. In the learning of American History there must be some interesting way—without memorizing dates—to present the lore, the romance, and the drama of these United States.

After fourteen years in a law office, the fact that we know very little of how to truly get along with one another perhaps stands out with clarity. If after the twelve years my child will spend in your school she is able to think her problems over clearly and come to a conclusion on her own good judgment, I shall be quite satisfied; even though she may not be able to quote one word of Shakespeare nor name a date in history.

Yes, they were ready to begin. No, to continue. For the beginning was already there. Concern for children was now the focus of attention.

## The Schools and Democracy

ELLIS ARNALL

That lay people in places of public responsibility must be concerned with the needs and functions of education if the schools are to discharge their total responsibility in the democratic way of life is the sincere belief of many educators today. In this article Ellis Arnall, former governor of Georgia and author of *The Shore Dimly Seen*, analyzes the needs of the schools in terms of their service, both to society as a group and to each individual member.

THE THEORY of democratic government assumes that the average citizen has both the capacity for making decisions for himself and a fund of organized knowledge upon which to predicate decisions.

It is possible, scientifically, to demonstrate that the intellectual capacity of the average citizen is adequate for self-government. The data supporting that fact had not been assembled and classified when Thomas Jefferson asserted,

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