

Uniting Forces to Improve Education

Column Editor: H. Gordon Hullfish

THE complexity of modern life is perhaps nowhere revealed more clearly than in the current need to bring about an effective relationship of school and community. In a nation which early realized that public education is an essential instrument for its proper development it does seem odd that so much effort is now needed to guarantee that the public remains sensitive to the significance of that which it wrought with so much of distinction. Education came into being as a formal undertaking in this country because the citizen valued it. It developed with amazing rapidity for the same reason. And it will be maintained for this reason. Yet today, when we work to create a public interest in education, we often forget that our schools gained their status long ago just because of the presence of a determined public.

The "rules and regulations" that follow below are beautifully illustrative of the point. They were adopted and posted in 1844 in what is now the Brattleboro, Vermont, School District.

3- RULES AND REGULATIONS
OF SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 1
ADOPTED BY THE DISTRICT,
DECEMBER 18, 1844

Things Required

1. To be punctual in attendance upon all the exercises of the school.
2. To pay due regard to cleanliness and personal deportment.
3. To treat fellow pupils with kindness and all with becoming deference.
4. To bring from parents or guardians a

written excuse for tardiness or absence, if required by the teacher.

5. To be supplied with necessary books and stationery.
6. To have a place for everything, and everything in its place.
7. To go directly to and from school, and to show proper respect to all on the way.
8. To enter the school-house in a quiet, orderly manner, and make no noise in the entry, or about the buildings.
9. To yield due obedience to all the regulations of the school.

Things to Be Done Only by Permission

1. To leave the seat for any purpose.
2. To leave the room in school-time.
3. To put wood in the stove, or open or shut a door or window.
4. To leave a study commenced, or to take up a new one.

Things Forbidden

1. To ask questions during the time of recitation, except by the class reciting.
 2. To make any communication, either by speaking, by writing, or by signs, during the time of school.
 3. To eat fruit or any other thing during school time.
 4. To cut, mark, scratch, or in any manner deface the printed bills, desks, seats, or any part of the building.
 5. To enter the school-house except by the door.
 6. To throw a ball or any other missile within or at the school buildings.
 7. To use profane or vulgar language.
 8. To use opprobrious epithets, or in any way insult a fellow-pupil.
 9. To put the feet on the seats or desks.
 10. To engage in a personal quarrel, or to encourage others so to do.
 11. To remain out about the buildings in school-hours.
- The punishment for violating the above

Rules is left discretionary with the teacher; to be proportioned to the nature of the offence. Repeated violation is to be referred to the Prudential Committee.

All damages done to the buildings, fences, and school property shall be made good by parents or guardians.

The above Rules and Regulations may be altered or amended at any annual meeting of the district, or meeting called for that purpose.

Now, over a century later, no such simplicity of relationship, even in Vermont, between school and community is possible. Moreover, given our vastly increased bodies of knowledge—knowledge to be taught and knowledge of what is involved in learning, and hence in teaching—one may properly doubt that a direct relationship of this sort would be fruitful. Further, and not of least importance, is the fact that public schools today are no longer supported by the homogeneous public which in 1844 was able to agree on these quite specific rules.

Yet we must have a public no less interested. This is clear. We must, however, anticipate that the governing rules and regulations of the schools will emerge from professional understanding. Thus it is that the public, once able to provide the pattern for the conduct of the school, is now asked to trust those whose special study has qualified them to provide leadership. Each citizen has a vital stake in this problem, but few have a chance to influence it directly. The wonder is, the more one reflects upon the matter, that schools are as well supported today as they are.

Actually, of course, the public was not without leadership in this earlier day. Harry N. Montague, currently superintendent of the Town of Brattleboro School District, has said, in response to an inquiry from me, that these rules and regulations "were probably prepared by

the Prudential Committee, *with perhaps the aid and advice of the teacher . . .*" The italics are mine, used to indicate the opportunity given the professional person (or the earlier equivalent thereof) to speak as an authority with his citizen peers. But this teacher, in this district, had *his* school (or his one room) in which he, and he alone, provided the equivalent of, as Mr. Montague puts it, "our total public education from grades one through twelve." He would, of course, be interested in the rules and regulations adopted. They were his to enforce, as his wisdom dictated.

There is nothing here which suggests a pattern for the present relationship of the teacher and community, except where (as might still be true of Vermont) the District (or Town) Meeting still passes on educational policies and programs. A principle is at issue, however. Our public schools are public and, in ways which the profession must yet invent, the public mind must be brought to meet the professional mind. The former cannot be dismissed because the profession may believe that the problem is too complicated for the public to comprehend. The public mind is the one "force" in education which, if its intelligence can but be extended, will offset the pressure of those segments of the total population whose vocal ability has given them power beyond their numbers.

There is no way to return to 1844; no informed person would want to do this. We must try, however, to invent the modern equivalents of those face-to-face relationships which gave the professional person in that earlier day the opportunity to be an educative force in developing community understanding.

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