

## Packing Them In

**T**HE GREAT increase in school population in the United States offers one of the most exciting challenges public school educators have ever faced. Reports indicate that by 1960 there will be 10,000,000 more young people in the nation's schools and colleges than were there in the spring of 1953. What a tremendous group of young Americans! What potentialities are represented in such a group! What opportunity and what a chance for education! But are these young people coming into the public schools too fast for educators to meet the challenge adequately? Are we resourceful enough to see that every opportunity is given to develop the potential abilities of these young Americans? As we look about at conditions in some of our cities and towns, we wonder.

Children are something that cannot be put in cold storage until taxpayers are ready to provide adequate facilities. The children and youth who make up this additional school population are already born. They are here now—eager, dynamic, and entitled to their full share of educational experience since they pass this way but once. All over the United States educators are alert to the problems involved in caring for this tremendous influx of youngsters. They are “packing them in.” Much has been written and much has been said about the vast enrollment numbers, but are we sure that the right people know the extent of

the problem? In many sections a good job of informing the community has been done. It is only by educating the lay public to the seriousness of the problem of increased enrollment, coupled with teacher shortage, that the overcrowding in our schools can be resolved. It takes money to build new facilities. It takes adequate salaries to attract more and able teachers to classroom teaching. There is enough money in this great nation to do the thing that must be done to insure the right kind of opportunities for all of America's children—if the citizens care enough. Children are the greatest resource of any nation. There should be no question in the minds of loyal citizens that the emergency of providing education for the children of America must and can be met.

### Need for Housing

The present facilities available for public education in our country are the product of two decades of postponement and neglect resulting from the depression and the war. It is evident that we have now reached the critical point since our educational efficiency is seriously cut down at a time when there is a tremendous upsurge in enrollments.

Reports tell us that we are short 345,000 public elementary and secondary school classrooms. Three out of five of those classrooms we have will be overcrowded before we can catch up. Tensions, anxiety, irritability, ½

day sessions, shared rooms, staggered schedules, elimination of special facilities and lack of program enrichments—not to mention juvenile delinquency, and lack of school unity—both for children and staff—exist where overcrowding is rampant.

Many school districts are facing tremendous problems of overcrowding *now*—others have a bit of leeway to plan and build before the full impact strikes them. It is evident that to meet either situation school administrators and teachers must plan carefully with the maximum of economy so that efficient use of time, space and finances will react to the benefit of children. Perhaps we need to give major consideration to a totally different design in school housing. There may be a cheaper design—still entirely adequate, functional, healthful, and a good place for youngsters to spend 12 years of their school life. Perhaps we need to perfect transportable school units so that they are readily adapted to a modern functional educational program—roomy, portable, cheaper, and more quickly constructed than permanent structures. This is a time for creative endeavors. Many school districts are using transportable units but think of them as “temporary” housing. If further perfected these may become an entirely acceptable answer to more and cheaper permanent housing.

Whatever we do, it will take a phenomenal all-out effort on the part of the American people to bring the school facilities of this nation to a satisfactory solution by 1960.

Half-day schooling has been the easiest and most practical solution for most districts up to this point. The

solution is obviously not satisfactory. Teachers who share a room find it almost impossible to make sufficient preparation for the day's work since they “pass each other” at the noon hour. All the impedimenta of the morning class must be out of sight so that the afternoon group may have full swing—and vice versa. Assignments, board work of all kinds, a feeling of belonging on the part of children and teachers, and a sense of responsibility are all lacking in both A.M. and P.M. groups. Sometimes a clash of personalities adds to the dilemma as a tidy, neat teacher shares her room with a happy-go-lucky person who does not keep things in apple-pie order. In a crowded building where can the primary teacher prepare her charts? Where can the intermediate teacher plan her assignments when every available space is in constant use?

In some situations where a staggered schedule has been substituted for the  $\frac{1}{2}$  day session, one group of youngsters attends school from 8 to 10 A.M. and return at noon and stay until 2 P.M. A second group attends school from 10 to 12 A.M. and from 2 to 4 P.M. Some problems are solved by this scheduling but others are added. At no time is it possible to have the total school enrollment together or the school staff either; the confusion, the time watching, the limited—as well as broken—time of four hours is not long enough for an enriched program.

All of the programs that school people have been forced to use as an expedient to take care of the youngsters knocking at the schoolhouse doors put a burden on the teacher

along with the price paid by pupils out of their quota of education at all grade levels. In times such as these when the best efforts of the available teachers are needed, added burdens are undesirable to say the least. Tensions, anxieties and confusions should be avoided at all costs for the sake of developing stable youngsters, stable teachers and stable teaching and learning situations.

Must we go on "packing them in"? Can we meet this overcrowding problem? Of course we can if we want to—if we care enough—if we put our best efforts into the task, knowing that the lives of millions of children will be affected and that the future of a better America is at stake!

—GLADYS L. POTTER, *deputy superintendent of schools, Long Beach, California.*



**Y**ou know very well that each year is lived only once and is gone forever. Each year, each week, each day has to be the richest, the fullest, the most affectionate, the finest that we, with all our collective wisdom, know how to make it. If we short-change a child when he is six, we can't when he is eleven or twelve say, "We're sorry we messed things up when you were six, we didn't have buildings ready for you, we gave you half a day or a third of a day, we didn't have a hot lunch for you, you had to share things with other children coming or going, you lived in something that resembled a railroad station instead of a home-like living and loving school. Go back and be six again. Do it over." You know as well as I we can't do that. It means, doesn't it, that every year must be the best it can be. If a child hasn't had a chance, we know from all our research, to live fully and richly the age he is, he may very well go on searching in an immature manner far into his later years trying to go back and find that year he lost. (By Alice V. Keliher, in *Education for American Freedom*, Washington, D. C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1954, p. 46-47.)



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