

Texas Studies Its Schools

TEXANS have been re-studying their public schools for two years. It has been a grass roots study with over four thousand citizens actually on working committees; and additional thousands have contributed information, answered questionnaires and opinionnaires, and participated in group discussions.

This activity was begun when the fiftieth legislature passed a joint resolution creating what is known as the Gilmer-Aikin Committee on Education. The eighteen members were appointed as follows: six by the Governor, six by the Lt. Governor, and six by the Speaker of the House. Of these, three must be Senators, three must be Representatives, six must be laymen, and six must be from the teaching profession.

The principal purposes of the study have been: (1) to study and inventory the public school system of Texas, (2) to determine opportunity, (3) to determine what it needs to equalize financial support, (4) to determine what changes are needed in school management for more efficient operation of the schools, and (5) to make definite proposals to bring about the best possible public school system which Texas can afford.

One fundamental concept adopted early by the Gilmer-Aikin Committee was that it could not do this job by itself. This must be a *grass roots* study. Therefore, it divided itself into five sub-committees each to study a crucial phase of the problem. These were on (1) State Management, (2) Local Administrative Units, (3) Curriculum, a Foundations Program, Salaries, Teacher Recruitment and Education, and similar problems, (4) Finance, and (5) Census, Attendance, Recodification of School Laws, School Building Codes, and similar problems. There were five members on each sub-committee.

Fifteen lay and professional people were appointed for each sub-committee as

a state-wide advisory committee. A total of seventy-five additional people was secured who have rendered outstanding service.

In every county in Texas there was organized a county-wide advisory Gilmer-Aikin Committee of not less than fifteen members—about equally divided between lay and professional people. Each county was to study its own problems as to (1) what do we have? (2) what do we want? and (3) how can we get what we want? Findings were sent to the central office in Austin where a composite study of the findings and recommendations from all reports was made and submitted to the state Gilmer-Aikin Committee members. A printed study guide was prepared and furnished each county committee.

One hundred thirty-three county committees, out of the two hundred fifty-four, turned in written reports. This represents over a fifty percent active participation. Many other committees did some work but did not send in written summaries.

A second function of the county committees was to submit questionnaires and opinionnaires to the people, collect the answers, and send them to the central office. To illustrate, over ten thousand answers were received to an opinionnaire for citizens. These are some of the answers received. Ninety-nine percent say rural youth should have equal educational opportunities with city youth. Nine out of ten persons believe that the state should set a minimum program that must be provided in each school community. Eighty-three percent think all property in a county should bear approximately the same rate and ratio of assessment for school purposes. Sixty-five percent believe that the present school district organization in their county denies equal educational opportunity to the children. Eight out of ten persons believe enlarged high school units would be practical in their county.

From these and other studies, the State Gilmer-Aikin Committee took its mandates. It has adopted thirty-three proposals and submitted them to the people for their approval. The county committees were asked to take the initiative in their respective counties to see that the proposals were presented to as many people as possible and that they were explained to them. A report form was enclosed to aid in recording the votes of the people for or against each proposal. Substitute proposals were solicited where a need was felt for a change.

The proposals have aimed to do at least four things. First and foremost is the recommendation for a *guaranteed minimum foundation program of education available to every boy and girl in Texas*. All other proposals are, in large measure, made to implement this proposal.

Second, it is proposed that Texas *redistrict* itself now for school purposes into larger administrative units. It recommends a county-wide unit as desirable for perhaps a third of the counties while the other counties would profit by having two or more districts. Machinery for redistricting has been recommended.

Third, the *local units and the state would combine their resources in the support of the minimum foundation program*. The cost of the program would be divided between the local units and the state. An economic index would determine the share of taxes a district should contribute in relation to all local units in the state combined. When it has raised what its index says it must, the state writes a check for the balance needed to guarantee a minimum program. Since local units would have approximately seventy-five percent of its taxing ability left, they could use

local initiative to support enlarged and enriched programs.

Fourth, it is proposed that state management machinery be revamped. Instead of an appointive State Board, an elective one from districts is recommended. Instead of an elective state superintendent, an appointive Commissioner of Education is suggested. All agencies in the state which have heretofore exercised administrative functions in the state educational programs should be placed in a professional State Department of Education. The Department should be under the direction and supervision of the State Commissioner of Education.

The functions of the State Lay Board of Education should be policy forming, reviewing, and planning. It would pass on all policies, make rules and regulations, and review reports, but would not invest permanent state school funds nor make recommendations for adoption of textbooks. All duties and responsibilities would be delegated by law. A complete flow of authority from the people, through their elected board, its chosen Commissioner, and to the state public schools would result.

The Gilmer-Aikin Committee will study the reactions of the people to the tentative proposals and select its final proposals in light of its findings. These will be presented to the legislature in the hope that from these proposals laws may be formulated which will lead to the realization of the best possible school system Texas can afford. It has been a people's study in the interest of the people's schools.—Pat H. Norwood, Executive Agent, Gilmer-Aikin Committee, Capitol Station, Austin, Texas, for the ASCD Legislative Committee.

The report of the Second National Training Laboratory in Group Development held at Bethel, Maine, last summer may be secured from the Department of Adult Education, NEA. This report describes the Laboratory and includes a thorough discussion of some of the Laboratory's major aspects. Price, \$1.25.

Copyright © 1949 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.