Community School Criteria

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Many ASCD members assisted the authors of this article in drawing up the general characteristics and qualities essential to a “community school.” They held that such a school is more than a physical entity, it is a concept, a point of view, a way of operation.

WHAT is a community school? Apparently, many educators think they know. They speak in complimentary terms of “the community school—the highest stage of evolution reached thus far by the American public school.” They cite examples of community school programs. They urge adoption of community school practices.

The trouble is, these educators who think they know do not seem to think alike. A given school is described by one of them as being an outstanding example of a community school. By another, the same school is ignored. Judging by their writing and their talking, a community school is both fish and fowl and even something in between.

Obviously, the community school is not an empirical phenomenon. If so, investigators would be in closer agreement upon descriptive characteristics. The community school, if it exists as a descriptive term, must consist of concepts in the minds of people. In other words, the community school is what people think it is.

Search for Criteria

Yet, it is fairly clear that some general agreements exist as to the nature of a school that is a community school. Most people who deal with the term seem to think that it is descriptive of unique relationships between community and school. They seem to agree that there are some characteristics that should be true of a school program before that program gets the community school label. If we can find the specific concepts upon which people agree, we shall have a set of criteria that can be used as a tentative definition, at least, of the community school.

The search for criteria was predicated on the premise that the community school is a concept, a point of view, a way of operation and not a physical entity. If this is true, then the characteristics of the community school may be sought in the minds and beliefs of those actively working to improve quality of school programs.

The membership of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development was thought to be the group of theorists and practitioners most actively engaged in planning the school programs of America. A random sample of the 1949 membership roster of ASCD was sent copies of reactionnaires.

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designed to get expressions of opinion concerning certain characteristics and practices commonly attributed to the community school.

These questionnaires were developed after an intensive survey of several hundred books, articles and pamphlets dealing with the community school. The first instrument listed fourteen general characteristics that were most commonly mentioned in the literature as typical of the community school. Respondents were asked if they thought these characteristics peculiarly applicable to a community school or equally applicable to a traditional school program. The second instrument had seventy specific practices that had been mentioned in the literature as being typical of the community school. Respondents were asked whether they thought the statement to be:

1. Absolutely essential for a school to be rated as a good community school
2. Valuable and desirable, but not absolutely essential
3. Of doubtful value, dangerous, impractical, undesirable or to be avoided

The 251 replies to the first instrument and the 243 replies to the second instrument were used to isolate the following suggested criteria. Only those items that received a percentage greater than four probable errors above fifty per cent of the answers were considered acceptable as criteria. These criteria may be thought of, then, as being accepted by a very significant percentage of the membership of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, a department of the National Education Association.

**Characteristics and Practices**

**General Characteristics**

1. The school takes the lead in building genuine community from the fragmented society about it.
2. The school acts as a catalyst to bring about community planning.
3. The school takes the lead in developing the Community Coordinating Council idea.
4. The school takes the lead in supplementing, coordinating and improving educational projects of other community agencies.
5. The activities and concerns of the school constantly revolve around community affairs.
6. The pupils are given an opportunity to plan and work cooperatively with adults on projects of direct service to the community.
7. The school makes an effort to meet the educational needs of every person in the community.
8. The program of the school is evaluated in terms of improved community habits and accomplishments.

**Specific Practices**

9. The school draws upon the community as a source of data and information.
10. The school gives wholehearted endorsement to worth-while community programs for the young.
11. The pupils gather first-hand information about the community by use of interviews, questionnaires and observations to illustrate materials being studied.
12. The public relations program of the school is effective in keeping the school in the minds of people and in
reflecting a favorable light upon the school.

13. The school operates periodic programs to acquaint citizens with the objectives and accomplishments of modern education.

14. Existing school facilities are used by the community if such use does not interfere with the regular school program.

15. The school exerts detailed effort to make its own educational program tangibly valuable to and appreciated by all segments of the community.

16. The school provides excursions to museums, historical sites, industrial plants and similar places.

17. The school gives information and guidance on the nature of worthwhile programs in order to quicken activity of other agencies.

18. The school offers cooperation and aid to community-improvement programs started by others.

19. The school uses community agencies, stores and plants as laboratories and shops to give the student real-life experiences.

20. The school allies itself with agencies seeking to stamp out bad conditions.

21. The school uses people from the community to help with the curriculum.

**Essential Practices**

In addition to these twenty-one items, nine were considered by the respondents to be absolutely essential for a community school, but their acceptance was at a less significant level than those included in the suggested criteria. These items were:

22. The school makes the public aware of places and situations harmful to the young.

23. The school adapts existing facilities to make them more suitable for community use.

24. Pupils study, from secondary materials, about local history, geography, population, food and shelter.

25. The school buildings and facilities are all deliberately planned and built to serve the needs of the entire community.

26. The school invites lay citizens to make periodic studies of what this and other good schools are accomplishing.

27. The school makes an analysis of its social constituency and provides differentiated programs to interpret the values of education to each segment of the community.

28. The school adds some specialized facilities designed to serve the community.

29. The school leads the pupils to work on all types of genuine community problems as a means of learning, with no type of problem being denied investigation in advance.

30. The school is the champion of children and youth in eliminating and preventing mis-educative situations, even though such action is considered officious by some segments of the community.

**Implications and Use of the Criteria**

Perhaps the most significant conclusion to be drawn from this study is that the persons responding do not think that being a good school guarantees that a school is also a community school. They were emphatic in their selection of certain characteristics as
being definitive of what they meant when they said, "community school." They rejected as being definitive many characteristics that describe what is ordinarily referred to as good school-community relations. They thought that the community school went much farther toward the development of a "school centered community" than such statements usually implied.

Then, the criteria selected are for the most part rather rigorous. While a few of them deal with such traditional matters as using the community as a source of instructional materials, most of the criteria contemplate the community school as being an active social agency bent upon improving community life and dealing with the real problems of community living. For example, they expect the community school to get involved in community coordination and they would judge the effectiveness of the community school's program in terms of improved community habits and accomplishments.

The criteria selected are far-reaching in their practical applications. They would call for new emphasis in most school endeavors. The curriculum of the community school would be made quite different, for example, if it really sought to meet the criterion of revolving around community concerns and affairs. Similarly, school buildings would change radically in design.

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