

# NEWS NOTES

by Bob L. Taylor and Robert C. McKean

## Textbook Evaluation in Dallas

In 1974, the Dallas Chapter of the American Jewish Committee convened a task force to examine textbooks for racial and ethnic bias. The 15-member task force, which is still active, includes professional educators and lay citizens; men and women; blacks, Chicanos, and whites; Catholics, Jews, and Protestants.

The work of this group is detailed in an article that appeared in the May 1978 issue of *The Clearing House*. The article is entitled "Correcting Textbook Bias: An Approach That Works." The author is Richard L. Simms.

The group reviewed books that are currently on the official state of Texas adoption list, with emphasis upon American history books used on two grade levels—five and eight.

The task force issued a 54-page report entitled "A Study of Racial Bias in Social Studies Textbooks." This report has been widely disseminated in Texas.

Officials of the Dallas Public Schools provided support in a number of ways. One of these was to assist the task force in developing a multimedia presentation that focuses on textbook racism and offers constructive ways for the classroom teacher to deal with it.

Simms recommends that interested groups in other cities prepare similar studies. As in the Dallas experience, it would require a period of hard work, but it can yield "many positive results in combating racism in textbooks."

A copy of the report "A Study of Racial Bias in Social Studies Textbooks" may be obtained from

the American Jewish Committee, 1809 Tower Building, Dallas, Texas 75201.

## Muncie Mini-Grant Projects

The Muncie Community Schools have a mini-grant program aimed at supporting proposals for programs that otherwise could not be handled through regular school budgets. An allotment in the regular budget has been reserved in the amount of \$12,000 to fund the program. According to an article in *Educator's Edition*, published by the Indiana Department of Education, "The grants range from \$200 to \$2,000 and are awarded to individual teachers or groups of teachers. . . . Grants cover costs of special equipment, supplies, honorariums for special instructors, and/or transportation costs for field trips."

Proposals vary widely. For example, special education teachers in one school turned a workroom into a Home Living and Learning Center for trainable mentally retarded students. The grant covered food and cleaning supplies to supplement a state grant for appliances.

Irene Marker of Claypool Elementary School secured a grant to cover the cost of fabrics, notions, and sewing machine rental for a unit on basic sewing procedures for the fourth and fifth grades. This was developed in response to her observation that many of the students frequently attended school wearing clothing with missing buttons, torn hems, or ripped seams.

"Other mini-grant projects included a unit on Indian history and

culture that included a lecture and demonstration by Chief Monganza of the Miami Tribe; a learn-to-swim program for third graders who were transported to one of the system's high schools for lessons; and a unit of study on careers in radio and television for which students wrote, produced, and designed sets for a television news broadcast, a talk show, a play, and radio programs."

Grants have been used for a photography course at an elementary school, individualized mathematics instruction, production and field testing of science games as learning tools, and for the establishment of a newsletter for high school parents. One ambitious project dealt with the industrial revolution and involved fifth graders in Washington-Carver Community School. A highlight of the instruction was the overnight trip to Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, to visit the Henry Ford Museum.

"Grant projects are evaluated as they progress and care is taken at the administrative level so that grant proposals and subsequent learning experiences are not duplicated."

## Required French

The York County Board of Education (Ontario, Canada), in its September 12, 1977 meeting, asked for clarification from the Minister of Education concerning compulsory French courses in the elementary schools. The board has planned to offer French to all grade one students on an optional basis in September 1978 with a compul-

sory course in grades seven and eight for those who had not taken it earlier. A Ministry of Education spokesperson indicated that this was not acceptable and that, if French is offered in grade one, it must be compulsory for all. The Board wants assurance from the Ministry that they will be supported if they adopt the compulsory position.

### School Boards Are "Persons" and Can Be Sued!

The U.S. Supreme Court on June 6, 1978 handed down a decision that held municipalities and other units of local government, including school boards, to be "persons" that could be sued for civil rights violations under the Civil Rights Act of 1971 (Section 1983, Chapter 42, United States Code). The case involved was *Monell vs. New York City Department of Social Services*.

Authorities believe that the ruling could lead to an increase in litigation against local school boards since it will become possible for plaintiffs to collect damages from school district treasuries instead of individual members.

The suit was concerned with female employees of the Depart-

ment of Social Services and the Board of Education of the City of New York who, as a matter of official policy, compelled pregnant employees to take unpaid leaves of absence before such absence was required for medical reasons. The suit was brought solely against the individual defendants in their official capacities.

The court ruled that such governing bodies can be required to pay monetary damages and to submit to declaratory judgments or injunctive relief when a governmental policy or custom is found to be unconstitutional. To an extent, the decision overrules a 1961 ruling by the Supreme Court (*Monroe vs. Pope*) that local governments are wholly immune to suits under Section 1983. One authority pointed out that the decision permits suits against local governments for violations of federal laws by local officials and constitutes a federal invasion into local affairs.

### Pennsylvania Study Identifies Rising Fixed Costs

A Pennsylvania Department of Education study has found that school districts in that state will be paying for increases in fixed expenses in insurance, retirement,

Social Security, and unemployment compensation. Based on data from 15 urban, rural, and suburban school districts, the department made projections that indicated a general trend of rising costs. For the 1978-79 school year, the projection demonstrated that fixed costs in the state's 505 school districts would increase by \$159 million over the 1975-76 figure. This represented an increase of 52 percent for the three-year period.

Unemployment is a rising cost over which schools have little control. Until recently, districts had not been required to contribute to the unemployment compensation fund, but a federal law now mandates such contributions. However, the largest increase in fixed costs will be for insurance payments—from 1975-76 to 1978-79 there was a jump of 82 percent for insurance costs.

In an earlier study by the department, it was found that school expenditures kept pace with inflation, but such things as fixed charges surpassed the inflation rate. Also, it was learned that the responsibility for the decisions leading to these higher school costs rested not with any single agency or organization, but with several including governmental as well as private agencies. <sup>17</sup>

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