

St. Paul Teachers Participate— in Fact Finding

All staff members grow in professional service as they participate in fact finding, evaluation and curriculum improvement.

IN THE Saint Paul Public Schools, teachers and administrators place great faith in staff participation. They believe that the intelligence and experience of the entire staff are vital resources that should be tapped continually to help bring about improvement of the schools. Use of these resources has led to broad involvement and democratic action within our school system. Involvement with school problems usually takes place through in-service education projects and special group or committee activities. Membership on committees and participation in workshops are entirely voluntary. It is seldom possible to provide teachers with all the kinds of workshops they request. In addition to staff participation, the Saint Paul schools have encouraged lay participation in many of the school improvement programs and are proud of the contributions made by both groups.

Teachers have many opportunities to involve themselves in improvement activities. Each year, every staff member in St. Paul participates in one or more in-service activities and a large percent of the members serve on one or more com-

mittees or other fact-finding groups. There are always fresh and unlimited opportunities for teacher participation in fact-finding. Based on objective information, cooperative democratic action normally leads to improvements in education. The purpose here is to point out some examples of staff participation in fact-finding and some of the observable results. The use of fact-finding and recommendation-making committees in Saint Paul is so widely practiced that it is impossible to report on all such committees. To delimit this article, we will take a look at one of our newer junior high schools and its program, pointing out some typical examples of staff participation in its development.

The Junior High School Program

As early as 1917, Saint Paul was using committees to obtain facts about school organization problems and to make recommendations. That year a *survey committee* recommended that Saint Paul institute a junior high school system. The recommendation was acted upon and considerable progress was made toward a complete junior high school organization by an extensive building program in the nineteen twenties. However, in the thirties, mainly for reasons of expedience (school population pressures

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and financial problems) several of the junior high buildings were taken over for senior highs or elementary schools. Another committee in 1945 made a plea for a return to the K-6-3-3 system. It reported that this type of organization was best suited to Saint Paul and recommended "a return to such a system as soon as proper housing can be provided." More recently a *survey group*, directed by the Bureau of Field Studies and Surveys of the University of Minnesota, concerned itself with the cost of a complete school building program for Saint Paul. After making a detailed fact-finding study, this group recommended that Saint Paul abandon the remains of its K-8-4 organization and build toward a complete K-6-3-3 plan. The study showed that this plan would cost less and that state aids would be more favorable to this type of organization. A *small group*, studying trends in reorganization of education both on the national and state level, learned that there was a marked movement away from the K-8-4 to the K-6-3-3 or the K-6-6 plans. As a result of the recommendations of these various groups Saint Paul is now engaged in a building program that is leading toward a complete junior high school system.

Two Committees Coordinate Their Work

When it was determined that a junior high school building program was to become a reality, *two committees composed of school personnel and others* were created. One was to plan and recommend the physical features thought necessary for a modern junior high school building, the other to plan a modern junior high school program. Members of the second committee were to acquaint themselves with modern educational philosophy, with the generally accepted functions

of a modern junior high school, and with recent thinking as to the needs of young adolescents and the meeting of those needs. They were charged with designing an "idealistic" program achievable in 15 or 20 years. This second committee was set up partly in response to a request by a member of the first committee. This member, who was the schools' consulting architect, felt that new physical facilities should be designed to fit the program planned for the building. As a result, Saint Paul has renovated existing buildings and has built three new junior high schools that compare favorably with the best in the nation. More important, the committees have cooperatively developed a modern junior high school instructional program, some of it admittedly experimental.

City-Wide and Local Philosophies

Many school systems develop an identifiable feeling about schools and education but do not have a written statement of their educational philosophy. This presents an opportunity for teacher participation through committees to organize these feelings into a written statement. A few years ago St. Paul's *Curriculum Steering Committee*, thinking that there should be a written statement of "the philosophy of the staff of the Saint Paul public schools," named a *Philosophy Committee* to study and prepare a written statement. During its life, this committee organized several study and fact-finding projects. However, it took about four years before the committee members felt that they were ready to write a statement. Parenthetically, we should say that very often the value of projects such as this is not so much in the written statement produced as it is in the fact that groups worked cooperatively in studying and attempting

to solve problems, real to themselves. The committee's brief written statement was made available to the staff and to interested persons.

Core Curriculum Study

Many hours of committee work in workshops, university classes, and volunteer activities preceded the decision to organize core classes in the new junior high schools. Saint Paul had previously experimented with "double period" classes for several years in senior high schools. Before initiating these classes, a workshop was held with *each member on a committee* of his or her choice. After study, the committees made reports and recommendations. Most of the recommendations were accepted and put into effect. When programs for the new junior high schools were being discussed and decided upon *by various groups*, it became quite apparent to *the study committees* that core curriculum would be an important aid to help implement the functions and objectives of a modern junior high school. The larger block of time provides opportunities for emphasis on group problem-solving, teacher-pupil planning, socialization, guidance and counseling at the classroom level, and on many other activities that would be precluded by shorter periods.

Core teachers have been in the vanguard in taking advantage of in-service education activities. Many of them have attended local workshops organized specifically for core teachers. Some of these have been general in nature while others have dealt with specifics such as reading, art, parent conferences, arithmetic, and guidance and counseling.

Problems of Individual Differences

In May 1953 a two-day workshop on individual differences was held at a near-

by camp with 60 registrants, 50 of whom were classroom teachers. *Seven sub-committees* studied various aspects of the general topic, "How to Better Provide for Individual Differences." After the workshop was over many of the participants continued to serve on a city-wide *Committee on Individual Differences*. Interest in this problem area led to another *teacher workshop* in the fall of 1954. A look at our junior high program reveals that an attempt is being made to follow many of the recommendations made by the workshop group and other committees. In general, after careful consideration of evidence from the study made, heterogeneous grouping is accepted practice. In the school we are looking at, three exceptions exist. There is one small class organized for low ability pupils (with below 80 IQ). State aid makes this type of grouping feasible. Two classes for gifted pupils are being carried on experimentally in the 9th grade, one in mathematics and one in science. These have been initiated as a result of recommendations made by *teacher committees*. *Teacher committees* have also been active in recommending supplementary materials for these classes and for writing guides for instruction. In general, we believe that, as a result of workshops and committee work, teachers in this building have an increased awareness of pupil differences and are doing something about them.

Marking and Reporting Practices

Reports to parents and pupils that we use today in our St. Paul secondary schools are much different from those in use ten years ago. Here again the changes have resulted largely from recommendations made by *teacher committees* formed at *workshops* set up to study facts and trends in this area.

Activities Programs

"Exploration" is one of the important functions of a modern junior high school. In St. Paul, *committees and individuals* have been at work trying to make this function effective in the lives of our early teen-agers. All junior high schools have class periods scheduled during the school day, once or twice a week, for special activities to supplement those which normally come up in core and other classes. Some of our schools are experimenting with scheduling most subjects four times a week rather than five so that more time can be given to special interest activities. The student activities usually center around: (a) exploring career opportunities, (b) exploring recreational opportunities in the community, (c) exploring recreational activities in the school, (d) exploring useful hobbies, and (e) exploring opportunities for better human relations. All activities are centered around expressed needs of early adolescents.

We believe that curriculum improvement is an evolutionary process and that an on-going program of curriculum development should bring active participation to as many teachers as possible. We believe that curriculum study and improvement is, of necessity, closely associated with our supervisory and in-service education programs. We believe that there are always opportunities for teacher participation in fact-finding and curriculum development. Through the look we have taken at one of our junior high schools, we have seen this kind of staff participation in:

Studying to determine the best school organization for St. Paul

Planning the building and physical facilities to meet the needs of the program

Developing a modern junior high school program

Studying and then writing a city-wide educational philosophy

Writing local school philosophies

Attending workshops and serving on committees to better understand core curriculum

Attending workshops and working on committees to learn how to better provide for individual differences

Serving on committees to help write curriculum guides and resource units

Studying marking and reporting practices and then helping to devise methods of reporting in keeping with a modern educational philosophy

Serving on committees to plan and develop a vital and worthwhile special activities program.

These have been given as samples. There are many other examples that might have been mentioned. Our experiences lead us to believe that through fact-finding and follow-up measures, the possibilities for the improvement of education are unlimited. In St. Paul we are proud of the accomplishments of our teachers. We have found that by encouraging freedom of thought and action they have developed interest, enthusiasm, vitality, strong professional attitudes, and qualities of leadership. Their resources of intelligence and experience have given us a better school system. Teachers who have participated in the creation of something that they feel is good and important become proud and happy people. That which has been produced is theirs!

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