

Uniting Forces to Improve Education

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Accent on the Positive

IN RECENT YEARS we have heard a great deal of criticism of public education, and the professional educator has spent much time in mending fences, correcting misunderstanding and offering rebuttals. In the process we may have lost sight of the positive forces which work in favor of sound programs of public education. Let us assess some of these helpful forces.

First, we are dealing with the most precious resources in our country—our young boys and girls. The story of Abraham is dramatic, not because he was called upon to sacrifice his gold, but rather his son—the most precious thing he had. No thinking parent is willing to sell short the education of his own children, and parents are so numerous, influential and active in every community in our nation that they will support and fight for a good sound program of education.

The responsibility of professional school people is to keep parents informed about how the school is helping their children and what the schools need to help them better. But we need to listen to parents' questions and to answer them boldly and honestly and, above all, clearly enough so that they can understand. We sell no one an idea if it is so vague it cannot be understood, and sometimes we educators are so vague we fail even to convince ourselves. The greatest source of strength the public school can command comes

from a satisfied parent. His enthusiasm is contagious and his loyalty is truly effective when he is convinced someone is trying to rob his child by false doctrine or by short support.

Second, we have a great reservoir of satisfied parents. Polls of parental opinion have been taken in many communities in the United States and every poll shows far more satisfaction than discontent. This great supply of good will needs more cultivation. We sometimes take it for granted and neglect it, as we sometimes take our own family for granted. But if we are to extend our area of support and friendship we would be well advised to start with our friends and multiply our effectiveness by their cooperative effort in our behalf.

Third, we have the resource of a successful record. Many studies show that the schools have done a significant job of teaching a vast number of boys and girls, with freedom and distractions all about them, the skills they need in order to succeed and the principles they need in order to be loyal. We have not succeeded equally well with all individuals—an impossibility of course; but no one expects this, even though each parent views the school largely in terms of what it has done for *his* child. When he sees failure here he generalizes to other children and schools. And while we have many unfinished tasks in making our schools better, we have a great

record of success and we should build more heavily upon it.

Fourth, we have throughout America enlightened people who make up our cities and counties, people who believe in education and its value. We are not starting afresh. We are building daily upon an accepted belief that if our country is to continue prosperous, if our great industries and business enterprises are to be staffed with skilled hands and trained minds, if our nation is to remain free and lead other nations from oppression and dictatorship, we must depend upon the schools to educate our youth. The great discussion over costs and frills is over details of methods and organization and content, and not over basic principles. There is a great area of agreement and shared goals between professional educators and the general public, and we can count on the continued support of business, industry and parents if we but help them to understand our problems, call upon them for help and advice, share with them our shortcomings and build upon their confidence in our efforts and our personnel.

Fifth, we have a great tradition of public service, of loyalty and devotion to our cause and of freedom from dishonesty and graft. Probably no other public servants have been so free from cheap politics, misuse of public funds, embezzlement or unsocial conduct as those in professional education. The public is aware of this and we, therefore, do not have the loss of public con-

fidence in our profession. The same thing is true regarding loyalty to the ideals of our country, and this is true in spite of the great furor that has accompanied the doubts cast upon a few of our members. Even these individuals are so few that our profession is as free of them as a certain well known soap is free of impurities.

These five resources are great sources of strength for public education and are positive factors our profession can use to increase support of schools and to strengthen public sentiment in favor of our system of free public education. These resources are attitudes of favor which many businesses spend millions to build for their products. Any industry would be tremendously wealthy that had the favor for its commodities which we have for the public schools. If we educators can build wisely on these positive factors of community support no forces of influence can seriously harm our schools. The loud talk of a few may make a louder echo than the silent satisfaction of the millions, but in a democracy the constant voice of the masses who want the best we can give their children will not be silenced. These positive factors become our support as we teachers succeed in our task of educating the young insofar as we develop understanding, appreciation and cooperation. To this end we should devote our major efforts.

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