

sand lot for a ball game, still another reads a book while another does her knitting. In the relaxed home there are these and many other individual interests being pursued yet group needs are respected and provided for. The boy whose talent is best expressed in science is left free to pursue his interests in his basement lab while his brother departs for the pond to practice figure skating.

The school which best epitomized this free pursuit of individual interests blended with high regard for group rights and activities was the Wilson Dam School when it was part of the TVA educational setup. Here individuals moved at their own pace and in their own directions in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere. Parents were helped to realize the rich rewards of the quality of learning when it was based on the unique needs of in-

dividual children. They grew to appreciate happiness and ease as the best accompaniments to learning. They saw the fabric of experience, rich experience, fashioned into a tapestry of vivid, lively education. Here each child more nearly lived up to his potential without pressure than in any other school I know.

This curriculum approach calls for faith in the principles of learning; for imagination, daring and courage as well; for rich and varied materials and equipment; and, of supreme importance, good, trustful relations among the members of the school's professional team as well as with the parents. The reward is to see each child growing into well-nigh the best person he can be, groomed with effective learnings to live with inner security ready and able to do his share in building a better world for all.

E. T. McSWAIN

## Who Should Guide the Public Schools?

**"The participation of lay persons in determining school affairs may be more productive when school people become more active in offering definite recommendations on important school affairs."**

**T**HE OPPORTUNITY and responsibility for determining the major objectives, general requirements and financial support of public education reside in the several states with the people and their elected representative body, the State Legislature. The administration and general supervision of the public schools have been delegated by the Legislature to the State Department of Public Instruction and the members of the school board in the various school districts. School boards appoint a superintendent and a staff of professional personnel to

provide educational leadership in preparing and in offering curriculum and instruction which, by professional criteria, promise to best serve the developmental needs of children and youth and also the needs of a democratic society.

The people have the privilege to share indirectly in determining the affairs of the public schools when they elect their representatives to the State Legislature and also the persons who are to serve the community on the local school board. They may make significant contributions for better schools as they accept and per-

form their advisory role to school board members and state legislators. The members of the school board are the legal representatives of the citizens in each local school district. These men and women, when they accepted membership on the school board, agreed to serve the people and the state by making final decisions on the affairs of the school system in accordance with state school legislation. They depend on the recommendations and assistance of the superintendent in the exercise of their legal duties. The people expect the school board to make policies and decisions on such school affairs as the building program, appointment of a highly competent superintendent, standards and practices used in selection of teachers, general supervision of curriculum and instruction, and preparation and expenditure of school budgets. The responsibility for the administration of the educational program is delegated to the superintendent and assistants; however, the authority for decision making on general policies and standards rests with the members of the local school board.

The involvement of lay persons and lay groups in any participation activity concerning school affairs should be planned to observe at all times the legally established channels of communication and responsibility. Lay persons serve the schools and the people more effectively when they safeguard the difference between the advisory role and the administration role in determining the policies and affairs of the public schools. In some communities, lay persons and lay groups have failed to observe this basic principle and have sought to bring pressure on the school board and superintendent to respond to their special interests or desires. Such instances have been the means of creating

misunderstanding and tensions which impaired the leadership and action of the board members, the superintendent and teachers. Lay persons and lay groups have the opportunity to present recommendations to the school board. They remove this opportunity when they seek to apply pressure methods. Decision concerning action on such recommendations must be made by the people's representative group, the school board. When the citizens are dissatisfied with actions of the school board, they may follow legal procedures in working to obtain a change in the membership of the board.

The National Congress of Parents and Teachers, and the National Citizens Council for Better Schools demonstrate in action the constructive leadership and services which may come through the participation of lay persons in action plans to improve the schools. One of the accepted principles of each of these organizations has been to serve boards of education, school superintendents and teachers in an advisory way and to refrain from direct involvement in the administration of the schools. The national, state and local units of these organizations have rendered valuable assistance to public education, communities and school people by sponsoring programs to help adults: (a) to recognize the importance of electing competent persons to serve on the school board, (b) to keep the election of school board members on a non-partisan level, (c) to work for better school legislation, (d) to examine the motives and accuracy of the criticisms and critics of the schools, (e) to understand the need for adequate financial support, (f) to examine the objectives

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of individuals and groups who may seek to exert pressure on the school board and superintendent concerning their desire for special interest changes in curriculum and instruction, (g) to study the needs and achievements of the schools, (h) to work for teaching conditions which will attract and keep highly qualified teachers in the schools, (i) to support democracy in education so as to secure more education for democracy, and (j) to sponsor study groups and conferences on educational problems and issues.

One function of the superintendent and the school board is to prepare and to present periodically informational reports which will enable the citizens to better understand the objectives, curriculum, instruction, special services, educational outcomes, and expenditures of the school system. A policy that invites lay persons to present questions, criticism, and suggestions related to the school system fosters communication between lay persons and school people. Indirect lay participation in the affairs of the schools is stimulated when all meetings of the school board are open.

The school superintendent has the opportunity to interpret the program and results of the schools to the citizens through the press, radio, and personal contact with various civic and business groups. The superintendent can be effective in stimulating thinking, fact finding and discussion on crucial issues and trends in American education. Lay persons should be afforded means to appraise highly the educational qualifications and leadership ability of the school superintendent. Constructive participation by lay persons and groups depends in a large measure on the amount of time spent by the superintendent in community educational activities. Lay participation by appropriate means suffers

when a superintendent devotes the major part of his time and action to managerial affairs. Much of the management duties may be delegated to an assistant, to give the superintendent time for leadership in community and public education. The superintendent should know and have contact with persons and groups who are active in various civic, religious and business affairs. He has the opportunity to be the communicative medium between the schools and the community.

### The People's Agency

The suggestion is presented that school people should re-examine their interpretation of the thesis that the public schools belong to the people. Schools are the people's agency to provide a specific educational program for their children and youth which they would find most difficult to provide by individual or small group endeavor. The idea that schools belong to the people should be expanded to include other persons. Schools are the responsibility of superintendents and teachers. The curriculum and instruction require the leadership and participation of persons who possess certain professional competencies. What may be the consequences to school people and the teaching profession if the involvement of lay persons in direct participation in matters of curriculum, instructional methods and evaluative standards is expanded?

How desirable is the procedure used in some communities to hold meetings and present questionnaires to determine what the schools should teach? A sounder approach may be for superintendents and teachers to spend time in cooperative study of conditions and trends in contemporary society and of probable conditions and requirements for living in the second half of this century. Their findings may reveal definite implications for

changes in educational objectives, curriculum, and instructional methods of the schools. Recommendations about what and how the schools should teach may then be presented to the school board for study. The school board may then inform the public about these recommendations and ask for their reactions. Final decision on the recommendation would be made by the board of education with the assistance of the superintendent.

Such a procedure may help lay persons to appraise more highly the professional leadership of school people. They may recognize more clearly the valuable contribution superintendents and teachers are prepared to make designing appropriate curriculum and standards for their children and youth. Improvement in the participation of lay persons in school affairs may be secured if school people devoted more time in preparing educational recommendations to present to school boards and the people, and less time in planning and sharing meetings with lay persons to determine what should be the objectives, the curriculum and outcomes of the schools. Progress in interpreting and thinking about the schools may be experienced by lay persons when they have the opportunity to examine the proposals and recommendations of members of the teaching profession. The writer does not imply that total responsibility for determining matters related to objectives, curriculum and instruction be accepted by school people. He is suggesting, however, that school people, to merit the respect of the people, should accept more active leadership in making educational proposals and recommendations to the school boards and laymen and to interpret the implications for improved education for young people and better schools for the community.

The nation faces a crisis in public education. School administrators and teachers in each school system have the opportunity to formulate recommendations concerning appropriate answers to such questions as these: (a) What should be the program in general education in the secondary school? (b) How much vocational education should be offered in view of the changes in conditions and requirements in occupational fields? (c) What provisions should be made for the students of high ability? (d) Should driver education and safety education be a part of secondary education? (e) Is it democratic to require compulsory attendance in school until the age 16? (f) What revisions are needed in the offerings and requirements in social studies, in science, in mathematics and in the humanities? (g) What should be the academic standards for graduation from high school?

Good schools are an indispensable part of the nation's defense program. Young people and society cannot escape the probable consequences of large classes, heavy teaching loads, and old model curriculum and instruction. The public relies on the vision, leadership and courage of school administrators and teachers to present recommendations for improving the educational programs for children and youth. The participation of lay persons in determining school affairs may be more productive when school people become more active in offering definite recommendations on important school affairs.

In the degree that school people keep silent on recommendations to present to the people, it may become necessary for lay persons to accept a direct rather than an advisory policy of participation in school affairs.

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