

# On These Leadership Must Take a Stand

---

WILLARD E. GOSLIN

In this statement of leadership responsibilities, Willard E. Goslin, superintendent of the Pasadena public schools, lists three major areas for action and indicates how we may better discharge our duty to our country and its children. We present it for careful reflection by all to whom the term "leader" applies.

WE ARE FACING the most critical crossroads in our history. There has never been a time in the history of the world when the decisions that a single people are in the process of making will have so much to do with the lives of people around the world as is true of the decisions which the American people are in the process of making now.

Freedom and democracy as we know them exist only on this continent at the present time. If we are to retain freedom and democracy and make it possible for other peoples to benefit from them, the American people must prove to believe deeply enough in the dignity of the individual and in the basic American ideals of free speech, freedom of religion, free press, and public education to meet successfully the conflict of ideologies which is now taking place in the world.

Recognizing the potentiality of American education as a great social force offers the American people an unprecedented opportunity to crystallize their beliefs into programs of action. In fact, there is no other force capable of carrying forward the ideals of freedom and democracy to the point that we have an enlightened and in-

formed citizenry participating in the responsibilities of citizenship in a free nation.

## LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ALL

Such a concept places responsibility upon the shoulders of public education. It is a responsibility which calls for the most vigorous and dynamic leadership that the profession can muster. This leadership should come from everyone in the profession—classroom teachers, supervisors, administrators, and others. We don't believe that position alone constitutes leadership.

It is well to recognize, however, that certain positions carry an opportunity for a type and level of leadership which is not easily available to all teachers. Since the opportunity is there, the responsibility cannot be denied. Those of us who are holding such positions need to take inventory to see whether or not we are meeting the responsibilities that rest upon us. We must accept responsibility for leadership with two groups.

## Public Understanding and Action

First, we must be responsible for helping the general public to under-

stand public education in such a way that they—the American people—come to recognize that free public education is the cornerstone of American democracy. America cannot settle for a program of education that is held only in the minds and hearts of its teachers. America can settle only for a program of education that is understood and held dear by all of us.

We must develop, then, those ways of working together that result in everyone's assuming responsibility for the welfare of public education. This involves the profession's serving as a unified influence in connection with the individual citizens of the community and with all of the constructive forces represented by organized groups within the community such as parent-teacher associations, chambers of commerce, civic clubs, professional organizations, labor groups, and farmer organizations.

### Professional Cooperation

The second group to which we have a responsibility as leaders is the teaching profession itself. We have to be sure that we have developed and arranged the administrative and supervisory structure of the school system so as to free each individual who is a part of the program in such a way that he will be able to contribute to the maximum of his ability. This means that the school system itself must be organized along democratic lines. It means that every individual in the school and every parent will have an opportunity to share in the development of the educational program and will emerge with the feeling that the schools' program is his enterprise. It is only as people come

to feel a sense of ownership growing out of participation that they assume a sense of responsibility for the maintenance and welfare of education.

What, then, are the major issues upon which we must take a stand as a leadership group if we are to accept our responsibility with the general public and with the profession itself? These issues are of three kinds, as we see them. One is in *the development of the educational program itself*. The second has to do with *some of the practices which we still endorse*, and the third *with the financial support of the public schools*.

### LEADERSHIP FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The program of the modern school must be completely overhauled if it is to meet the needs of America and her youth of 1949 and 1960. In the early days of our country the responsibility of the school was to teach the individual reading, writing, and arithmetic. Today that responsibility has broadened until education has two major functions. It has the responsibility to help underwrite the general welfare of all people and it has the responsibility to contribute as much as it can to the growth and development of each individual school citizen. If education is to contribute to the general welfare, there are major instructional problems upon which leadership must take a vigorous stand.

### World Peace and Understanding

The first of these is world peace and understanding. The only way that we can be sure of world peace is to use the force of education to help develop

understandings of peoples all over the world. This means that we are going to have to completely revamp our program so that we teach the geography of 1949 instead of 1850; so that we give emphasis to those countries which are today a vital factor in the life of the world rather than to those which were flourishing in 1850; so that we use the modern vehicles of radio, air-age, television, and moving pictures to help each child face the realities of time and space. We need to know and to help our ten-year-olds understand that every ten-year-old is literally a neighbor of every other ten-year-old around the world and, therefore, it is important that he know what they eat, what their schools are like, what they do for fun, and a host of other things.

If we are to develop world peace and understanding we must help our young people to grasp the idea that we are on the threshold of a new development in cooperative action. This development is known today as the United Nations. If the United Nations is to succeed, it must have strength enough to cope with the tensions and problems of the world today. As leaders in education we have the responsibility to help our young people recognize the necessity for transferring into a common pool enough of the prerogatives of each of the nations of the world so that the United Nations will be strong enough to maintain peace.

#### **Maintenance and Extension of Democracy**

Leadership must also take a stand for the maintenance and extension of democracy in an age when wars are fought over conflicting ideologies. We have to do a better job than we have

ever done before in teaching the boys and girls of America the fundamental ideas and ideals that have underwritten our freedom and democracy throughout the years.

If we are to do this we must grow as teachers to the point where we have respect for every American child that comes to school. We must make the schools of America living laboratories for the practice of democratic techniques to the extent that each child who comes to our schools will develop such deep and strong habit patterns, attitudes, appreciations, and appetites for democracy that he is eager to carry his share of the load in extending and strengthening democratic living.

#### **Conservation of Natural Resources**

If we are to carry our responsibility as leaders in educating for the general welfare, we must deal with the issues of conservation of natural resources. Peace and democracy are impossible without a standard of living that maintains a people at a level where time and energy are left to work for peace and democracy.

America must be kept so that it is a good place in which to be young. We must help develop other portions of the world so that they are good places in which to be young. If we are to do this we shall have to use the resources which are at hand with the greatest possible intelligence. We shall have to make sure that we replace as much as we take out and as fast as we take out. We can do this only as each citizen recognizes that he has a personal and moral responsibility for the conservation of natural resources—that when he wastes he has caused someone

else to go without and is, as well, jeopardizing the future of those who come after.

### Equipment for Living

A major function of education is the growth and development of the individual. Leadership must stand for personal development in four areas: physical health; mental health; an adequate kit of information and skills; and a set of attitudes, ideas, and beliefs compatible with democratic living.

As leaders we have to do more than just talk about this program of education. We must see that it actually gets transplanted into such terms that the children in our schools can take hold of it and come out equipped to handle their share of the responsibilities that are entailed in modern living.

This means that we have to develop new ways of working. We have to develop the know-how of group action. We have to find out how we can concretely and specifically teach world peace and understanding from kindergarten through the entire school program; how we can equip young people to use the skills and techniques of democracy with a deep understanding of democratic living; how we can get boys and girls excited and interested in the conservation of natural resources; and how we can help each individual to realize the maximum of his own potential growth. Certainly, the leaders in education have the responsibility to help develop this know-how and to make it available to all of us in the profession.

### LEADERSHIP FOR IMPROVED PRACTICE

The second large area upon which leadership must take a stand has to do

with educational practices. Three of these practices will be pointed out in this article—promotional policies, dictation of program by higher institutions, and organization of school day and year.

### Promotional Policies

The traditional practice of giving tests every six or eight weeks regardless of where the child is in his learning and then sending home a grade card with a mass of hieroglyphics which are meaningless and competitive has been under fire for some two decades, and yet we continue the practice. All the information we have on child growth and development decries our present traditional practice. Why *do* we continue it? Principals say that parents demand grade cards. Teachers say that students demand grade cards. Students and parents protest to superintendents about grades, testing, marking, failing.

How long does it take a profession to become unified on such an issue as promotional policies? How long does our profession have to reach some unity? I doubt that there is a single item in American life that has contributed so much to a feeling of insecurity to thousands of American boys and girls as our evaluation and promotional system. You can't tell a child that he is a failure every six, ten, or twelve weeks and not have him come to believe it. Do we have the courage to take a stand as leaders in American education and to follow through on what such a stand would mean? Do we have the techniques for interpreting child growth and development to parents? Are we big enough as citizens and as teachers to live with boys and girls and

get them interested in living with us on a developmental basis?

### Dictation of Programs by Higher Institutions

A second practice upon which the teaching profession must reach some unity has to do with permitting higher institutions to dictate to lower institutions what the program of education shall be. How frequently do we hear in teachers' meetings, "I have to teach that because the junior high school expects it," or "I have to teach that because the college demands it!" What do you suppose would happen if the profession became unified to the degree that it said, "We are going to ignore college preparatory requirements and develop the best program that we can for the boys and girls who are now in our institution?"

College requirements can be changed just as soon as the teaching profession is willing to take a stand on their being changed. The colleges are not going to refuse the youth of this country. A number of studies point to the superiority of the development of a program of education that is suited for the maturity level of students regardless of college preparatory courses.

We have too long neglected to develop a program of education designed specifically for the majority of high school youth—those who do not go on to college. Most of the junior colleges are so designed that they represent the first two years of a typical four-year program. In Minnesota, for example, the majority of young people entering Minnesota colleges register in courses that have been planned to meet the requirements of advanced work, which

only half the students will actually take!

### Organization of School Day and Year

The organization of the school day and school year is a third educational practice which has been discussed for many, many years and about which we have been unable to come to any common agreement. Educational theory seems to be agreed that learning takes place best when it is concerned with the whole and when an opportunity is given to see the inter-relatedness of content. Little children need to have the experience of living with one teacher long enough that she and the group of children come to be a unit in which growth and development may be continuous and geared to the highest potentialities of every individual in the group. This calls for children living with one teacher for a period of two or three years.

Still we continue dividing our school day into fragmentary pieces into which we fit isolated subject matter content that frequently has little meaning to the vast majority of students who go through our schools. As a result of this segmentation of the school day, the average student comes out of high school without one teacher ever having known him very well. Educational and vocational planning is fragmentary and unrealistic. Citizenship habits are neglected. Leadership must take a stand on this issue.

The other phase of this problem is that of the organization of the school year. America is one of the few major countries that still clings to the belief that you can have a dynamic educational program by beginning in September and ending in June.

Our nine- or ten-month school year was developed when we were a pioneer nation, when boys were needed on the farms to harvest the crops. We are still following this pattern although America has moved to the point where a greater percentage of its people live in the city than on the farm and a vast majority of the students have nothing to do in the summer but roam the streets. This represents one of the greatest wastes of human energy and human resources among the youth of our country. We must take American education and the teaching profession off a part-time basis and develop a year-round program. This would give us time to do some things which we now neglect—outdoor education, for example.

#### LEADERSHIP FOR ADEQUATE FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Adequate financial support for public education is the third area of problems on which leadership must take a stand. We need specifically to understand the tax structure as it exists in America today. Traditionally, we have tried to support public education at the local level. More recently we have added the state. Yet, within the last decade and a half, the American people through their representatives have transferred most of the tax gathering authority to the federal government. We have left the American school system to dry upon the vine for want of financial support.

Bills have been introduced into Congress for more than twenty years which would provide federal aid to education. Why haven't these bills succeeded in

passing? Largely because the teachers of this country have not been united as to their stand on this issue. We can never support our schools on the level that they deserve until we are willing to work out a system whereby the federal government will help in their support. One of the main reasons why nothing has happened is that neither the American people nor their teachers understand what has happened to our over-all tax structure. We need to study it. Divide your own tax bill into local, state, and federal categories and see where you really spend your money.

#### HOW MUCH TIME REMAINS?

We have tried in this article first of all to indicate that leadership has a responsibility to the general public and to the teaching profession itself, and, while there is much in common between these two groups, each calls for the development of specialized ways of working with people. Then we have tried to indicate a few of the areas in which education must take a stand if we are to build a dynamic program of education that is capable of meeting the demands of the present day.

Most of the areas which we have indicated are areas which have been discussed for a decade or two. Yet, because leadership has not been willing to take a stand on these areas, we still haven't moved ahead to keep our practice anywhere near the educational theory that we intellectually subscribe to. The areas indicated are not intended to be an exclusive list but, rather, representative of the type of action which leadership needs to take. There isn't much time. We don't have another two decades to make up our minds.

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