

Winchester Community School: A Laboratory of Ideas

BARRY E. HERMAN

EZRA CORNELL stated the essence of the community school concept when he said, "I would found a school where any person could find instruction in any subject." This statement can best describe Winchester Community School, the largest elementary school in New Haven. The school has an enrollment of 750 pupils, including students from kindergarten through grade six and four special classes for slow and retarded learners. There is a staff of 42 regular teachers and an after-school community school staff of over 25. Besides the principal, there are two assistant principals, a full-time guidance counselor, two curriculum assistants, teacher aides, and many part-time ancillary personnel. One assistant principal serves as the community school coordinator of all after-school programs.

The school is located in the heart of a large inner-city neighborhood with a Negro population of over 90 percent. Housing in the area includes low rental high rise apartments, low rise apartments, new cooperative housing and

some substandard dwellings that are slated for demolition. Winchester Community School was specially designed and constructed as an institution for community school programs. It was the first of seven community schools now operating in New Haven. The school building is used from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. six or seven days a week throughout the year. It is used by individuals of all ages and by groups serving young children, children, teen-agers, adults, and senior citizens in the community.

The physical plant includes 32 classrooms; a full size gymnasium with bleachers, locker rooms, and showers; a 560 seat auditorium; a large cafeteria; the city's department of audio-visual education; a 100 seat little theater; a 5000 book library; health and medical suite; rooms for home economics, arts and crafts, music, and recreation; a community social agency office (C.P.I.); and many small offices and meeting rooms.

As a community school it serves:

1. As an education center—a place where children and adults have oppor-

self
control
is
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repression
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tunities for study, learning, and cultural enrichment.

2. As a neighborhood community center—a place where citizens of all ages may take part in such things as sports, physical fitness programs, informal recreation, arts and crafts classes, musical programs, civic meetings, adult education, home economics, tutoring, and leisure-time activities.

3. As a center for community services—a place where individuals and families may obtain health services, counseling services, legal aid, employment services, and homemaking help.

4. As a center of neighborhood and community life—the school as a place that can assist citizens in the study and solution of significant neighborhood problems.

In order to achieve a feedback between the educational programs during the day and the after-school programs, the teachers and community school staff are being encouraged to view the various services and programs as coordinated with a single purpose—that of providing more adequate and better integrated services to the total community school population—preschool, regular school, after-school, and adult.

School-Community Activities

Some recent and ongoing community school activities involving the school population and neighborhood have been:

A Paperback Book Fair, held on two days and one evening, where children and adults had the opportunity to browse at new books and magazines, make purchases and stimulate a desire to read all kinds of reading

materials. Books and magazines ranged in price from 5 cents to \$1.00.

H.M.S. Pinafore, presented by the children's theater, an after-school group which presented four performances of this delightful Gilbert and Sullivan operetta. The children's theater has now embarked on a new musical production.

Winchester Motown Review was a variety show benefit made up of local bands, singing groups, and dance groups found in the community. The program was initiated by high school work-study students who work in the community school program. Teen committees were organized and the teenagers signed up the local talent to perform free of charge in the benefit. Other committees handled publicity, making posters, and selling tickets.

A Tutoring Program for all ages is successfully carried on daily. The tutoring volunteers in the program are teachers, college students, housewives, and interested adults from the community at large.

A Seven Week Course in Negro History for parents, teachers, and community adults began after interest was aroused in a recent PTA meeting where multi-ethnic and Negro History materials used in school were discussed. A Yale American History major was hired to teach the course.

School Vacation Programs provide sports, camping, storytelling, recreation, trips, films, and many other varied opportunities for experiences geared to the weather and the interests of the groups being served.

A Teen Dance held recently was planned and organized by a teen committee to provide a social outlet for young people to meet under supervision. An informal teen lounge is held at the school two evenings a week for the same purpose.

A Junior Advancement Program is held four days a week after school for above-

average fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students. This enrichment-teaching program is conducted by a group of dedicated former teachers and housewives who are affiliated with the Yale community.

Neighborhood Organizations and Groups meeting at the school are given assistance and leadership by community school personnel when it is asked for.

A Softball League was recently started and teams will compete with each other as they competed when basketball was in full swing.

The Children's Chorus put on a spring concert of folk music, spirituals, Broadway hit songs, and perennial favorites. The chorus, with the music teacher as conductor, will repeat the concert at several other schools in the city.

Winchester Community School can boast a seventeen-year history as a community school when its first principal, Isadore Wexler, made a dream come true. He made Winchester School one of the first community schools in the United States. He organized committees, parent groups, community groups, and used the talents of volunteers to run community school programs.

Now with a paid community school staff and a separate budget, Winchester Community School has become a model for other urban schools to follow. Persons from all over the world have visited the school to see how the community school concept functions as part of a total city program in education, redevelopment, human renewal, and urban change.

—BARRY E. HERMAN, *Principal, Winchester Community School, New Haven, Connecticut.*



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