

Uniting Forces to Improve Education

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With its one high school and three elementary schools, Rockdale County, a community of about 8500, has a school population of approximately 1500. Although Rockdale is thought of as a rural community, it feels the influence of a metropolitan area since it is only 25 miles from Atlanta and a great many Rockdale people commute to the city to work.

Community-wide Cooperation Assists Education in Rockdale County, Georgia¹

AS A RESULT OF an evaluation made by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, the parents and teachers of Rockdale County, Georgia, realized that there was a definite need for improvement not only in the school plants, but also in the educational program of their schools. They accepted this as a challenge and initiated an all out drive by school and community to improve and to grow together. In planning the program for curriculum improvement, there were two major concerns: (a) Where to get professional help, and (b) How to develop a curriculum which would really meet the needs of the boys and girls.

The school administration took the lead and worked closely with parents, teachers and pupils in setting up goals for a long range program to fit the needs of the children, and to work on the more immediate problems which would help to create a better environment for learning. Interest spread.

¹ Submitted by Elizabeth Donovan, consultant, State Department of Education, Atlanta, Georgia.

People talked about the plans wherever they met—in church, on the street, in the court house, over the bridge tables, at the stores, and on the telephone. Both informal and planned meetings were held to discuss ways and means and personnel.

In order to provide needed assistance, a class in curriculum planning was set up under the direction of Emory University and the University of Georgia. Classes were held twice a month when the instructor lectured and outlined ways of planning curriculum. Between class meetings the teachers did research in line with problems related to curriculum planning. (At the end of the term the teachers were given a choice of regular college credit or of credit for renewal of certificates.)

At the opening of school the following year, a steering committee composed of parents, teachers and pupils was formed to set up general policies for continuing the study. After much thinking about and discussion of the current program, the committee decided that work should be undertaken

in the areas of Language Arts, Science, and Child Growth and Development. Parents and teachers were left free to join the group which interested them most. Consultants were secured from the State Department of Education and the Georgia State College for Women who met with groups to assist in the development of curriculum outlines.

While working to improve the over-all program of the schools, many questions arose which demanded immediate attention, such as:

- What are the characteristics of children at various age levels and what are the implications for curriculum planning?
- What are the needs and interests of children at various age levels?
- What kinds of homes do our children come from?
- Should foreign languages be taught in high school?
- How valuable are parent-teacher conferences and should they take the place of report cards in the primary grades?
- How can we improve the learning climate of our classrooms?
- How can we satisfy the felt needs of our high school youngsters so that they will remain to graduate?
- How can we convince all of the parents of the importance of regular school attendance?
- How can we get the general public interested in what we are trying to do for our youth?
- Should we have continuing education for out-of-school youth?

In seeking solutions to problems, work was undertaken in many ways. Teachers in a single school worked on common problems; teachers, parents and pupils from different schools joined together to work on special in-

terest problems; a social science teacher and her pupils surveyed problems of out-of-school youth to discover reasons for drop-outs; consultants helped in the evaluation of procedures and in the selection of subject matter content; motion pictures were used as a basis for studying child growth and development; workshops and clinics were held in the county; parents and teachers visited other schools and organizations in neighboring counties to get a better understanding of ways of working together; PTA study groups were organized and many night meetings were held in the homes (one was a dinner meeting, and refreshments were always served).

Released Time for Study

A major problem confronting the administration was that of freeing teachers from other responsibilities so that they could give the needed attention to the tasks involved in the cooperative study. The following illustrations of specific ways in which the important work of the study groups was accomplished give ample testimony to support given by the superintendent and administrators, teachers, Board of Education, community organizations, and parents:

- The ten days which are allowed the teachers in Georgia for preschool and post-school activities were distributed throughout the year. These days were devoted to cooperative planning and evaluation by parents and teachers (the children were dismissed on these days).
- The local school board gave one afternoon a month for teachers to work at school while the pupils stayed at home.
- On some occasions, parents took over while teachers worked on curriculum prob-

lems or went visiting in the interest of the school.

- At times members of the Future Homemakers of America, the Future Teachers of America, and other school clubs were given an opportunity to teach while teachers attended meetings.

- One of the most popular methods of giving teachers released time was that of parents taking the children on all day field trips which had been previously planned by the teachers, parents, and pupils.

Some of the tangible results of such a cooperative project were:

- Some classrooms have tables and chairs instead of nailed-down desks.

- Children are writing more articles for the local newspapers and making exhibits for downtown store windows.

- Teachers and parents are making home visits together.

- One school has a new TV and reading room.

- There are evidences of teacher-pupil planning in classrooms.

- Every school has one or more new record players and albums of records for the elementary music program.

- Many new film strips and recordings have been added to the central library.

- A greater variety of art media is being used.

- Many new easels and reading charts are being used.

- Many more science activities are in evidence.

- Last year an art show was held in the American Legion building.

- This year a science fair will be added. This county-wide fair is being sponsored by boys and girls in one of the seventh grades in the county.

- Preschool clinics for parents and children are held at each school.

- One PTA study group has developed a guide for preschool parents.

- Parent-teacher conferences are held regularly in the primary grades in place of report cards.

- PTA study groups meet regularly and practice techniques of group dynamics.

- There is a new friendlier relationship between the school and community.

- More parents drop in school for friendly visits and to offer a helping hand.

- The supervisor feels free to visit most classrooms without specific invitations and to initiate discussions with teachers. (In Georgia supervisors work with teachers upon invitation.)

- Some of the most exciting times are the impromptu conferences held in the corridors, classrooms or on the playgrounds.

- Plans are underway to have classes for exceptional children next year.

Through this cooperative effort to improve the instructional program in the Rockdale schools, educators and lay citizens alike have felt a deepening sense of personal satisfaction and group unity. The experience has built a cohesiveness and a community spirit from working together to improve education. Perhaps the greatest of all benefits has come from the realization that a school system and a community are strong and stable and good to the degree that all those concerned therein are working together to achieve these ends.

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