

The Listening Post

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State Aid for Public Schools in Oregon

ELLWOOD P. CUBBERLY, in *Public Education in the United States*, asserts that no public battle in America, with the exception of that over the abolition of slavery, has been more bitter than the fight for free public schools.

Over the past ten years, local school people in Oregon have had to engage in a long, difficult, bitter fight to build a proper financial structure for their public schools. Within that period the Oregon Education Association, with the support of the Oregon Congress of Parents and Teachers and a few other organizations, has submitted to the voters in this state four state-wide initiative campaigns and has supported one measure referred to the people by the state legislature. Four of these five state-wide efforts have proved successful. School people who have worked in these campaigns and actively supported development of a sound financial structure for the schools of Oregon can feel some pride in their success. It should be pointed out that five successive state-wide legislative campaigns could not have been eighty per cent successful without the excellent support given by newspapers and many state-wide organizations.

During these campaigns in Oregon, the Oregon Congress of Parents and Teachers, the American Association of University Women, the Oregon State Grange, the Farmers' union and the Congress of Industrial Workers have been the groups most consistent in their support of the public education

program. The American Federation of Labor, historically a great aid in the free public school program, opposed the educational forces in two of the state-wide campaigns and remained noncommittal in one of the other campaigns.

Initiation of State Aid

Previous to 1942, state aid for the public schools in Oregon was the lowest in the nation. In that year a measure was initiated which provided that all surplus income tax monies in the state treasury would be used to offset local school district property taxes. The PTA, the AAUW and the CIO gave this measure good support. The AF of L and the Grange were noncommittal. Most newspapers in the state opposed the measure. This measure passed by a majority of 44,698 votes. The legislature in 1943 set the amount that would go from surplus income tax monies to reduce local school district property taxes at \$5,000,000, although the amount voted by the people was much greater. School forces had to conduct a stiff fight to keep the amount this high.

In 1944 a constitutional amendment was initiated by the Oregon Education Association which would absorb the \$5,000,000 mentioned above and would have guaranteed to the local school districts an amount of \$12,000,000 per year state aid. This measure lost by 9,823 votes. A switch of 5,000 votes would have carried the measure. The

tax fighting groups, the American Federation of Labor, the Grange, the Farmers' Union and the general press opposed the measure.

The legislature met in 1945 and increased the income tax fund to offset local school property taxes to \$10,000,000.

Basic School Fund Provided

In 1946 the PTA, the OEA, the Oregon State Association of School Boards and Ronald E. Jones, representing the Farmers' Union, initiated what is known as the Basic School Fund measure which provided that the state government would furnish \$50 per school census child (children between the ages of 4 and 20 years of age). For the year 1950-51 this amounted to \$18,424,750. This measure was supposed to provide at least fifty per cent of the operational cost of the public schools. This measure was widely endorsed in the state by most newspapers and by practically all state-wide organizations. The tax fighting groups bitterly opposed the passage of this bill. The measure carried by 5,951 votes.

In 1948 the Oregon Education Association initiated what was known as The Right To Vote measure which gave every registered voter who has lived in a school district six months the right to vote on every school measure. Previous to this, only property owners could vote on school bonds and school budgets. This measure was widely supported by the great majority of newspapers and state-wide organizations, and passed by a majority vote of 120,751. Opposition again came from one of the tax fighting organizations in the state.

The 1949 session of the Oregon state legislature referred a measure to the people increasing the original Basic

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School Support Fund from \$50 to \$80 per school census child. The reasons for doing so were that prices had increased materially since 1946, school population in Oregon was growing at an unprecedented rate, and birth-rates had trebled within a 15-year period. Although this measure passed by a majority of about 3 to 1 in the state legislature, those legislators who did not support it were bitter in their opposition and immediately went home and began a campaign against the measure. Again, the Oregon Congress of Parents and Teachers, the American Association of University Women, the American Legion, the CIO, the Oregon Machinists Council and a few other state-wide groups strongly supported the measure. Approximately 75 per cent of the newspapers in the state gave good support to the measure, although much of this support came late in the campaign. The tax fighting groups opposed the measure, as did the state executive committee of the American Federation of Labor. This measure passed by a majority of 2,538 votes.

State Support Benefits Oregon Children

Oregon schools can expect to receive about \$31,000,000 from the Basic School Fund during the school year 1951-52. Currently, state funds are also used to offset a \$10 per school census child county school fund. Thus during the school year 1950-51 state aid in Oregon will amount to about \$35,000,000 or approximately 50 per cent of the operational cost of the public schools in Oregon.

Thus after ten years and five state-wide campaigns the school forces and lay organizations in Oregon that have been greatly concerned with the public school program have established what they believe to be a sound state aid

program. Unless future events cause school costs to increase greatly, the current program of 50 per cent state aid and 50 per cent local aid will meet the established goals of the teaching profession in Oregon.

It is unlikely that the 1951 Oregon state legislature will attempt to take away from the schools what the people

have voted. The distribution of the money to the various local school districts will be a major problem at the 1951 legislative session. Oregon educators are fortunate in that the initiative, referendum and recall operate in this state.—*Cecil W. Posey*, Executive Secretary, Oregon Education Association.

The Curriculum Commentator

Column Editor: Prudence Bostwick
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Social Competence and Individual Competence

IF one thing has become clear in the period since 1945, it is that we have to do much more about developing social competence. We face large-scale group predicaments, and it is imperative that we develop ideas that match the scope of our problems, and find words for our ideas.

This isn't easy for educators. Until recently, our focus on the individual has largely prevented our thinking very profoundly or for very long about the big social problems with which we must deal. Schools have consequently done a spotty and uneven job of helping children grasp the significance of the social problems which they face.

Individual differences, individual needs, interests, abilities, individual adjustment and the development of individual competence are important concepts, but they are not sufficient for us. We have to do better than deal with children one-at-a-time. Child study has to be supplemented by a genuinely "social" study—a study of all aspects of society—if we are to measure up in the global contest that is upon us. Our exclusive emphasis on the individual

suggests a naive view of the way the world goes, for it implies a world in which individual striving is the whole story—and everyone knows better than that. The most important problems we face, we face as a group. To meet such problems, we have to act as a group.

Fortunately, a number of books, films, pamphlets and recordings have been appearing recently which help our understanding of the big problems.

One of these is *The Lindenwood Conference on International Relations* (Committee on International Relations of the National Education Association, 1951, \$1.00) in which a successful effort has been made to present the big issues in a way that provokes thought. Readers will find the "study guides," which appear throughout the volume, a particularly good source of ideas. In each case, the emphasis is on issues, not answers.

We have to face moral issues squarely, and learn to think well about them. How are we going to do this? For one thing, we have to see how adequate our learning tools are. This has been done in part by Dorothy

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