

Migration Provides Leads for Curriculum Planning

*Needed, in any locale:
a liberalizing education.*

THE mobility of the American people is one of the significant characteristics of our culture. Many institutions and agencies of our society, and especially the schools, are affected by the high migratory rate of the citizens. It has been used as an argument for a broader federal support for education at all levels, for greater standardization nationally of the curriculum, for uniform curriculum and requirements among the schools of a city, for wide-scale televising of instruction, and for extensive use of tests in classifying pupils.

Mobility among school children is, of course, a serious problem for educators, and it has a number of implications for curriculum planning. The nature of the problem is indicated by significant studies that have been carried out by individual school systems. A recent study was made of retention rates in the high schools of 11 cities which had populations between 200,000 and one million. Transference between schools in the same district during the

four-year period of normal school attendance for the group amounted to 10.1 percent of the pupils originally in the ninth grade class used as the population of the study, and 16.7 percent transferred from one school system to another school system. In the three largest cities included in the study, Chicago, New York and Philadelphia, a group equal to 23.4 percent of the initial ninth grade membership transferred between schools within the same school system, while transference to another school system amounted to 12.4 percent of the original group. Moreover, 48.2 percent of the graduating class in the first group of cities had attended two or more schools during the preceding four years of high school attendance, and in one of the three largest cities the percentage was 38.0.¹

Migration of High School Graduates

As extensive as migration may be among the school population itself, the curriculum planner is also concerned

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¹ David Segel and Oscar Schwann. *Retention in High Schools in Large Cities*. U. S. Office of Education Bulletin 1957, No. 15. Washington, D. C.: Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office.

Table 1.—Place of Residence in 1960 of Graduates in 1933-37 and 1946-50 of the High Schools of a Rural-type County in Nebraska

| <i>Place</i> | <i>1933-37 graduates (858 graduates)</i> | <i>1946-50 graduates (577 graduates)</i> |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Same town as high school attended | 16.7% | 23.6% |
| Same county, but not same town | 8.9 | 14.0 |
| Nebraska, but not same county | 26.1 | 32.4 |
| Other states | 43.8 | 27.6 |
| Unknown | 4.5 | 2.4 |
| | 100.0 | 100.0 |

about another aspect of this phenomenon of mobility—the extent to which graduates of a high school leave that community and establish residence in another locality. To gain some insight into this problem, the writer made a study of migration among the graduates of all the high schools in a rural-type county in central Nebraska.

The eight towns located in this county have ranged in population from 68 to 2352 during the years 1930-60. Each of these towns maintained a public high school throughout the period under study. Obviously, some of the high schools were very small and the largest one never enrolled over 250 pupils in any of the ten years included in the study.

This county, although rural, is a prosperous agricultural region and is in no sense a depressed or a submarginal farming region. During the severe drought period of the 1930's, it was hard hit by crop failures but no more so than most other agricultural regions of the Middle West. During the past decade, pump irrigation has been used exten-

sively in the county so that by 1960 it was one of the most productive agricultural areas in the state, with many of the farm owners having large investments in irrigation pumps and equipment and in the machinery necessary to carry on a highly productive agriculture.

Graduates of each of the eight public high schools (there were no private or parochial high schools in the county) for two five-year periods, 1933-37 and 1946-50, were studied. The whereabouts in the spring of 1960 of all of these graduates was ascertained. The number of graduates included in the study was 858 for the five-year period, 1933-37, and was 577 for 1946-50. Thirty-eight graduates of the former group and 2 graduates of the latter group were deceased.

The present location of these high school graduates is shown in Table 1. A quarter of a century after graduation from high school only 1 in 6 of the graduates still lives in the same community in which he was educated. Another 8.9 percent still lives in that county,

but they do not have the same address as the high school community in which they graduated. A little more than 1 in 4 of these graduates live elsewhere in the state of Nebraska, but have left their home county. Forty-three and eight-tenths percent have moved to other states.

Migration Already Apparent

The graduates during 1946-50 have not yet moved about quite as extensively as the earlier classes, but migration is already apparent among this group of young adults. About 1 in 4 still has the same address as the town in which his home high school is located; an additional 14.0 percent live in the same county, but have a different town for a mailing address. About 1 in 3 have moved to another county in the state of Nebraska, and 27.6 percent have migrated to other states.

To ascertain some characteristics of

the groups who remain in the home community and who migrate, high school rank in the graduating class was obtained. Mobility status in relation to class rank is shown in Table 2. Some caution is appropriate in analyzing these data: Rank by quarter of the graduating class is not too meaningful in some of these small high schools in which the graduating class may have been as few as 8 or 10 pupils; moreover, ranking students for each of the 10 years by quarters resulted in some disparity among the size of the quarters when totaled for the entire county.

Two important facts stand out in these data: A significantly lower percentage of graduates who ranked in the top quarter of their class have chosen to remain in their home communities; and the graduates who ranked in the top quarter of their classes in 1946-50 have moved to other states in a much greater proportion than have graduates in the other three quarters of their class.

Table 2.—Place of Residence in 1960 of Graduates in 1933-37 and 1946-50 of the High Schools in a Rural-type County in Nebraska, by Rank in Graduating Class

| | | <i>Top quarter</i> | <i>2nd quarter</i> | <i>3rd quarter</i> | <i>Bottom quarter</i> |
|-----------------------------------|---------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Same town as high school attended | 1933-37 | 10.5% | 16.9% | 20.3% | 19.5% |
| | 1946-50 | 14.6 | 23.9 | 23.1 | 36.7 |
| Same county, but not same town | 1933-37 | 9.2 | 12.6 | 8.4 | 5.1 |
| | 1946-50 | 13.9 | 12.0 | 15.7 | 13.3 |
| Nebraska, but not same county | 1933-37 | 26.6 | 25.6 | 29.1 | 22.6 |
| | 1946-50 | 34.2 | 35.2 | 34.0 | 25.8 |
| Other states | 1933-37 | 50.2 | 40.1 | 36.6 | 48.7 |
| | 1946-50 | 36.1 | 26.8 | 24.5 | 20.8 |
| Unknown | 1933-37 | 3.5 | 4.8 | 5.6 | 4.1 |
| | 1946-50 | 1.2 | 2.1 | 2.7 | 3.3 |
| | 1933-37 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| | 1946-50 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

An interesting result of the data is the fact that about as many of the students who ranked in the fourth quarter of their graduating class in the earlier period have left the state as those who graduated in the top quarter. Graduates in the two middle quarters have not migrated out of the state as extensively. By examining the data for the two periods, we might speculate that the students who rank high academically leave the state in larger numbers fairly soon, probably because a much higher percentage of this group go to college and then locate wherever job opportunities for their particular specialties are best, but in time graduates of all types follow suit and leave the state in about equal proportions.

The data show the great extent to which graduates from a rural area, such as the county studied in Nebraska, leave the home community in which they were educated.

Leads for Curriculum Planning

The findings of this study seem to be especially significant for the proponents of the community school idea. In the early days of this movement some extremists among its advocates maintained that the community school, particularly in the small rural areas, should plan an educational program that would encourage and prepare young people to remain in their home communities. These data, as well as census data in general, show that people do not remain in their home communities to any great extent at all. Even if the idea were feasible, it would be unrealistic to plan a curriculum of a village or community high school on the principle that the school should provide a specific education for life only in that community.

Furthermore, a study such as this emphasizes anew the necessity of providing youth with a broad, basic general education, directed to the development of individual capabilities and a high level of citizenship, ethical character, worthy home membership, enjoyment of beauty, and concern for human personality. These will be the values and competencies that graduates of high school will need to have in any community in which they live. The fundamental aims of education in our culture are the same for children everywhere. These include the broad, basic goals of general education as enunciated in our widely accepted statements of aims and objectives. A narrow provincial conception of educational objectives is unwarranted. Continuity in education for any child is best attained by helping him achieve to the fullest the aims of a liberalizing education, regardless of the locale in which the education is obtained, but utilizing effectively the present experiences and the existing knowledge and insight of the pupils to achieve these goals of an education.

A third implication of these data relates to vocational training in the schools. Specialists in this field have long maintained that the secondary schools should emphasize the development of broad vocational competencies, rather than devote a sizable portion of the secondary program to education for specific vocations. Curriculum planners have long been aware of the desirability of developing broad vocational skills rather than narrow specific skills, but a study such as this confirms the soundness of such decisions. Certainly these data provide no basis at all for fostering a narrow, specific kind of vocationalism in the secondary schools of at least our smaller towns and communities.

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