

Uniting Forces to Improve Education

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The material below is abstracted from a longer article prepared by President William H. Plemmons of Appalachian State Teachers College. Permission to present this condensation was requested because of the significance, in creating a pervading atmosphere in education, of the cluster of forces to which the writer refers. President Plemmons, sensitive to the ways in which interscholastic contests and competition affect education, has recognized that whether "good or ill prevails depends on the leadership in education." And he asks significantly, "Does leadership know better than it will do?"

—H. GORDON HULLFISH, professor of education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

What Are Educational Values in Interscholastic Contests and Competition?

THAT INTERSCHOLASTIC contests and competition contain potential educational values will not be denied by many educational leaders. Yet, as many studies have revealed, these values are not always realized. One notable study of the results of national contests, made in Indiana by the Indiana Activities Committee, listed fourteen serious consequences. These ranged from "Interference with regular school program" through "Use of pupils for personal aggrandizement of a teacher" and "Desire to win sometimes develops unethical practices" to "School policies often times directed by out-of-school agencies."

It is not easy for individual schools to maintain interscholastic contests and competition on a manageable basis. For this reason such organizations as the North Central Association

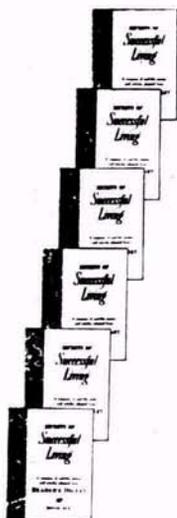
of Colleges and Secondary Schools and the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools have acted in an effort to place their power and influence at the disposal of member secondary schools. In 1954 the Southern Association adopted a principle it hoped would be helpful. It read:

All activities commonly classified as extra-class, such as bands, glee clubs, and athletics shall be completely controlled by the administration of the school, or designated school personnel. This control shall include the handling of all finances, including expenditures for capital outlay; the purchase of equipment and supplies; and the employment of and payment of salaries to all personnel connected with the activity.¹

The National Association of Secondary-School Principals, also, has undertaken to lend its influence and prestige

¹Proceedings of the Fifty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, December 1954.

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in support of individual schools' making public a list of approved contests and having contests evaluated by local and state committees. And, since frequent and widespread expressions about present practices in athletics indicate an increasing concern about the place they occupy in the school program, it is not surprising that the Educational Policies Commission devoted some eighteen months to the preparation of a report on school athletics.²

The commission noted the following values as potentially obtainable in athletics: individual development, improvement in skills and strength, better mental and bodily health, development of self-reliance and emotional maturity, social growth, and good sportsmanship. It found certain false

²*School Athletics*, National Education Association, Washington, D. C., 1954.

values attached to athletics, such as, overemphasis on winning, the glorification of the star athlete, the disparagement of the non-athlete, and the turning of school games into public spectacles. Moreover, it pointed to several positively bad practices: overemphasis on the varsity, distortions in the educational program, financial strains, etc.

Unfortunately, the picture is worse than has thus far been suggested. Interscholastic contests and competition are not confined to the high school level. This fact led to the publication in 1952 of *Desirable Athletic Competition for Children*. This report stated: "Interscholastic competition of a varsity pattern and similarly organized competition under auspices of other community agencies are *definitely disapproved* for children below the ninth grade." Yet pressure continues at this

level, especially in athletics, accompanied by widespread interest on the part of community groups, commercial concerns, state and national organizations, and the public in general.

The question that now confronts us is whether educational leadership, armed as it is with a wealth of knowledge that the study of the problem by many individuals and groups has made available, will insist that these activities contribute, in terms of time, effort, and money spent on them, their known potential to the total education of children and youth. This will be no easy task. It will require those in charge and responsible to see to it that members of boards of education, parent groups, and similar bodies, as well as the public in general, understand and appreciate the basic reasons for the very existence of such events.

Teachers and administrators should support and adhere to, by word and deed, the rules, criteria and standards developed by responsible educational agencies for the administration of these events.

Educational leaders, further, should acquaint news writers and news editors, including those of sports, with the schools' position on these matters. Educational leadership, in short, needs to assume its rightful share of the responsibility for assessing and seeking the real values in interscholastic competitive events. Its other alternative is to return to its previous position of toleration. And this, of course, is unthinkable. We know too well what the consequences of that position were.

—WILLIAM H. PLEMMONS, *president, Appalachian State Teachers College, Boone, North Carolina.*

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