

When Education Is the Center

SURVIVAL of the American way of life depends upon strong educational programs in every community of our nation. The strengthening of instructional skills of our teaching forces, improved learning by our children, and understanding on the part of parents, members of community organizations, agencies, business and professional, labor, fraternal and social groups are essential.

To effectively combat and overcome insidious threats to community solidarity of educational purpose, forces within each community must exercise every potential in their quest for a united posture of strength. The attainment and maintenance of such a posture depend upon four basic elements: (a) dedication, (b) communication, (c) coordination and (d) leadership.

Basic programs for all children of all communities must be upgraded. Programs designed to fit the needs of the academically talented, the mentally retarded, the physically talented, the physically underdeveloped, the physically handicapped and all others between these extremes must be strengthened. Taken into account must be many factors including the environment of each

child, whether this be one of culturally deprived, middle or upper socioeconomic condition. Also to be noted are the preparation of teachers, some with limited capabilities in specialized areas such as elementary physical education, gymnastics, aquatics and dance, as well as the fact that there is an abundance of men physical education teachers—many with an eagerness for coaching—and an undersupply of women physical education teachers at the secondary level.

Limited facilities, inadequate teaching stations to provide for good lessons in the rudiments of tennis, swimming or other physical education activities constitute additional barriers. Yet a community must rise above these lacks if programs are to be broadened and strengthened.

Fortunately, the people of many communities have recognized many of the conditions and problems and are already squarely facing them. Many are showing a genuine dedication in efforts to overcome the weaknesses and to embark upon a pursuit of better quality in their educational programs.

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When Citizens Move

To accomplish the purposes of the development and continuance of goals for a stronger education in the community, there must be a desire and willingness on the part of citizens to establish good facilities, provide excellent teachers and administrators and develop an outstanding curriculum. As in other areas of the curriculum, there must be strong programs in health and physical education under competent teachers. These teachers must be dedicated to the goals of the development of healthy attitudes toward life, toward self and toward others, basic skills of physical efficiency, basic skills for safety and for leisure pursuits, and a state of good health and general fitness for everyday living and for emergencies.

Citizens will readily support such goals if they know what these are, if they understand reasons for the various means used to attain such goals, if they see reasonable progress toward the goals by their sons and daughters and if they have confidence in the teachers and other school personnel to whom are entrusted their children for the major portion of their waking hours.

Yet how do we reach this state of understanding, confidence and support? Communications and human relationships are basic means to this end.

The author prefers to classify these elements and their application into four basic spheres: (a) the school community, (b) the parental community, (c) the organizational community, and (d) the general community. To be sure there will be some overlap in such a classification; however, for the most part the lines of demarcation will be demonstrable.

The school community includes the pupils, teachers, counselors, supervisors,

administrators and other school personnel, such as the clerks, caretakers, cafeteria workers, etc.

It has been said many times by eminent educators that the best means of public relations in the school program is for the teacher to do a good teaching job. This is true to the extent that the child learns and that there is adequate accompanying communication and understanding. A happy child, pleased with having learned something in school, successful in improving his performance, or motivated to intellectual curiosity will carry such feelings home as he relates his experiences of the day at the dinner table. A feeling of happiness and success on the part of the child will be contagious in the home.

In most communities about 25 percent of the total population is enrolled in school and daily goes through an educational experience. When these experiences are related enthusiastically to at least one and one half times this number of parents, acceptance and support for the school program will be the result. It behooves each teacher regardless of grade or subject taught to establish goals to be reached, to teach toward these, to summarize properly and to interpret what the children have learned in a daily learning situation. A brief evaluation by children and summary by the teacher at the close of each lesson will go a long way toward improving the communication and interpretation of not only what and how we learn, but also why. This is especially important in the physical education program in which daily activity is essential to proper growth and development.

The image of the community's education program is a composite result of one's information, understanding and experiences in relation to that program.

Each person's image will vary because of his unique role in the community, whether he has children in school, whether they are successful or otherwise, personal contacts with school personnel, what is read in the local press, what is heard over the local radio or television station, what is discussed over the back fence or over a cup of coffee, the personal attributes of teachers, other school personnel, the coach and his attitude and demonstration during the heat of a closely contested game in football, basketball, baseball, water polo or other team activity.

All these elements, and others, tend to form in the minds of the people a profile or image about the school, its program and personnel which may become lastingly favorable or lastingly unfavorable.

Perhaps one of the best opportunities for communication and the development of understanding of the school program is through the Parent-Teacher Association of each school. Specific techniques of developing such understanding are parent conferences, reports to parents via the report card or other specific progress indicators, such as reports on the scores attained on local, state or national physical fitness test batteries. Parents are exceedingly interested in how their children are doing in comparison with the general average of other children of like sex, age or grade. Such tests and performance results when properly interpreted often serve to inspire greater achievement efforts on the part of the children.

Illustrated talks or demonstrations are often more effective, better received and longer remembered than mere verbal presentations. Use of colored slides to illustrate presentations in the field of physical education and recreation has

become quite popular. Also effective are actual demonstrations of pupils' participation in various phases of instructional and competitive programs.

Use of the physical education demonstration as an interpretive device has grown in popularity in Long Beach and several other communities in California in recent years. The demonstrations are designed to acquaint parents, particularly, with the various aspects of the regular physical education program rather than to serve as demonstrations by highly skilled performers in such areas of the total program as gymnastics, diving or swimming, which lend themselves beautifully to "show" or professional type programs.

Physical Education in Perspective

The physical education demonstration, however, has as its purpose the creation of a favorable image of the school and its total program including that of the physical education curriculum. It is important, therefore, that the physical education demonstration be well planned and executed to present a picture of "the typical instructional program." The presentation should be dynamic, appealing and instructive and should enable the children participants and parents who see the program to go away with a feeling of pride of having been a part of the demonstration or of having seen it.

A physical education demonstration to be effective should:

1. Involve many children in the program.
 2. Show typical teaching and learning situations, condensed in order to retain audience interest.
 3. Encourage the use of student leaders.
- Parents enjoy not only seeing their children take part in the program, but are genuinely

(Continued on page 390)

(Continued from page 387)

proud when their children participate in the role of a leader.

4. Emphasis in planning and in the demonstration should be placed upon safety of facilities, equipment and performance. For example, gymnastics equipment should be checked prior to its use for safety and properly instructed "spotters" must be in place whenever any children are performing.

5. Limit the demonstration to not more than one and one-half hours. If the program is drawn out too long there will be a lessening of audience interest which will result in a less favorable impression of the whole demonstration.

6. Check all apparatus, seating, ventilation, and public address systems prior to the demonstration to make certain that they are in proper working order.

7. Avoid undue delays in the program.

8. Take advantage of having a captive audience of interested parents and friends. The principal should open the program by stating briefly the purpose of the program, making a brief statement of philosophy of physical education and its role in the total education program of the district, and introducing members of the teaching staff responsible for planning and putting on the demonstration. Needless to say the teachers and participants should be properly attired for the occasion.

Reaching Out

An on-going program of communication and interaction with various community groups is essential for all school personnel. Opportunities may present themselves on an informal or formal basis to relate the story, to answer questions, or to interpret the specific aspects of the education program. School personnel should readily and willingly take advantage of opportunities of involvement in several groups, organizations or agencies and should serve as participating members rather than spectators.

Serving as a member of a speakers bureau to bring to organizations or groups specific information can be useful. Too often, however, this service is used only at times when there is a campaign to put over a bond issue or to adopt a tax override assessment. Many community groups, including PTAs, service clubs and others, are anxious to have good speakers discuss topics of general and timely interest. Too little use of supervisory and administrative personnel is made for this purpose in many communities.

The typical concept of "public relations" is that directed to the general public via the mass media of newspapers, radio and television. To be sure, these are very important channels of communication in the mobilization of any community or of most campaigns. Yet if one half the space devoted to the athletic program could be directed to the broader fields of instruction of interest to greater numbers of parents and citizens of the community, improved communication, greater knowledge of the school program and greater support for the total educational program could result.

Much public service time available on radio and television goes for other use because communication and relationships with radio and television station personnel have not been established. An example of effective use of available mass media communication is the "Learning 63" program. This one-half hour weekly television program is sponsored by the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools Office and the Los Angeles City Schools. The program was started as the "Learning 52" program and has continued for the past 11 years to emphasize various instructional pro-

grams and aspects of education. Another example is the "Formula for Fitness" program that has been developed recently on specific aspects of the physical education program in the San Francisco Bay area. This is a series of 50 ten minute television programs designed for the purpose of emphasizing the need for improved physical fitness. Some 38 school districts and 500 pupils participate in the programs. The audience viewing the presentations will probably run well over a million.

Seeking and Giving Support

One of the great challenges of a community's efforts toward self improvement is the development of a spirit of cooperation and coordination of appropriate efforts towards reaching established goals.

For the past few years a luncheon has been held in Long Beach during National Youth Fitness Week, with representatives from every organization and agency being invited to attend.

The City of Pasadena has an on-going community-wide committee on physical fitness. Representation on this committee comes from all facets and agencies of the city. The President's Council on Youth Fitness in its new publication, *Physical Fitness Elements in Recreation*¹ offers a suggested plan for a Community Committee on Physical Fitness in Recreation.

Shared meetings, joint promotion, co-sponsoring or assisting with community events and participation on citizens committees are other means for improving a community's efforts in coordination for strong support of health and fitness.

¹ President's Council on Youth Fitness. *Physical Fitness Elements in Recreation*. Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1962.

Basic to any program of mobilization is a carefully conceived, skillfully prepared plan. This should involve a complete inventory of present assets and a listing of improvements to be accomplished. Goals for immediate, short range or long range implementation should be clearly established.

A cooperative approach can be effective only if there is dedication of purpose, establishment of desirable understandings and relationships, and coordination of efforts under the strong leadership of competent personnel.

Major Objective

(Continued from page 384)

scientists, doctors, lawyers, musicians, poets, philosophers, journalists, businessmen, and the like who cannot achieve their full potential because they lacked the strength, stamina, health and vitality to do so. . . . For all of our youth, physical education represents the best hope to develop the interests, skills, knowledges, and attitudes in regard to physical activities that will culminate in a strong, tough, fatigue-resistant physique that will bear up under the stresses and strains of the softness of our space age.²

This tragic human waste need not happen. It can so easily be markedly reduced. Concerted effort among educators will certainly be met with willing cooperation by parents, the medical profession and other community groups so that "every American child (may have) the opportunity to make and keep himself physically fit—fit to learn, fit to understand, to grow in grace and stature, to fully live."³

² Address at the 1961 National Convention, American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation.

³ Presidential Message to the Schools on the Physical Fitness of Youth. President John F. Kennedy, 1961.

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