

A Program of Parent-School Cooperation

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It is generally agreed that the wholehearted support of parents is necessary if the schools are to be successful in carrying out a modern program of education. Mary Beauchamp, educational assistant in the Pasadena, California, schools, and Mrs. Maren Fulton, president of the Pasadena Council of Parents and Teachers, describe the highly successful cooperative program developed in their city.

THE NATIONAL CONGRESS of Parents and Teachers is potentially the most effective lay organization in community life for the support and improvement of public education. In many communities throughout the nation, the Parent-Teacher Association has assumed this role and has improved the quality of living within the community to a very significant degree through the improvement of the educational program. The objectives of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers aim to make possible the closest kind of working relationship between the home and the school. They read as follows:

- To promote the welfare of children and youth in home, school, church, and community
- To raise the standards of home life
- To secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth
- To bring into closer relation the home and the school so that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the training of the child
- To develop between educators and the general public such united efforts as will secure for every child the highest advantages in physical, mental, social, and spiritual education.

The Pasadena PTA

This article will be concerned with

the last two objectives in particular. The purposes of the Pasadena PTA have been first, to interpret the needs of the community to the school and, second, to interpret the needs of the school to the community. Special attention has been given to the second purpose, since it seems that this purpose is sometimes neglected in parent-teacher organizations. Attempts have been made to develop techniques for realizing these purposes both individually and in groups.

There is a keen feeling in Pasadena that the PTA should remain a lay organization, that every effort should be made to keep the organization from being dominated by school people, while at the same time encouraging teacher participation in every phase of its program. The Parent-Teacher Association also believes that it needs to operate within the framework of the national organization in order to utilize the strength of numbers and to protect the purposes and policies of the national organization. Likewise, it believes that local units need to develop an understanding of the concerns of the whole community and at the same time make possible work with individual parents. Through such a program, thousands of parents have opportunities for leader-

ship that they would never have had otherwise, and many thousands more have had a chance to sharpen and deepen their understanding of the purposes of public education. Therefore, it is necessary for each local unit to find ways for carrying on a dynamic educational program while operating within the framework of the Parent-Teacher Association.

The Pre-School Parent Program

Pasadena City Schools have had a long, constructive, and effective history of parent-school cooperation through the PTA. The California law makes provision for pre-school observation classes through reimbursement for adult education. Pasadena began its pre-school parent education classes in 1933. These classes have grown until at present there are nine hundred mothers and one thousand children enrolled in the classes. The school district is now in the process of providing more adequate housing facilities through the erection of small bungalows at a number of school sites for the pre-school education classes. Mothers bring their pre-school age children to these classes one morning a week. The children have an opportunity to play together while the mothers are helped in making observations of their children. The mothers—and some fathers—then meet in special evening classes for the discussion and interpretation of these observations.

Gertrude Laws, who was Director of Education for Women in the Pasadena City Schools for a number of years and who worked closely with the PTA, was a moving force in the development of the educational program which is now carried on. It was through her efforts

that about three years ago Ralph Eckert, Consultant in Parent Education for the California State Department of Education, held two conferences in Pasadena. These conferences included principals of elementary and secondary schools, PTA presidents, council officers, and school administrative officials. Their purpose was to take a long look ahead to plan the programs and activities which might be carried on in the community of Pasadena during the next several years to make living better for children. Some of the results of the conferences were:

- developing a home-school survey for the purpose of identifying the major problems troubling parents
- sending the Parent-Teacher Council President to the White House Conference on Home and Family Living, which was held during the summer of 1948
- developing closer cooperation between the school and the PTA by having lay representatives on most of the major school committees
- forming a Citizens Council on Education which would be representative of the major organizations in the community which are interested in education.

Survey Findings

Through the cooperation of Dr. Laws and the Parent-Teacher Council, a home-school survey was developed which endeavored to find out the expressed needs and concerns of the home, especially as they related to school life. This survey was supplied to the parents of all the elementary and junior high schools, and in addition a modified form of the survey was given to a number of classes of young people at the junior colleges. The results of the survey were studied, and each school took these results into consideration as it planned its

Parent-Teacher program for the coming year. Staffs of individual schools were encouraged to become familiar with the survey, so that they might be able to take the reactions into consideration in the school curriculum and in school practices.

One of the most important findings of the survey was that school seemed to be a source of frustration and tension in the home. The junior college students indicated it to be the major item of tension in their lives. Clearly, here was a need identified for the home and school to work more closely together to find out why, since school was so frequently expressed as a source of tension, it was not also a major source of satisfaction.

In an endeavor to follow up on the survey, a home-school conference was planned for the fall of 1949. There were approximately one hundred twenty people who attended this conference, composed equally of parents, teachers, and junior college students. An attempt was made to secure representation from every school in the community. Howard Lane of New York University key-noted the conference; and the remainder of the conference time, which extended over a six-weeks' period, was given over to small discussion groups for an analysis and study of the returns of the home-school survey. Some of the recommendations which came out of this conference are as follows:

Sex Education

- A. Sex education should begin earlier in the schools and should consist of a continuing process in the study of growth and development
- B. The study of sex education should be combined with that of mental health

- C. Biology classes which deal with sex education should not be segregated as between boys and girls

Grades and Assignments

A workshop or committee, including teachers, parents, and students should be set up in every school to study:

- A. Attitudes and tensions caused by the present system of grading
- B. Homework assignments and study habits
- C. The importance of working for something other than grades

Human Relations

A workshop in human relations should be developed. (*Such a workshop is now in operation.*)

Basic Living

A continuing course on basic living or life adjustment problems should be developed and made an integral part of the educational program of all schools. Such a course should include:

- A. Family relationships
- B. Social relationships
- C. Sex education
- D. Sociological and personal aspects of marriage
- E. Family finance
- F. Household management—sewing, cooking, manual arts
- G. Student problems

Coordinating Council

A youth coordinating council should be established, representative of the youth agencies throughout the city, for the purpose of coordinating youth activities and eliminating conflicting demands on time and money.

Grade Level Meetings

Grade level meetings should be extended from kindergarten through college. These groups may be broken into smaller core meetings, if necessary, keeping in mind the growth pattern of the particular age which is the concern of the group.

Night Sessions

At the same time that the home-school survey was being given and its results interpreted, Gertrude Laws was holding a class at night for interested parents. She endeavored in this class to help parents identify their problems and clarify some solutions to these problems. This class served as a stimulus for much creative thinking and certainly contributed largely to the high quality of the way in which the results of the home-school survey were handled.

Summer Workshop

When the decision was made for the Pasadena City Schools to hold its first summer workshop in 1949, it was obvious to everyone that the PTA should be represented. The Parent-Teacher Council agreed to pay the tuition of four parents to attend the workshop. These individuals were all members of the Parent-Teacher Council. Although they had children and were busy parents, they spent five weeks during the summer, from nine in the morning until three in the afternoon, sitting down and working and talking with teachers about the common problems of education. This was one of the strongest features of the workshop. It gave a sense of reality to the problems discussed. The parents' understanding of the philosophy of the school system and of the efforts of the teachers to develop an increasingly improved program of education has been tremendously important in helping the entire community to have enthusiasm and faith in public education.

Discussion Groups

As a further step in securing participation of a large cross section of the

community in school matters, plans are being laid to carry on neighborhood discussion groups which will be composed predominantly of lay citizens. It is anticipated that these neighborhood discussion groups will be organized all over Pasadena. We hope to have seventy-five to one hundred operating at one time. Each group will be small enough in number (around twenty) that groups will be able to meet in an environment wherein real discussion can take place. These neighborhood discussion groups will be sponsored by the PTA, the Citizens Council on Education, the Civic League, and perhaps other organizations within the community. If this plan is carried on over a period of a few years, thousands of people within the community will have an increased understanding of the educational program that is being developed.

ONE CITY'S TECHNIQUES

Let us consider the techniques that have been used in the development of parent-school cooperation in Pasadena.

Social Aspects. The PTA recognized the need for people to know each other in an informal manner if they are going to feel comfortable with each other. Therefore, a great deal of attention has been given to the social aspects of working and playing together. The coffee hour in the summer workshop was of great importance—perhaps more things were settled over coffee cups than were ever settled in the discussion groups. Parent education classes in some schools are held every month, when parents and teachers eat together. The Parent-Teacher Council sponsors an annual tea for the school administrative staff. This

fall, when an orientation program was being planned for new teachers, the Council sponsored a tea for the probationary teachers, during which time parents and teachers had a chance to meet. Individual associations help in remembering teachers by special tokens of recognition during the year.

Working in Small Groups. It is becoming increasingly evident that the real changes occur when the group is small enough that everyone can participate and feel comfortable in doing so. There has been a great increase in the number of grade level meetings. Small groups of parents and teachers are encouraged to get together on numerous kinds of occasions such as neighborhood discussion groups.

Study Groups. It has been recognized that most problems which are really significant are not open and shut—something may be said on many different sides of the question—and consequently such problems need study; they need time to develop. The program in Pasadena has recognized that consistently.

Working Toward Action. At the same time that study has been important, it has also been recognized that such study should usually result in action. Consequently, the study programs have been set up in such a way that recommendations might grow out of them and might be referred directly to a specific body or a specific person.

Joint Endeavors. More and more, we are realizing that parents and teachers must work together and that the prob-

lems and opportunities for working together are not limited; and so PTA Boards have teachers on them, system-wide school committees have PTA individuals on them. Parents are encouraged to visit schools and participate in the school program. They are also participating in the in-service training program which is planned by teachers.

Parent-Teacher Conferences. These are of two natures: individual, between parent or parents and the teacher; and group conferences wherein the parents of a room get together to discuss common problems. Teachers are coming to recognize more and more the need for knowing the parents and home if they are going to teach adequately and effectively. An effort is being made to develop the means whereby junior high school students' parents and teachers can hold such conferences, including in many cases the students themselves.

Conferences and Workshops. As this article has indicated, much of the program in Pasadena has employed the face-to-face approach through the development of conferences and workshops so that people have time to talk.

Inclusion of Fathers. More and more, the PTA meetings are being held at night so that fathers can attend. Fathers are being asked to accept responsibilities in the groups. Local units have been asked to change their by-laws, so that they refer to fathers as well as mothers. We no longer have room mothers. They are now room representatives.

Developing Educational Programs. Because attention has been given to

minimizing the routines of business in the PTA, there has been an opportunity to develop constructive educational programs sponsored jointly by the school and the home.

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The Parent-Teacher Association was formed in 1897 for the purpose of getting parents and teachers to work together for the welfare and development of each child. At various times, emphasis has been placed on material

welfare only. But in Pasadena we are proving that it is possible to develop a parent-teacher program that concerns itself with the total development of children. This type of program can be carried out only by making the name Parent-Teacher Association really do what it implies—an association of parents and teachers working closely together to develop a dynamic educational program that will meet the requirements of all our citizens.

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