

A School Program in Civil Defense

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How can schools cooperate with other organizations in preparation for civil defense? One program is described by Harry L. Walen, chairman, Committee on School Preparedness, Newton, Massachusetts.

FIVE days after President Truman's Proclamation of National Emergency in December, 1950, the School Committee sent a letter to all parents of children in the public schools in the city of Newton. The letter presented a basic plan for protection and education of school children in the emergency. This plan had been prepared by the seventeen-member Committee on School Preparedness, which had been organized in September, 1950. The committee included teachers, administrators, and representatives from Junior Red Cross and the police and fire departments. The preparedness program gained strength from this close connection with other groups in the city connected with the Civil Defense program. Its chairman represents the group in the Department of Civil Defense as Deputy Chief Warden for School Protection.

The schools make their vital contribution to national defense through maintaining a sound educational program. They share the general responsibility, however, of being prepared for any emergency.

There were three major phases of the program: studying the problem and planning how to meet it, preparing the teachers to interpret the program in school, and actually putting the program into effect when indicated. What-

ever program might be developed was to emphasize fundamental educational values, was to be presented as unemotionally as possible, and was to cooperate fully with the local Civil Defense program.

Taking up the first phase, studying the problem and planning how to meet it, during the fall of 1950, members of the committee studied as fully as possible with the information available the problems that might be raised should cities in this nation be attacked from the air. It was recognized from the beginning that the plans adopted by any school system would be affected by the particular problems of its own community.

Preparing Teachers for the Program

Concurrently, the second phase of the program, preparing the teachers for their part in it, was pushed forward. Early in October, the Committee on School Preparedness made a survey of the skills and experience of all persons employed by the Newton Public Schools. This survey accomplished two ends: a record was made of the human resources that were available and the amount and type of training that might be required, and the school personnel were made more aware of the many responsibilities that might become theirs as the defense program expanded. In

the middle of October an abbreviated list of measures to be taken for personal protection if an air attack should ever come, and a letter sizing up the situation were sent to all teachers. The fact that the children were in no way to be brought into the program at this time was emphasized in the letter. Late in the same month the Newton Department of Civil Defense provided copies of Richard Gerstell's book, *How to Survive an Atomic Bomb*, which was to be read by all members of the staff as a common source of basic information.

In November a memorandum to all employees of the Newton Public Schools announced that the American Red Cross Standard First Aid course would be made available on a voluntary basis to employees of the schools. More than eighty persons entered the courses for which instructors were available in the fall. By June 1951, nearly 500 had taken the course. The value of knowledge of first aid at all times rather than just in a national emergency was emphasized throughout the program. Letters were sent by the superintendent to colleges which in the past had prepared teachers coming to Newton requesting that they consider the inclusion of a first aid course as part of the beginning teacher's equipment.

Warning System Set Up

A telephone warning chain originating from the Department of Civil Defense was set up in the Newton Public Schools and tested as an interim warning system. An inventory of safety areas, fire fighting equipment and first aid supplies was taken in each school building.

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To keep the entire teaching staff in close personal touch with the problems and developments of the program, a special committee consisting of one representative from each school building was appointed to work with the Committee on School Preparedness in interpreting the program and bringing problems to the central planning committee from the different schools. The day before the School Committee's letter of information was sent home to parents, this committee of liaison teachers read to the teachers in their buildings a complete statement of the problems and of the plans for action in emergency.

Of paramount importance in the success of the program have been the hundreds of teachers in the classrooms who actually presented the material to the pupils. Their long preparation had given them opportunity to become used to the ideas they were going to teach. The elements of excitement and fear were reduced to a minimum. The teachers were presenting information that was familiar to them. Signs of disturbance in the children as a result of this instruction have not been reported. On the contrary, there have been many remarks approving the manner in which the instruction was carried through.

Preparation of Materials

The third phase, putting the program into effect, required the calm and understanding presentation of carefully prepared and accurate teaching materials. A sub-committee comprising teachers from all grade levels was set up with the cooperation of the Division of Instruction to prepare the instructional materials. It was decided to pre-

sent the material in an entirely different way for each of three different levels: kindergarten through the third grade, fourth grade through the seventh, and eighth grade through the twelfth. After a tentative draft of materials for each of these had been carefully produced, each draft was tried in selected classrooms in different schools in the city. A consultation of the teachers who prepared the materials, the teachers who had used them in the classroom, and parents of children in these rooms followed. As a result of this consultation, the materials were further revised before being printed in leaflet form. A general set of instructions emphasizing the purpose and suggesting the manner of presenting the material was prepared for all teachers, and for each of the separate grade levels a special sheet of additional instructions was provided.

MATERIALS FOR PREPAREDNESS

The organization of instructional materials for each grade level follows a similar pattern: discussion of the historical background of survival, protective devices that men have developed, the American tradition of taking emergencies in our stride, the development of the present crisis, man's continuing discovery of energy, controlled as opposed to destructive uses of this energy, and the challenge implied in the discovery of atomic energy. The atomic bomb is discussed only because it represents the latest and least understood source of destructive energy. The wide publicity given the atomic bomb has made it synonymous in many people's minds with modern warfare.

Each leaflet includes rules for conduct in the school buildings during a

drill and general rules for self-protection. The leaflet for each grade level ends in a hopeful and confident tone.

While the materials were being prepared and tested, with the aid and advice of the Newton Department of Civil Defense, school buildings were carefully surveyed. Areas were established in each building which, in the light of available knowledge, offered the best protection for people in them. Charts of the buildings were duplicated and shelter areas were indicated on these. Copies of these charts were made available in school buildings for information of groups meeting outside regular school hours, and were placed on file in the Civil Defense office, the local fire station, and the Red Cross chapter house.

At another meeting of the principals and liaison teachers of the various schools, the instructional materials were carefully explained and discussed under the leadership of the people who had prepared them. The materials were then taken to the individual buildings, where they were likewise to be discussed with the teachers who were to use them in the classrooms.

The instructional program in each school was culminated by a practice defense drill in which the children were ushered to the shelter areas assigned to their classrooms.

Parent Cooperation Secured

Complete understanding of the program has been essential for securing the cooperation that has been shown by the parents. Since the planning phase of the program was initiated in the fall of 1950, the local newspapers have cooperated by reporting progress

to the adult community. The letter submitted to parents, following closely as it did the President's Proclamation of a National Emergency, thoroughly described the plans, so that parents had an opportunity to think about, question and accept them. Attached to every one of these letters was a slip which the parent signed and returned to the school, indicating that he had read the plan.

After instruction had been completed, the printed leaflets were sent home with the children. In this manner, supplementing and in cooperation with the public information campaign of the Newton Department of Civil Defense, a source of accurate information was placed in each home. Also, the parents could read exactly what had been presented to the children in the schools.

The Committee on School Preparedness recommended the inclusion of first aid instruction as part of the Civil Defense program in the schools, and also as an addition to the regular curriculum. The senior class in the high school took the standard first aid course, which, it is expected, will be required for high school seniors. All pupils in the junior high schools took the Junior Red Cross first aid course.

Children's Reactions to the Program

How have the children reacted to the program? In many instances, with older children especially, a calm discussion of the present emergency and the manner in which bombs of different types actually carry through their destruction led to the elimination of unwarranted fears, and a clearer under-

standing and sober appraisal of the real dangers to civilians in modern warfare and of methods for coping with these dangers.

With the younger children, the instruction and the drills seemed to be accepted as a new kind of serious game. Youngsters in the elementary schools vied with one another to see which room could proceed most quietly and rapidly to its assigned position. There was a kind of *esprit de corps* in learning the rules of this new game. In one school, a kindergarten teacher took the basement room assigned to her class and made it into a reading den. The children decorated the brick walls with some of their own drawings. Small chairs were put around the room. It became a pleasant break in the routine of certain days in the week to go to this room and hear the teacher read a story. There was no fear in walking to this room when the school bell was sounded.

Review of the program suggests that four factors have played a vital part in carrying it through with the least possible disturbance of the established curriculum and of the children themselves. Thorough planning before the children were involved in the program; giving the teachers opportunity to become intimately acquainted with the problems and instructional materials before they introduced them in the classroom; keeping the parents in close touch with every step before it was taken; and maintaining close and cooperative liaison with other groups in the city connected with Civil Defense made it possible to carry through a constructive program.

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