

Connecticut's

Committee for the Gifted

To provide better opportunities for gifted students is the aim of a special committee appointed in Connecticut. All resources of school and community and the practices of other systems are being studied in this effort.

THE State of Connecticut has undertaken a project on behalf of gifted students in the public schools which is unique in this country.

The State Board of Education has appointed a committee "to study the question of the education of the gifted, to identify good programs and practices and to help disseminate information concerning them, to stimulate responsible interest in the problem, and to encourage constructive measures."

What makes the Connecticut Committee for the Gifted unique is the fact that it consists of professional educators and lay citizens working side by side on the problem.

The hope is that while school programs for the gifted are developed and improved, the resources of the communities supporting the schools can also be brought to bear in releasing the talents of our able students.

The committee is the end product of a conference on gifted children which was called in 1951 by N. Searle

Light, then Chief of the Bureau of School and Community Services of the State Board of Education. At this conference about fifty citizens who had themselves demonstrated gifts of various kinds discussed with Dr. Paul Witty of Northwestern University their own experiences in education and the development of new programs which might help gifted children. Out of that conference grew a continuing committee which was authorized last spring by the State Board of Education to go to work with the state's public schools.

The committee defines "gifted children" as including "very able children of all sorts—both the mentally gifted and the talented in special fields, potential leaders, discoverers, and creators in all areas of endeavor." The committee is focusing its work on the needs of the genuinely gifted, especially as other agencies working for able children in Connecticut are concerning themselves with the broader category of bright or superior students.

Beyond the Classroom

As a first step in its work the committee has undertaken a study of cur-

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rent practices in the teaching of gifted children in Connecticut schools. In June 1955, while the committee was making plans for such a study, President Victor Butterfield of Wesleyan University made an offer of real assistance to the committee: to finance and to help guide the study; to supply funds to hire a person for a full year to do a thorough job; and to help actively in the study.

Mrs. Helen Erskine Roberts, a noted specialist in the education of the gifted, was secured to make the study. In her work, which will be completed next fall, Mrs. Roberts will describe sample instructional programs and activities for gifted children in both elementary and secondary schools in the state.

As a Ford Foundation Fellow in 1953-1954, Mrs. Roberts made a study of educational practices for the gifted throughout the United States. Her report, *Current Trends in the Education of the Gifted*, was published by the California State Board of Education. Mrs. Roberts is on leave of absence from the Los Angeles Public Schools, for which she has conducted a workshop on the education of the gifted and has lectured and written on the subject. Her husband, Andrew A. Roberts, is one of the subjects of Lewis M. Terman's celebrated study of gifted children in California.

The committee has some subcommittees designed, in the language of the enabling vote of the State Board of Education, "to encourage constructive measures." The committee is interested particularly in encouraging forward looking experiments in special fields such as music, art, literature and science. Some of these plans may encourage flexibility in scheduling so that students with exceptional abilities may be freed from part of the regular school curriculum for special work in their fields.

To encourage the exchange of experiences, groups from different parts of the state will be invited to discuss their plans in orientation and development of programs for gifted children, in both round-table and larger conferences. The committee is working also with private schools and colleges, and at all age levels.

The committee considers that work for the gifted cannot be confined to classrooms, and it is therefore working outside school systems as well as within, with parents, community resources, museums and libraries.

The first active months of the committee's work have made the hope seem real that this group can be instrumental in rousing one state to the need of more appropriate educational provisions for all gifted children, youth, and adults.

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