

Leadership in Defining Goals for Schools

The challenge to the educator is to increase public understanding of what good schools can and should do.

AMERICANS today find themselves in a unique struggle. It is a struggle for men's minds, a struggle in which ideas and ideals must generate great power for good.

Military leaders on opposite sides of the globe in World War II have been quoted as saying in effect that victory came to the populace which had the highest average level of *trained* intelligence. Americans are now faced with beachheads for survival. In this struggle the most important consideration must be given not only to the right of, but to the necessity for, every child to learn to the fullest extent of his abilities.

In a world-wide war of ideologies it is not enough to prepare for and to win military battles. We must nurture and cultivate those beliefs basic to the ideology which motivates our lives. That nation which most effectively and universally passes its cultural attributes from one generation to the next, wisely and not tardily meeting the needs for progressive change, will be victorious

in conflict with opposing ideological forces from within or from outside its borders.

America looks to its school system as one and perhaps the most important medium through which regard for the individual is engendered and its democratic institutions and practices are made secure. The school has become a symbol of the "American way of life." It is dedicated to the belief that every person is worthy of becoming the most and best that his talents will permit. Much is heard today about the lack of appropriate learning to meet the enemy in a war of ideologies. When the edge of the sword is education, it is important to keep that edge well sharpened.

It is time now for the critics of American education to turn their efforts toward helpfulness to meet the challenge of a new era. Analysis, appraisal and faultfinding of public education in America have reached a point of detriment. It is time now for a synthesis of constructive suggestions.

This is not to say that criticism of the schools by men and women of goodwill should be stifled. On the contrary, edu-

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Citizens work with their board of education and educators as a community team to establish goals for Midland, Michigan schools.

cation needs and welcomes the help of well-meaning, well-informed critics in developing a school system which will be increasingly effective in winning this struggle of ideas and ideals which is now upon us.

The first step in synthesizing an effective educational program is to define its purposes—goals in which the people will have an impelling faith. It must be a faith strong enough to cause everyone to work hard enough and to invest bountifully enough to assure success in achieving the objectives.

Citizens Committees Can Help

In the American plan of representative democracy it will be the people working through their elected representatives in school matters, the board of

education, who will determine educational goals. This is and will be true as long as Americans hold and exercise the right to express themselves through open and free elections. The members of a board of education who attempt to write their own goals for the schools without reflecting in a comprehensive way the wishes of the people will not find themselves long in office.

Yet goals in education are neither authoritative nor operative until they are formally approved by the board of education. And successful attainment of the authorized goals can be realized only in the degree that they reflect the will of the people to support them by their personal efforts and their material sacrifices.

Many school communities have found the use of citizens advisory committees helpful in defining a set of goals that

will serve as a rallying point for applying their resources to school improvement. The National Citizens Council for Better Schools¹ has assembled the stories of many communities which have used citizen advisory groups in developing programs for school betterment.

Analysis of the experiences of communities using citizen committees indicates that the surest step toward success is first to answer the question, "What should our schools do?" Writing from his experience as executive secretary of the National School Boards Association, E. M. Tuttle² emphasizes the values of exercising faith in people and of using citizens in developing working policies for schools.

Many school interest groups such as the National Education Association, the American Association of School Administrators, the National School Boards Association, and the National Congress of Parents and Teachers have compiled much helpful information concerning the experiences of many communities in the use of citizen advisory groups for school betterment.

The use of citizens committees in determining, "What should our schools do?" can augment the influence of a school board in its conduct of the schools and therefore improve its leadership role. Especially is this true when the board clearly defines the committee's sphere of operations at the time of its appointment. The following criteria generally have proved valuable:

1. It should be made clear that the functions of all committees are fact-finding and advisory to the board of edu-

¹ National Citizens Council for Better Schools, 9 East 40th Street, New York 16, New York.

² E. M. Tuttle. *School Board Leadership in America.* Chapters II, III, V. Danville, Illinois: The Interstate Printers & Publishers, 1958.

cation which by law is responsible for decision making.

2. The board should not make appointments to a committee until a charter for the committee's operations is drawn up in writing and approved by the board. Unanimous approval of the charter by the board will give it added strength and assure committee members that their services will be valued.

3. The job the committee is being asked to do should be clearly defined.

4. A date should be set for the committee to report its findings. It should be made clear that the committee is without power after that date unless an extension of time is requested by the committee and approved by the board.

5. The board should appoint only a nucleus of members to the committee, leaving them free to organize themselves and to add to their membership as the committee sees fit. This provision minimizes the possibility of accusations that the committee has been "stacked" by the board.

6. A board member might well be delegated to serve as liaison between the committee and the board but without power of vote on the committee unless the committee so decrees.

7. The president of the board and superintendent of schools, or their representatives, should be ex-officio consultants to the committee, but without power of voting or holding office.

8. The committee findings, recommendations and statements should become official, and therefore public property and subject to publication, only when and after these are filed in writing with the board of education in session. This is not to imply that progress reports of the committee are not to be open to the press and made public.

9. Committee members should be chosen on the bases of "the person for the job," open-mindedness, understanding and appreciation of the role of the school in a dynamic society such as ours, leadership in the community, zeal for good schools, time to devote to the job, acquaintance with the educational needs of the community and unimpeachable character.

10. When the committee has completed its work and submitted its report, the board should act formally to receive the report for consideration, to thank the members of the committee for their work and to terminate the charter.

New Emphasis in School-Community Relations³

In every community and state, laymen are coming into new consciousness of the potentialities of the schools for improving the social structure. They are beginning to see that many of the community relations programs of the schools in the past have been unavailing and misdirected. They see that the job of school leadership is not one of selling the schools to the people but essentially one of projecting and buying the kind of school which the laymen themselves decide they want for their children.

Laymen in effect are saying, "We already own the schools. The children are ours. Help us to learn what good schools can do for our children and for society, and what they will cost in terms of our collective ability to support them. We shall then decide upon the changes we want and are willing to pay for. We shall thereafter hold the school board

³ See Chapter VII, by E. R. Britton, in *Practical Applications of Democratic Administration*, Clyde M. Campbell, editor, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952.

and the administration responsible for securing that kind of education for our community." This interpretation by laymen of the place of the school is essentially democratic. It is basically the soul of local autonomy, or home rule, in school administration.

Laymen are becoming convinced that they own an institution, their school, which has power to improve life and living. Yet they are not sure that it is functioning to capacity or turning out the best product of which it is capable. They seem ready and eager to increase the capacity for production and to improve the product. They are registering a demand for enlightenment as to how the job can be done.

Since schools have arisen from the needs of laymen, since the legal structure of the state places on laymen the responsibility for providing schools, and since school improvement depends upon the response of laymen to actual needs, one of the first and major activities of school administration should be to increase lay understanding about what the entire program of good schools can and should do. What the schools do depends in the first place upon what the laymen in the local community understand that schools *can* do, and in the second place upon the participation of laymen in arriving at a decision on what their schools *should* do.

Key to Successful Leadership

In the complexity of modern life the role of the professional educator is evolving as one of growing stature in leadership. To define the goals of the schools required by changes taking place in a democratic society like ours requires action as dynamic as life itself.

Schools which are alert to meet the changing demands of a changing social order must be dynamic institutions. Adjustment to needs is a dynamic process in itself. This dynamic nature of the role of education makes several demands. First, it calls for a type of school leadership which recognizes how important it is for the influence of education to be clearly and extensively understood in the community.

The approach to increasing lay understanding about schools must not be predicated on selling the public a bill of goods. The people simply need to see the power of education and of good schools in improving the lives of individuals and, through them, the social order. Second, the professional educator in the role of leader must have the capacity to develop and to use successfully the procedures, devices and techniques particularly suited to the symbiotic character of his community. Third, the dynamic nature of adaptability in schools calls for a continuity of leadership which does not rest on its oars. Leadership must continuously pave the way to better schools (a) by raising the level of community understanding of the power that education can exert for better life and better living, (b) by generating potentialities for community action in making adjustments to needs, (c) by directing the energies of the community into constructive actions, and (d) by keeping the channels for action properly open.

If a community is to have appropriate education, opportunities must be given for popular participation in discovering and defining school needs, in designing ways to meet the needs, and in putting innovations into operation. Should the channels of participation be cut or

blocked, the dynamic forces in a community may spill over into irrational channels, with dire results.

The educator as leader must function not only as a chief teacher but also as a chief citizen in the community and as an expert in social engineering. His function is to point the way to the improvement of schools in terms of changes necessary to meet demonstrated and felt needs. It is not enough merely to prove to the community that it has good schools. The end result of such a policy is contentment with attainment, and this is the beginning of decline. The challenge to the educator is to increase lay understanding of what good schools can and should do, for in the knowing thereof is generated the will to obtain good schools. The success of the schools in meeting educational needs depends upon his skill (a) in identifying the elements of the community which mold public opinion, (b) in using the proper tools for opening the community channels through which public understanding about schools is increased, and (c) in channeling the participation of laymen in fulfilling their desires for even better schools. Thus will the schools entrusted to the educator's leadership become adaptable schools.

Leadership for school improvement cannot be monopolized. Democracy bears fruit when the best contributions from all sources are brought together into a plan of action. Thus the school program in a democratic society must tap the finest resources of its people if it is to fulfill its mission. Leadership becomes a composite force, powerful because it is activated by the faith, the energy and the sacrifices of the best that shared responsibility can produce.

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