

Leadership Responsibility for School Costs

That it costs money to give boys and girls the kind of educational program we believe in is an inescapable fact. The stories of how educators in one state and in one city joined forces with community leaders in order to improve the schools through establishing a more adequate financial base are told by Frederick L. Hipp, executive secretary of the New Jersey Education Association, Trenton, and Virgil M. Rogers, superintendent of the Battle Creek, Michigan schools. It is significant, we believe, that both writers base their arguments for increased school finances not only on the need to maintain but, more important, to improve the quality of instruction in our schools today.

Solving the Dollar and Cents Problem

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THE PEOPLE of this nation have said over and over again that they have a high regard for public education and that they want it to succeed. New leaders—influential lay and teacher leaders—have come to the fore in recent years in the nation, in the various states, and in thousands of cities and hamlets from coast to coast, and are a real strength to be reckoned with.

Organizing for Action

The campaigns carried on by these leaders on national, state, and local levels have produced results—results in terms of dollars and cents. Progress has been made even though the problem—the practical one of dollars and cents—looms ever larger. The New Jersey Education Association, like almost every such association, has attempted to use all of its resources to bring this problem before the public in an attempt to secure sufficient funds on local and state levels to maintain the present qual-

ity of instruction and, fully as important, to improve upon this quality. This means that superior young people must be attracted to the teaching profession in sufficient numbers to do the job; it means also that salaries must be attractive enough to hold able teachers now in service.

In attempting to bring about such results in terms of organization, the NJEA adopted two fundamental services: a field service to leaders of local and county associations to aid in securing improved salaries and salary schedules; and an Educational Planning Commission, organized on state and county levels, made up of outstanding lay leaders including lawyers, doctors, industrialists, businessmen and women, labor leaders, and farmers.

Providing Local Field Service

When the field service was instituted in 1944 it was unique among the states. Local leaders were asking for assistance

in the field of salaries and public relations, and the NJEA gave it to them. The fundamental procedures were to encourage teachers, administrators, school board members and, in many instances, the lay public to work together, gather facts, make comparative studies, and develop salary schedules *jointly*. This public relations approach was designed to avoid strikes, allay tensions, and arrive at lasting solutions through democratic procedures.

Since no two communities are alike, modifications to the fundamental approach were always in order. Local campaigns were often necessary. Citizens' committees were organized, assistance was given in preparing advertising copy, handbills were designed, and guidance was given in establishing good relations with the local press. Local teachers were encouraged to do much of the behind-the-scenes work; while lay leaders made the speeches and personal contacts with board members, city officials, and other influential lay leaders. Campaigns based upon honest facts were designed to tell a true story in order to educate the public to the situation and encourage boards of education to improve upon school finances. This year three salary clinics were held in each of the state's twenty-one counties. Experts in municipal and school board finance and public relations advised teacher leaders on necessary facts and procedures for securing improved salaries.

Planning for Over-All State Needs

On the state level the Educational Planning Commission, an organization of laymen, came into being and took the lead to provide more state aid for

education. Since they were organized on the county level also, leading laymen all over the state made hundreds of speeches describing the plight of the schools, the unfair financial burden upon local real estate, and the need for a sound system for distributing state aid to education. Pamphlets were printed, film strips prepared, fliers sent out in great numbers. For the most part, influential lay leaders in the counties told the story in detail. Personal conferences were held with state senators and assemblymen asking each of them to support the state aid proposals of the Educational Planning Commission.

Looking at Results

As a result of these concerted efforts, New Jersey's average annual salary for classroom teachers rose from \$2100 in 1939-40 to an estimated \$3200 for the current year. The average annual per pupil cost (average daily attendance) increased over the same period of years from \$135 to an estimated \$230. State aid for education increased more than 350 percent, and a sound system of distributing the funds to the districts was instituted.

Outstanding in this work during the past few years was the leadership that came to the fore from the ranks of teachers and laymen alike. As this leadership developed it became a real asset in achieving goals for a better education for every child in the state. Teachers know they have friends; they know they have help in their work outside of their own ranks. That progress has been made is a source of encouragement to them. The job is not yet done, but these leaders know how to get results and move ahead.

THIS IS an immensely wealthy country! How often we hear it said that our standards of living and per capita income are the highest in the world. Would one ever suspect these truths if he were to judge by the antiquated and dilapidated school buildings so typical of many of our cities and the countryside in every state in the Union?

How has it come about that the average school in America is staffed with poorly trained and inadequately paid professional workers? Why is it that overcrowded classrooms, with a scant supply of instructional materials and teaching tools, housed in neglected buildings with "down-at-the-heel" playgrounds and yards, are allowed to exist side by side with our fine roads, wealthy homes, and prosperous farms and industries?

Will Communities Pay?

In this discussion we are not concerned with those communities which are financially underwriting education to the very limit of their capacity; we are, rather, talking about those thousands of communities where state, local, and national financial support, if properly tapped, is quite sufficient to provide a rich educational program. We're thinking of those numerous large-city, small-city, and rural communities where the resources are adequate but have not been marshaled to provide good schools.

The question is, therefore, posed: *Can able, professional leadership change this condition?* There is evidence in certain spots over the nation that, through

joint participation by lay and professional leaders concerned with better schools, communities can be brought to accept their responsibility for providing substantial financial support to assure excellent educational programs.

One Community's Program

A midwestern city has succeeded in developing a comprehensive educational program with the community giving its wholehearted financial support and moral backing. Its experience would seem to suggest that where the power structure of the population has been involved in supporting comprehensive financial programs, excellent schools can be established and maintained.

The measures used are not necessarily unique—but they have been found to be helpful in arousing a complacent and cynical citizenry to the realization that a rich and wholesome classroom environment is possible only when laymen have a live interest in good schools, are eager to provide such schools, and manifest a sympathetic and cooperating attitude. In the development of this program over the past four years, certain essential steps have been taken in bringing the community to accept its responsibility for properly supporting its schools.

There is unity of purpose, understanding, and high morale among the teaching personnel and administration through the development of educational policy on a cooperative basis. Every attempt is made to eliminate con-

flicts, tensions, and divisive elements from the school system. Thus, it is possible for the teaching corps to present a united front when dealing with the public on all educational matters. Educational planning becomes a shared process with students, teachers, and parents having major roles. This has aided in the promotion of high ethical and professional standards within the faculty and has resulted in a united profession completely enrolled in the local, state, and national professional association.

The executive board of the community education association and the Professional Problems and Appeals Committee of the faculty provide the machinery for group participation in educational planning. Such working arrangements help to assure better understanding and closer cooperation with community groups. A divided faculty and an autocratic administration or an indifferent professionalism fail to challenge the potential lay leadership in almost any community.

The Board of Education has come to understand and accept the broad outlines of policy which encourage participation of faculty and community in educational planning. The Board has adopted a resolution recognizing the desirability of involving teachers, parents, and other laymen in educational planning through the use of committees, councils, and advisory groups. Board members are frequently invited to serve with such groups.

Lay participation in the development of school policy and plans for educational support are a funda-

mental part of public education. The Educational Advisory Council, composed of lay and professional people, meets monthly and occasionally has special meetings with the administrative staff on educational problems, on policies, and on long-range planning. The local Parent-Teacher units serve as the neighborhood planning groups at the grass roots.

The Educational Planning Committee was a temporary group appointed, with the consent of the Board of Education, to study the needs of the schools. This group of thirty-five citizens, representing business, industry, labor, the professions, and the faculty, after months of study, recommended action through three important steps:

- Salary schedules should be greatly improved
- The educational facilities of the schools should be expanded, repaired, and improved
- A long-range program of expansion and improvement should be inaugurated.

The next step was the appointment of a Citizens Committee on School Finances to study ways and means of getting added funds to meet the proposed program. The school budget was analyzed and the sources of revenue carefully checked. Two plans were developed for increasing school revenue:

- Increase the local millage, despite a constitutional limitation of fifteen mills for city, county, and state purposes and notwithstanding a requirement for a two-third majority vote to increase millage
- Cooperation at the state level in revising the constitution and the statutes to increase state aid.

The net result is that after three years of intensive study, planning, and local school elections, the available state and local school funds have increased to the point that beginning with the fourth year the budget is two and one-half times greater than four years ago. An excellent salary schedule is in effect which provides for liberal sick leave and sabbatical leave on half salary. A broad program of in-service education cooperatively developed is a regular part of the school system today including local workshops for professional personnel, travel allowances for conferences, budget appropriation for consultant service from the nation's higher institutions of learning, and extensive programs of school visitation as a regular part of the year's work.

Better working conditions have been provided; school buildings and grounds are repaired and improved; much new instructional equipment has been placed in the classrooms. For the first time in a score of years there is a "lush environment" for good learning with adequate teaching materials available. Additions to buildings are being made; certain new plants are in the blueprints despite the cost of construction materials; a comprehensive program of curriculum improvement carried on through the representative group, the Council on Instruction, is underway.

School camping on a year-round basis is an accepted part of the educational program. The pupil-teacher ratio, despite increasing enrollments and crowded conditions, has been consistently reduced and is being held to an average of thirty pupils per teacher.

Carefully planned and consistent interpretation of the schools' program to the community is accepted as an essential part of the schools' function. The school digest is a four-page monthly newspaper, distributed to parents, carrying to every home in the school community the story of progress made and school needs yet to be met. A streamlined tabloid-type of annual report with few figures and many pictures plus special features receives wide distribution each spring. Every school has its own newspaper which also gets into the children's homes. Teachers understand that the most important news stories and impressions of classrooms and the school come to parents at the dinner table as children relate them first-hand.

An On-Going Process

We recognize school-community relations as a never-ending process and we are coming to a realization of the necessity for continuously involving the community in all phases of educational planning from classroom procedure, technique, and philosophy to long-range planned expansion, budget improvement, and district reorganization. Without this continuous process schools seem to eventually encounter community indifference, educational stagnation, and general neglect. Where school leaders have become community leaders and have discovered the secret of full participation by fellow teachers, pupils, and laymen, they have found that the schools can have almost anything they may reasonably request from an appreciative and understanding constituency.

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