

Problems Related to a SHIFTING SCHOOL POPULATION

A rapidly shifting population poses many problems—and provides some unexpected resources—for schools in a defense area such as that described in this article.

PRIOR to World War II, Norfolk County, a combination suburban and rural community, had an enrollment of 6,000 pupils in its public schools. Suddenly, because of the pre-war preparations and the later outbreak of hostilities, this area with its vast naval and military installations grew rapidly. Mushrooming housing projects, ranging in size to 5,000 units, were erected within a few months. As a result, from 1941 to 1945, the school enrollment increased from 8,000 to 18,000. This phenomenal growth has continued up to now, even though large suburban areas of the County have been absorbed by neighboring cities through annexation proceedings. Nevertheless, approximately 28,000 pupils enrolled in Norfolk County schools this September, nearly five times the number of pupils enrolled before the war period.

If the school divisions throughout the nation beset by a rapidly growing and shifting population were interro-

gated concerning their most pressing problems, it is probable that two would be most frequently listed: financing the construction of needed classrooms and locating a competent staff of teachers. Herein it is not proposed to analyze these two items in detail but to discuss three related problems encountered by Norfolk County and to describe activities undertaken by its administrative and supervisory staff in its efforts to relieve the resultant conditions.

The problems identified by the staff are as follows: (1) the alleviation of conditions caused by rapid population turnover; (2) the orientation of 200 new teachers into the school system each session, and (3) the development of equitable arrangements for shift classes.

Such a high degree of population shift as that experienced in Norfolk County during the past decade creates a major problem for all concerned. It presents continuous harassment for both school officials and teachers who must pass out the transfer slips on Friday and enroll the new pupils on Monday. Of course, these new enrollees need special help with personal adjustment to the new school with its strange surroundings and unfamiliar

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faces. In addition, the parent is affected by the task of moving furniture and family as well as by the desire to assist his children in making satisfactory adjustment. Disturbed by a sudden change of residence, which he may not have desired, the parent can become annoyed by small differences in practices and policies which exist between the school he left and the one in which he now enrolls his children.

The population shift also presents problems for the school official who faces a high degree of turnover not only among his pupils and patrons but also among his teachers. The Navy wife who has been teaching, and usually doing a good job, comes into the office with the news that her husband has been transferred. So a new teacher must be found. The school official is hopeful that the replacement for the departing Navy man has a wife who is qualified to teach.

New Pupils Bring New Resources

These and many other resultant problems have been faced by the Norfolk County school system with both a philosophical and a practical frame of mind. First, it has learned that the turnover is unavoidable and expected. Thus, it has accepted the problem as such. Next, it has determined that certain things can be done to alleviate the situation. On the other hand, it has learned that this constant influx of new people can be used as an asset in the instructional program. Thus it has sought to turn seeming disadvantage into educational benefit.

From all over the United States and many foreign countries pupils arrive. The teachers have learned that the



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New children often bring to a school new and exciting resources.

boy who enrolled today comes directly from Paris where he has lived for two years. His presence in the French class becomes an asset which the teacher is quick to recognize. The geography lesson becomes something that is living. Here is a person who knows Guam from firsthand experience; there is another who is ready to boast about Texas.

The available resources do not end with the pupils. Many of the parents have been brought into the classroom. The Royal Air Force officer stationed in Norfolk can help the classroom teacher by discussing some of the problems faced by his own country. Then there are the teachers themselves. Recently an investigation within the teaching staff revealed its versatility of background. For example, the number of states and foreign countries visited by the teachers indicated wide travel. A high percentage of the teachers were born outside this area. In listing the things that had helped them improve their teaching skill, the teachers placed first their association with the large number of fellow teachers who have come to Norfolk County from all parts of the nation.

Finally, another desirable effect upon the curriculum has been due to the

necessity of individualizing instruction. With pupils coming and going, the teacher has had to devote special attention both to the pupil who appears retarded and to the new enrollee who needs assistance on an advanced level. This individual need has been recognized and filled in both the elementary and the high schools.

In the secondary schools, which offer a comprehensive educational program, the curriculum has been made flexible enough to admit easy transfer of pupils from all types of high schools throughout the nation. Orientation programs for the new students have been developed by the various student councils. Handbooks have been prepared by pupils and teachers and presented to the new enrollee so that he might have an authoritative guide concerning the school's offerings and its policies and practices.

Orientation of Teachers

Orientation of new personnel has presented a second major problem in Norfolk County. Approximately two hundred teachers, new to the system, are absorbed into the school faculties each year. Most of the schools have also found it advantageous to prepare faculty handbooks, which have helped teachers in the maintenance of desirable relationships with pupils, with parents, and with fellow teachers. The Norfolk County Education Association also publishes a teachers' handbook and a teachers' directory which have aided the school system in establishing close relationships between the schools. These handbooks are indispensable to a system in which individual school faculties range from twenty

to eighty-five members, a high percentage of whom may be new teachers. It is not unusual for an addition to a school building to cause as much as a fifty percent increase in the number of faculty members.

Concern for the teacher's welfare extends beyond school walls. Locating suitable living accommodations is a large task in itself. This concern for the personal happiness of the new teacher became of such importance in Norfolk County that three years ago the principals and supervisors began to seek better ways of helping the new personnel attain more satisfactory adjustment to the school and community.

An orientation committee was created. This committee, under rotating chairmanship, meets early in the spring. Its membership consists of representative principals, supervisors, visiting teachers, experienced teachers, and teachers new to the system during the current year. New teachers spearhead the work of the committee and their comments and advice serve as a nucleus for future plans.

Orientation becomes an individual problem since teachers differ greatly in personal training and experience. The supply of new teachers who enter Norfolk County each session might be divided into the following categories:

1. Graduates with degrees, qualified to teach in elementary or high school.
2. Liberal arts graduates who have not prepared to teach.
3. Graduates with high school training who must adjust to an elementary grade.
4. Teachers with two or three years of college training, once certified to

teach, making an adjustment to modern techniques.

A kit of materials has been prepared by the Orientation Committee as a guide for coordination between Norfolk County personnel and the new teacher. Suggestions have been included to aid principals, experienced teachers, supervisors, presidents of local organizations, local ministers, and other people directly concerned with making the new teacher happy and comfortable. Picnics, tours, outings and receptions are also planned by the committee.

To test the effectiveness of the program during the session, an interview guide was prepared locally and distributed to the new teachers. They were requested to supply reactions concerning housing, community relationships, local recreation, the orientation program, school board regulations and policies, teaching materials, the pre-school conference, and problems that confronted them during the first few weeks of school. The new teachers made frank and beneficial suggestions which will be used with the next group of new teachers. The pre-school conference and personal conferences with principals, supervisors and other teachers proved most helpful to them. New teachers in the lower grades who were on a double shift basis reported that the practice followed in the County of placing them with experienced teachers proved useful in making a satisfactory adjustment.

The Problem of Shifts

It is reasonable to believe that many school systems throughout the nation have been forced to resort to the use

of shifts as a means of providing classroom space for the rapidly growing pupil population. How Norfolk County faced this situation is the final problem to be discussed herein.

During the early years of population influx the Norfolk County schools in the suburban areas found it necessary to use a double shift through the fourth grade. Even with this arrangement, sub-standard classrooms had to be used in order to obtain housing for all pupils.

Commonly used by many divisions is a shift plan that leaves the burden of two or more classes upon one teacher. This system was not adopted in Norfolk County as it was believed that such a plan shortens the school day too much and that the individual teacher cannot give the energy and planning necessary to teach effectively sixty to eighty pupils per day. The administrative and supervisory staff determined to work out the most equitable arrangement possible for the pupils and teachers who had to be placed on shifts. The following plan was devised and has proved successful as a temporary solution to the problem of providing adequate classroom space.

Full four-hour sessions were arranged for the children, usually from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and from 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Shifts have been alternated on a semester basis so that the morning shift during the first semester becomes the afternoon shift during the second. The afternoon teacher arrives at 10:30, spends 1½ hours with the morning group, eats lunch, and returns to meet her own class at 12:30. The morning teacher

assists the afternoon teacher until 2:30, taking time out for lunch.

Although the children are actually in class four hours, through this plan they have two teachers in the room for 1½ hours of that time. Actually more individual attention can be given to children when two teachers are in the room. Furthermore, with lunch-time and recesses excluded from the regular six-hour day, the instructional time is approximately the same as that of children going to school a full day.

It is not unusual to walk into a classroom where this plan is used and find two reading groups in progress simultaneously or find one teacher assisting with seat work while the other helps a group of children to understand number concepts. There is time each day for milk to tide the youngsters over until mealtime. Although it has been necessary to limit activities in such areas as art, music, physical education and dramatics, this instruction has not been seriously curtailed. Assistance in some of these fields has been provided by special teachers, who supply both advisory and technical help to the classroom teacher.

In some of the elementary classrooms located in or near the high schools, capable high school students have assisted the shift teacher for a period each day. These students belong to Future Teachers of America and are considering teaching as a full time career. Under the supervision of the regular teacher, these students have rendered valuable aid in working with children. Both teachers and parents have favored the plan.

Recently, a County-wide meeting of FTA clubs was planned. The future

teachers discussed how they might work more effectively in the classroom. It was amazing to discover how much insight they had gained through working with both children and teachers. The classroom experience has aroused in these students a greater interest in teaching. However, it should be emphasized that "practice" teaching should not become the sole activity of the Future Teachers' Club. This experience, when used with careful guidance, provides the high school pupil with valuable training and also gives effective aid to the teacher with an overcrowded classroom.

Standardized testing in Norfolk County has shown that pupils in shift classes rank in the basic skills with or above other pupils within this school system who have had the advantage of a full school day. These findings are not conclusive since economic and social factors of the various school communities enter into the picture. However, it is reasonable to conclude that pupils in shift classes have achieved more progress than would have been possible had not the County taken steps to provide a program as adequate as possible under the circumstances.

As might be determined from the foregoing discussion, the Norfolk County school system has not been able to establish stability to the degree desirable. However, it has attempted to offset this disadvantage by the utilization of the abundance of human resources at its disposal. As a result the curriculum has been enriched and vitalized. Since the pupils themselves have participated in the building of the ever-changing curricu-

lum that fills their individual needs, the curriculum itself has become more meaningful to them.

At present, Norfolk County, under the direction of a forward-looking superintendent, is nearing the completion of a twenty-five-million-dollar building program. All six high schools are now or soon will be entering new multi-million-dollar plants. Several large, modern elementary school buildings have been constructed, while many of the old buildings have been renovated and modernized. As evidence of progress accomplished, it is noteworthy that effective with the 1954-55 school

session, all pupils will have been relieved of shift classes with the exception of the first and second graders in the densely populated areas adjacent to Norfolk City.

The County has been fortunate in having capable and aggressive educational leadership. The immediate past president of the National Education Association and the president-elect of the AASA are listed among its past superintendents of schools. Excellent leadership, combined with a sympathetic and alert school board, has enabled the school division to progress despite a multiplicity of handicaps.



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Each Community Must Face Its Own Problems

Always, in the final analysis, the local community must meet and solve as best it can the problems which result from such a condition as school overcrowding. This author suggests several ways in which local communities are meeting their urgent needs for more adequate housing.

ALTHOUGH the use of "temporary" school housing facilities has been necessary at one time or other in virtually every school community, it is probably safe to state that proportionately more children found themselves in temporary classrooms in September 1954 than at any other time in our history. By and large, these arrangements are distinctly unsatisfactory, and the children who will suffer through the often-mislabeled "emergency" period are being cruelly cheated of their

rightful educational opportunity. As a result, the time has long since arrived for a thoughtful examination of the various expedients which have been tried.

The use of temporary or emergency school facilities becomes necessary whenever typical or permanent facilities either cease to exist or become overtaxed by the number of students to be served. Unfortunately, the definition of "overcrowded" varies greatly from community to community, from

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