

# *Priority for Children*

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**Responsibility for a positive program for children rests with educators and parents together, according to Hazel F. Gabbard, specialist for extended school services, Office of Education, Federal Security Agency, Washington, D. C.**

IN a national emergency, planning for children often is pushed aside while other matters are given priority. Our national resources are poured into the insatiable appetite of the war machine. Large appropriations for defense are made available to produce super-guns, boats and planes. Men are called into the armed forces. Families are disturbed, frequently uprooted. New contracts for industry call many parents to new jobs. Families seek new homes. These times are hard on children. They sense the anxieties of their elders. Many children do not have a chance for a normal, healthy childhood. Far too little attention is given to meeting their needs. Preparations for defense are large scale. Planning for children is small.

Failure to plan for children is shortsightedness on our part. It should be remedied promptly. This is not a good example to be set by a country now holding a position of leadership in world affairs. It is a poor record for a country with our wealth, technical know-how, ingenuity and government built on democratic principles. Furthermore, in the face of a strong defense program, we cannot afford the large scale neglect of our children which occurred in the last defense emergency. The responsibility for a positive program for children rests with educators

and parents together. Let us not abdicate to other professionals the planning for children in this defense period.

## **Children Need a Good School**

If there ever was a particular time when children need a genuinely good school, it is now. What kind of a school? A school constantly striving to be alert to children's needs in the new world which is emerging. Educators try to discover ways to strengthen and to improve the schools. It is not enough to plan only for the physical safety of children. The emotional scars of these times will be left on children during their growing years unless adults sense what is happening to them below the surface. Today's children must find at school grown-ups who are knowing, intelligent, stable and who care. Children must discover adults who can reassure them, be aware of their perplexities and help them to get a perspective on their problems.

Schools must be ready to guard the interests of children as never before. In the months ahead while the national mobilization program moves forward, some communities will be more affected than others. All will doubtless feel the impact of national defense in different ways. Schools must strive to make children's lives richer, more secure, more

fun. They must realize that the emergency brings anxieties to children and increases the responsibilities of the schools in helping to minimize these tensions. There are constructive things to be done to enable children to ward off fears and to develop a sense of adequacy to meet their problems. There are services already operating which may need to be expanded. As new needs arise other programs may be required.

### **A New Look at Children's Needs**

Since World War II some schools have taken a new look at the needs of children. They have adjusted their programs to changing community needs. A look at present conditions has brought to their attention: children whose parents are employed with no one at home to care for them after school hours; children whose mothers are the sole breadwinners, working to keep the family together; children living in homes of relatives with no place to play except the city streets; children at loose ends with nothing to do except to get into mischief. These and other problems have been the stimulus for schools to open their doors after school hours and during the vacation months.

In communities affected by the impact of defense activities, there are already signs which point to the neglect of children. Schools generally have responded to developing plans for civil defense, but this has been largely in terms of the physical safety of children. Few have realized that physical safety is only one aspect of defense planning. The need to help children build good emotional health and social support and solidarity through a program of play activities has often been over-

looked. This is a matter for every school to give attention to during the coming year. It is one of the musts in education for national defense.

Ordinarily, women in the homes and schools are to an important degree responsible for the education and security of boys and girls. In the present emergency, obstacles in building programs for children are enhanced by the number of women drawn away from homes and schools to do defense work.

Here are some facts for us to ponder. If the present emergency continues and the full impact of defense production makes itself felt, the number of women workers is expected to increase to a peak above the labor force of World War II, which was 20½ million. Today there are 19 million women workers, 30 percent of the entire labor force, and more than half of them are married. More than 4½ million of these women workers have children under 18 years and over 1½ million have children under six years of age. The number of married women employed outranks single women workers, and ½ million of all women workers have children.

In some way communities through their schools must plan for children to offset the removal of women from homes. Those planning for the most effective manpower utilization recommend that among the community facilities and services needed, consideration be given to: (a) Care for preschool and school-age children; and (b) Provision for guidance and counseling of workers on special problems arising from employment.

These facts should not twist our thinking about children in the direc-

tion of meeting manpower needs. Unfortunately this was the path we took in the last emergency. This time let us place the needs of children first and resolve to do not only a child-caring job but a *fully educational* one as well.

### **An Effective Summer Program**

What kind of program should schools provide to safeguard children outside of school hours? How change the regular school program? What does an extended school program look like? Let's visit one. It is a Friday afternoon in August. We find the children have planned a special event today—a Hawaiian program. The teachers tell us that for several weeks the children's interest has centered on searching out facts about the life and traditions of people in the Hawaiian Islands. It started when a member of the group who came from Hawaii brought a grass skirt to school one day. The center requested that a collection of books about the Islands be sent to them from the library. Records were also secured so the group could hear Hawaiian music. The children have learned some of the dances from Island people who were invited to the center. They have dramatized several of the old legends which have been handed down to the Hawaiian children. Glancing about the room one sees the children's impressions of life in Hawaii in their paintings, their clay products, and the collections of articles which they have brought from their homes.

Today the girls are barefoot, wearing grass skirts, colorful leis, and flowers in their hair. The boys wear large figured shirts. There is no doubt about it, children like a good show. This after-

noon they are enjoying a program they have created. They are completely absorbed in this new world. They have learned much about their neighbors only a few thousand sea and air miles away. A few parents have gathered to enjoy this occasion with them, though most of the parents are employed and cannot attend.

Teachers move about quietly and remain in the background. The children have worked out their plans with the teacher's guidance, but they are in charge of the program. The program is under way. Different children appear before the appreciative child audience. Linda does a hula dance. Her mother died while her father was overseas. Her father was killed in a plane over Korea, and at that time his buddy promised to take care of Linda. He is making good on this promise, the teacher explains. She is an attractive child swaying to the music in her grass skirt with charm and grace. Jerry has tears in his eyes. What is wrong? He missed his cue for his part in the pantomime of the legend. Big sister helps to steady him while the teacher makes a plan for him to come on later. Again children from a motherless home. The extended school program is a stabilizing influence in the lives of these children.

The children have lunch, rest and a full day's program at this elementary school center throughout the summer months. When school begins the children will stay after school and consider this home base until a parent or guardian comes for them.

### **Providing for Children Under Six**

Another extended school program cares for children under six years of

age. It is a nursery school near a large housing development, in a portable building on the schoolyard especially constructed for this purpose. In the spacious, well-equipped play yard twenty children are absorbed in their activities. Several children have set up a playhouse grocery store. The clerks hand small articles over the counter and make change as the customers arrive and depart. Other children are busy filling and emptying trucks in the sandbox. A few children are on the jungle-gym and another group is riding on the rocking boat. A train made of boxes draws many passengers who get on and off as stations are called. The artists over by the easels display real talent. The teacher remarks that they have found that children of Japanese and Mexican backgrounds seem to have a special skill with paints and brushes. Their pictures show design and balance quite unusual for their years. Children of many national groups attend this center. Some of their parents cannot speak English, but one of the teachers has learned their language and interprets.

Walking through the nursery school building we find other children playing in the large airy rooms with plenty of light. The play room has open shelves for blocks and other play materials. There are small tables and chairs where they may be seated to look at books or to engage in other activities. Another large room is for resting. In it small cots are arranged in neat rows with their white linens. In the toilet room fixtures are adjusted to the size of children as are the lockers in which their personal possessions are stored.

Tempting odors draw one toward the kitchen where the noon meal is being

prepared. There is a homey feeling about the place. The teachers move about leisurely and look as though they enjoy their work. Children have a well balanced day at the center. All of their mothers are employed and must make arrangements for their care while they are at work.

### **Varied Experiences Provided**

These programs just described, the school-age center and the nursery school, are typical of others which you and I might visit. They are providing children and their parents a service which has been developed by schools on the basis of considerable experience. The children are safe and happy here with teachers who are especially interested in their welfare and best development. Through careful staff planning, the program of any of these schools takes on a character which is not always evident to the casual eye. It is more than play to keep children busy and off the streets. In the day-to-day planning there are varied experiences—indoors and outdoors, activity and quiet, with materials for experimentation, to use in creating, to relive adventures. There are companions, young and old, who become friends and help children to know different kinds of people. Trips and excursions are planned to whet the curiosity and bring to children new vistas of the world outside. Parents are always a part of the life of the extended school program, sharing information with the staff, helping in many ways, learning more about their children through their talks with teachers. They are most appreciative of the care their children receive which they cannot give at home, but

which a community can provide when parents and the school work together for children.

Defense preparations are geared to putting our house in order for whatever we may face as a nation. It is unfortunate that in time of a national emergency the problems of youth flare up with the unsettled conditions, because the ultimate success of our defense preparations may depend upon what we do for youth today. Slowly communities are waking up to the responsibility and putting their school buildings to use for children more hours of the day, week and year. Extended school programs, such as those just described, offer one solution to better planning for children as a defense measure. Why not let your school be one which gives children a top place in mobilization?

#### READINGS ON EXTENDED SCHOOL SERVICES

• "Extended School Services." Hazel F. Gabbard, Reprint, *The National Elementary Principal*, June 1951. pp. 9-13, Office of Education, Washington 25, D. C.

Defense impact on the community and children; how schools can keep informed, and plan for needed services.

• *Report of Conference on Planning for Day Care and Extended School Services in Areas Affected by Defense Mobilization*, January 1951.

Problems and policies to guide planning for children in areas affected by defense.

• *Open Doors to Children: Extended School Services*. Margaret T. Hampel and Hazel F. Gabbard, 1945. 30 p. Illus. 15¢ Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D. C.

A picture book of typical activities in an extended school program.

• *Programs for Children Below Six*. Committee 3, National Association of State Directors of Elementary Education, 1948. 41 p.

Discusses what is a good program for children under six and how such programs can be provided. Order from: Elsa Schneider, Dupont Plaza Hotel, Dupont Circle, Washington 4, D. C. Price 50¢.

• "Extended School Services for Children," *Childhood Education*, March 1951.\*

What the schools can do to plan for children in the defense program and what it takes to get an extended school program under way.

• "Why Child Care Centers are Successful in Philadelphia," *Childhood Education*, April 1951.\*

A report of child care centers in Philadelphia.

• "A Community Plans a Nursery School," Elizabeth L. Woods, *Childhood Education*, May 1951.\*

How parents and community cooperation established a cooperative nursery school in Sierra Madre, California.

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\*Above articles in a series on the Impact of Mobilization on Children, prepared by The Association for Childhood Education International, 1200 15th Street, N.W., Washington 5, D. C.

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