

Citizens Advisory Councils at Work . . .

What accomplishments have citizens advisory councils helped bring about in local school communities? Some of these accomplishments are detailed in the following accounts from two school systems. George Sharp is curriculum coordinator, Tenafly High School, Tenafly, New Jersey. George N. Wells is superintendent, Bloomington Public Schools, Bloomington, Illinois.

. . . In Tenafly, New Jersey

GEORGE SHARP

THE LAY ADVISORY COUNCIL of Tenafly High School was formed in the spring of 1946. Leadership of the school at that time was in the hands of Burt Johnson, principal (now supervising principal), Helen Storen, curriculum coordinator (now at Queens College, New York City), and Kenneth Peterson, guidance coordinator (now at Syracuse

University). Since its founding, the council has become one of the most useful and valued organizations in the service of the school. It has served as a "safety valve" by providing a way for parent dissatisfactions to find expression and—in many cases—answers. It has been a constructive force in improving the school's program. It has been a



Tenafly (N. J.) Public Schools

The Lay Advisory Committee meets in Tenafly, New Jersey.

source of security and satisfaction to the administrative and teaching staff by providing a group of key people in the community who understand the school's problems and are sympathetic to its aims.

It is the purpose of this article to describe in some detail how this council is organized, how it works and some of its accomplishments.

Tenaflly High School is located in a "commuters town" of about 10,000 people. The town itself is in a valley about 7 miles north of the western terminus of the George Washington Bridge that spans the Hudson River. As a "receiving school," its population includes 9th-12th grade students from the "sending districts" of Cresskill, Demarest, Haworth, Norwood and Alpine as well as Tenaflly boys and girls. About three hundred of the eleven hundred students are from the "sending districts."

ORGANIZATION OF THE COUNCIL

The first step in setting up the council was to ask the students and the teachers to give the principal the names of people in their neighborhoods who were unusually interested in the work of the school. This list was examined to find representatives from all sections of Tenaflly and from each of the sending districts. In the final selection of the membership, participation in local organizations was taken into account as well as geographic location. However, no organization was given official representation.

From 1946 to 1950 the council totaled 24 members exclusive of the school personnel. Of these, 18 were from Tenaflly and 6 were from the sending districts. In 1950, the number was in-

creased to 20 from Tenaflly and 8 from the sending districts. The increase was made so that some recent graduates of the High School might be included. Approximately 7 members of the teaching and administrative staff have taken part in the work of the council annually.

Members serve from 1-3 years. At the end of each year approximately one-third of the group drop out and their places are taken by new members. The problem of who shall drop out has more or less taken care of itself in the last five years. There are always those who drop out when their sons or daughters graduate; some move out of town; while others take on other responsibilities that require their time. The only officers that are elected are a chairman and a secretary who are always chosen from among the parents.

The Lay Advisory Council meets monthly from September to June. At the September meeting the principal explains the purpose of the council to the new members. He points out that it is purely an advisory group; that it has not nor can it have any legislative power since this resides in the Board of Education. However, he also points out that there are many decisions he has to make on his own and it is here that he would like to have the advice of the parents. Following this, the meeting is turned over to the identification of problems by both parents and school personnel that might be the subject of a year's work by a committee. Four or five of these are finally selected and everybody is asked to write down his first, second and third choices of committee. These choices are then gone over to form committees which will be

approximately equal in number. A member of the administrative staff and at least one teacher, as well as the parents, are on each of these committees.

At the October meeting and all subsequent meetings, each committee goes directly to its assigned classroom at 8:15 p. m. where it works until 9:45 p. m., at which time all committees meet in the school library for a general session. The minutes of the previous meeting are read, announcements are made and the meeting is opened for general questions about the school's work. At the end of the question period the meeting is adjourned—at 10:15 p. m.

At the June meeting, each committee makes a report of its activities. Some of these reports may include recommendations for consideration by the principal. These usually suggest *what* might be done rather than *how* it might be done. Other reports may include no recommendations but merely report what the group learned from the experience. Still others may report on activities to date and recommend that the subject of their study be continued for another year.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE COUNCIL

Perhaps a clearer picture can be given of the work of the members of the Lay Advisory Council by listing some of their accomplishments:

- They have given informed interpretation of the problems, policies and practices of the school to the members of the community.
- They have taken part in the development of the curriculum.

They assisted in the writing of a new course outline for family living.

They recommended the requirement of Community Civics for all 9th grade students.

They rejected after careful study a proposal to include a general language course in the 8th grade program.

They have studied the English and the Core Programs in the light of the Evaluative Criteria of the Middle States Association.

They have served as advisory members in the setting up of the Adult Evening School Program.

- They suggested and helped to develop a catalog of courses that would be understandable to parents when selecting subjects with their children each year.
- They suggested and helped to develop a new report card.
- They have familiarized themselves thoroughly with the adequacies and inadequacies of our present building. Armed with the Middle States Criteria on School Plants they have inspected everything in the building from attic to basement.
- They have made recommendations concerning our student activity program.
- They have represented our school at educational meetings, usually "stealing the show."
- They have served as members of Evaluative Committees for the Middle States Association.

Parents must be dealt with in one way or another. A Lay Advisory Council is a constructive way for parents to participate in the improvement of the school. Its initial undertaking is up to the principal. If he is genuinely inter-

ested in improving his school and has courage, a lay advisory council can become a valuable group within the school organization. At first the parents may be suspicious and even somewhat

hostile. But as they come to see the sincerity of the principal's purpose and as they take a hand in the school's work, they will come to accept the school as "our" school.

. . . *In Bloomington, Illinois*

GEORGE N. WELLS

THE BLOOMINGTON PUBLIC schools have greatly benefited from Citizens Advisory Councils during the past seven years. In 1944 an education panel of The Better Bloomington Citizens Committee made recommendations which have served as a blueprint for the Bloomington Public Schools to the present time.

The challenge presented the Bloomington Schools through their representative citizens committee has been both interesting and productive. Where but in America could the people have a say in what is to be done in their schools? The story of educational progress in Bloomington is an exemplification of the democratic process in a free society.

The Board of Education and the administration accepted the recommendations of the "Educational Panel of the Better Bloomington Citizens Committee" as a guide in developing the educational program. The citizens of the community accepted their responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the well-being of the public schools and they recognized that the function of the administration and the trained staff was to furnish leadership and technical skill in developing and improving the program. It was in this spirit that the

superintendent accepted the challenge offered by the Bloomington community in 1945.

The citizens of the community showed their faith in the recommendations made by the "Educational Panel" when they provided the necessary funds by voting, in March 1945, to increase the educational and building tax rates. Again the public registered approval of the program in December 1945, when the voters authorized the Board of Education to issue bonds in the amount of \$750,000 to provide buildings in which to carry out the proposed program. The citizens insured the success of the program when they stabilized the tax rate in April 1947.

Results Have Been Achieved

The following accomplishments have resulted mainly from recommendations of the "Educational Panel of the Better Bloomington Citizens Committee." Administrative leadership has been exercised to the end that:

- Curriculum development has proceeded during the past seven years to meet the educational needs of children and youth.
- A coordinator of curriculum has been appointed to help provide planned se-

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