

Organizing for Growth

when values are important.

GROWTH! Improvement! Achievement! These are verbal symbols used in education to express things we seek to do for and with people involved in the educational enterprise.

Depending upon the individual using them, these terms may imply a concept, a process, a goal as they appear in almost every statement of educational objectives. These terms are related to the work of boards of education, administrative and supervisory personnel, teachers, students, and to school patrons and community supporters. They also relate to school structure, organization and practice.

The controlling bodies of education are the local boards of education. We covet, for these boards, teamwork and cooperative action, growth in ability to analyze problems, skill in decision-making, and firmness in the conviction of the power of education. Boards of education, administrative staffs and all educational personnel experience a sense of pride as their superintendent grows in knowledge, understanding and performance.

Furthermore, they help to create an image of the superintendent as an educational leader in the school system and

local community. In their respective positions, all other administrative and supervisory personnel are given similar support and are held in similar regard.

Teachers, next to the students themselves, comprise the largest group for which we strive to promote continuing growth. The focal point of education, we believe, is in the teaching-learning relationship. All effort, organization and services should contribute to the enrichment of this relationship.

Upon parents and the general public we depend for continuing understanding support. Their aspirations, in a very real sense, constitute the lifeblood of education. Nothing is more encouraging than a real concern on the part of parents and the public for the improvement of education.

We may emphasize the organization of a school system to facilitate the continuing growth of teachers. Obviously, though, such a program must be organized with many people and groups in mind. Those who participate in such a program can help in their own growth. People bring rich resources to a school

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system. Through interaction, attitude and personal relationships they can help each other greatly.

Value of Education

The image, function and influence of the board of education are affected greatly by its legal structure. The action and expression of the board can help to create an atmosphere of high regard for the worth of education.

Reference may be made to a few critical conditions of organization and structure which strongly influence the function of boards of education. If a body or agency has a responsible function, it must have the authority which will enable it to perform this function.

In the case of boards of education, if they are to require accountability of their superintendent, they must have the power to appoint the person to fill the position. If boards of education are to pass value judgments on phases of education which must be strengthened, they must have the power to appropriate and secure funds to pay for such new emphases. This means that boards of education must have fiscal independence and not depend upon other bodies and agencies to exercise these judgments.

The real issue here is that a board must be placed directly in line of responsibility to the community for the judgment it renders. Under conditions not providing this opportunity the community at best is kept in political darkness as to how it may express itself and hold any group or body accountable for the quality of its educational program. Professional personnel may develop a similar degree of misunderstanding and apathy.

Normally boards of education should be elected by the people, and, to be

directly representative, they should be so elected. However, a careful study will reveal that boards are usually comprised of valuable members by any method of selection. More important than the method of selection are other provisions and conditions. For example, without the power to appoint the superintendent or without fiscal independence, or both, election of the board will probably add to the political hodgepodge. A board elected under these conditions will not be able to perform its full responsibilities to the community and to professional staff.

Superintendent-school board relationships also influence the knowledge and appreciation of the worth of education. This is true particularly if the board is granted authority commensurate with its responsibility. In order for the appropriate lay-professional relationship to be preserved, the superintendent must be able to represent education and a profession in his recommendations. Likewise the board must be able to exercise judgment of approval or disapproval on behalf of the community. Such a relationship helps a board to expect and to secure complete information and a high standard of performance. The profession in turn can concentrate on performance of its duties—knowing what good education is, knowing how to provide it; and being accountable for demonstrating this to the board of education and community. Failure to maintain these relationships and to exercise such roles may deprive the public of the opportunity to understand and act on educational issues and may prevent the profession from devoting maximum effort to the substance of education.

We may have to reassert our need for professional stature. Do we really covet a high degree of academic freedom? Are

motivation, incentive, flexibility and creativity essential in good teaching? Must on-the-spot, individual judgments be exercised in the teaching-learning process? Must educators be trusted with the direction of children and the full care and protection of them for long periods of time?

Obviously, in the organization and structure of public education these conditions are essential, and such trust and privileges can be granted only to a profession. A school system contributing most to professional growth will be improving performance through in-service education programs, encouraging and supporting education associations and fostering attitudes which stress the importance of the teacher and a high degree of dependence upon his professional integrity and competence.

Education associations must play a major role in the promotion of professional stature for educators. As such, they should reflect professional interests and concerns far beyond the work-day services. They should not depend heavily upon borrowed time from the school system for the pursuit of these interests. Neither should these associations subject themselves to domination by persons exercising assumed rights by virtue of an official position.

As organizations representing a professional group, education associations should adopt a more positive approach to service. A primary concern should be for the training for membership in the profession. By states and individual communities, associations should identify early in their preparation program those who plan to enter teaching and provide greater encouragement and assistance to them. Professional associations should become more active participants in planning and promoting adequate programs

of teacher education. They should also provide direct assistance in placement and in orientation to active teaching.

Education associations should reflect deeper concern for service in communities. Too seldom do they represent, by their activities, the goals and ideals which the profession assumes a major responsibility for developing. Local associations should pledge themselves to greater effort in promoting cultural activities in art, music, drama and other areas in communities that are consistent with the goals of education and the responsibilities of the profession.

Education associations can become a vital force in raising the professional stature of education. What group could better sponsor a community concert series or support a needed community study or research project than could an education association? We may be limited too much by our own self-image. Perhaps we might profit most from a renewed effort of giving coupled with a de-emphasis upon receiving.

Competence in Teaching

In-service education programs in a school system, building on sound pre-service preparation, may contribute much to continuing growth. Such in-service education programs can make excellent use of teacher leadership. While it is too much to expect any teacher to be an expert in every field, the faculty of almost every school should have at least one specialist in each area. This speciality should be utilized to assist and promote growth for all teachers. The principal should not feel responsible for leading every in-service education session. His best function will be the utilization of able staff members who are capable of stimulating growth in

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others. On a system-wide basis, those with similar strengths and interests should assist and challenge each other to higher goals and objectives. Such groups can always be concerned with making recommendations for new programs, methods, procedures and experiments. We should expect special areas to extend from social studies, through grading and reporting, planning school buildings, to parent-teacher relationships and the like. It would not be expecting too much for a school system through this approach to have, for example, a new school building—elementary, junior high or senior high—on the drawing board at all times with the latest designs and facilities incorporated for use on any day that the need might occur. A new

development in mathematics or science should and could become the knowledge of an entire staff within a few weeks.

Toward Maturity

Obviously, this requires an organization which places responsibilities implied on all members of a staff—major and minor responsibilities on everyone, opportunities for sharing responsibilities for leading. Such an organization will facilitate the identification of leaders as well as of persons who need assistance, a function so often left to chance unless it is a specific assignment. Perhaps from these activities will come more reliable bases for determining organization, structure and administrative procedures, now so often established as forerunners to educational program planning.

What do we have in mind when we suggest that a little more experience will serve to prepare a person for a certain job? We hope that he will show increased understanding and skill. We hope he will become a more mature person—less subject to snap judgments, with greater capacity of patience and a willingness to take more time and to follow a more logical route to conclusions. The test of organization will be the degree to which maturity is fostered in all persons in a school system.

In the organization and assignment of jobs and responsibilities, permissiveness is necessary. Only so can the individual exercise independent action and use critical judgment. Each person needs to be encouraged to make decisions and to act according to his best judgment in carrying out the philosophy of the school or school system. Such an approach will help the individual find new security and give him incentive for further creative effort.

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