the OAKES newsletter

An Independent Monthly Dedicated To Improving Public Education
Helen Oakes - Author and Publisher

Vol.XV, No.1 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania September 1983

SCHOOL SAFETY AND THE ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING

Nationwide, the public sees "lack of discipline" as a major problem in the public schools. Parents and school staffs are also distressed that systems seem unable to stop students from disrupting classroom instruction, abusing alcohol and other drugs, assaulting students and staff, setting fires, breaking windows, or defacing walls. Schools must provide good environments for learning if students are to give their full attention to their studies and get the most from them.

On February 1, 1983, Dr. Constance Clayton, Superintendent of the Philadelphia public schools, wrote to a large number of people asking them to serve on a Task Force on School Safety. She stressed the need for an "educational partnership" if serious school problems are to be solved. The response was excellent. About 100 people, half from outside the schools accepted: legislators and city councilpersons; interested citizens; and representatives from parent organizations and community organizations, the police and fire departments, the city managing director's office, mayor's office, and health department.

After the first meeting, the large group broke into smaller subcommittees and addressed five major issues: discipline, drug and alcohol abuse, graffiti, neighborhood safety, and vandalism and arson. A very concentrated effort must have been made judging by the comprehensive report issued just a few months later in June.

The subcommittees ranged in size from 10 to 28 people. Most were chaired by people not employed by the School District. Although all subcommittees met several times to develop their recommendations, they retained a high degree of participation and attendance at each meeting. The subcommittees sought information and ideas from the field and two conducted surveys. Clearly, their report of more than 150 pages cannot be adequately summed up in a page or two, but it is possible to give some indication of their thoughtful, practical recommendations.

The Subcommittee on Discipline stresses the need to revise and adopt a code so that students and staff alike know what is unacceptable behavior and its consequences. This is the only way to work toward discipline practices that are consistent, fair, reasonable and uniform. Principals must have a wider range of options to deal with students who are problems, e.g., transfer to a work-study program, in-school suspension, assignment to a small class for intensive assistance, referral to an outside agency, peer counseling, or alternative programs.

The Discipline Subcommittee focuses on two other major areas. They recommend that the School

District take a hard look at the junior high school organization which they believe causes problems, is unsuccessful and should be phased out. Committee members, seeing an unmet need, developed a proposal for model remedial-disciplinary centers designed to take disruptive girls and boys out of their regular schools, but also to diagnose their problems and enable them to become productive citizens.

The Drug and Alcohol Abuse Subcommittee recommends increased emphasis on prevention of substance abuse in the elementary and middle school years. Current national thinking is that the best prevention programs focus on helping students to learn to respect themselves, make decisions, clarify their values, cope with stress, and take responsibility for their own actions.

The Subcommittee recommends the formation of a district-wide Substance Abuse Prevention/Intervention Committee chaired by a special assistant to the superintendent and charged with developing a comprehensive, coordinated plan utilizing all available resources inside and outside the schools. They also recommend the formation of a Safety Committee in each school to plan and carry out the efforts to create an appropriate learning environment. A coordinator for each school's Substance Abuse Program would serve on that Committee.

The Vandalism and Arson Subcommittee examined the willful and/or malicious destruction of school property. Vandalism, including setting fires and the destruction of plumbing, walls, windows and locks, takes a major financial toll — $1.9 million in Philadelphia schools in 1981. It also affects morale and disrupts the instructional process, so its costs must be measured in more than dollars.

Steps have been taken to fight vandalism. Ten years ago, the School District began installing electronic security alarm equipment which protects the schools at night. There are patrols to respond to the alarms and catch intruders. These measures have proved helpful. Also, Superintendent Clayton has directed that an intensive effort be made to apprehend intruders and/or vandals. Once caught, they will be arrested, prosecuted, and their parents will have to pay damages.

The Subcommittee recommends taking preventive educational steps, involving parents, and enlisting broad community support. They suggest a campaign within schools to build school pride and to hammer home the concept that vandalism is a crime. Students must be helped to see that their school is in a real sense their home for a period of years. When they destroy or deface it, their lack of caring, concern and respect for property affects everyone.

The Graffiti Subcommittee identified most graffiti vandals as 13 to 19 year old males. Because most are enrolled in school, they can be reached by an educational program.

The most successful efforts to prevent graffiti in other communities have combined paint and ink removal with community relations work, education, and the apprehension of offenders followed by prosecution. The Committee recommends a major anti-graffiti campaign this fall. Existing graffiti should be cleaned up and efforts made to instill school pride. Students should understand that graffiti seriously detracts from the attractiveness of a school or community and from Philadelphia's ability to attract visitors and business. Defacing property is a crime and nearby residents should be contacted and urged to report

it immediately.

The Neighborhood Safety Subcommittee dealt with the problem of safety for students in and around schools. They concentrated on developing a plan which after testing in one area could be utilized throughout the city. They recommend that a neighborhood organization adopt an elementary school and join with agencies, parents, schools and students to assure freedom from harassment in school and safe passage going to and from school. Another element of the plan, successfully used by the House of Umoja (a remarkable neighborhood organization), is to enlist the assistance of young people from the neighborhood currently incarcerated in correctional institutions. Many are leaders with influence among the youth in the community and could assist in bringing about safer conditions.

The Subcommittee recommends notifying appropriate agencies when there are to be early dimissals so that students can be supervised as they go home. It recommends revision of a policy which sees tens of thousands of students suspended annually. When these students are out of school and on the streets, their time is neither well occupied nor supervised.

MAJOR EFFORTS OF TASK FORCE

The School Safety Task Force, charged by the superintendent to seek a "new initiative", wisely focused their major efforts on developing recommendations that can be implemented quickly without great cost, or on others that involve cost but they consider to be of great importance. An effective anti-graffiti campagin could be mounted this fall at minimum cost. However, several subcommittees recommend early identification of students with problems and the provision of assistance. This would require the addition or reallocation of resources. For example, counselors, provided with time, could work with small groups of elementary students that are classroom discipline problems. Early intervention would be likely to avoid later difficulties. Counseling service currently is limited however and much of it is allocated to special education students. This leaves little time for preventive service.

Viewed in its entirety, the report shows clearly that campaigns, education, and new procedures can accomplish a great deal without extreme changes or expense. It is also obvious that there are many serious, deeply-rooted problems and attacking some of them will necessitate fundamental shifts in attitudes, relationships and the climate in many schools. However, the possible results hold great promise. For example, several reports suggest that the School District must try to help each student build self-esteem and develop a sense of pride in her/his school. For some schools this will necessitate major changes. They will have to move away from utilizing only punishment and exhortation to improve student behavior because this approach doesn't achieve much and has little or no positive affect on the building of self-esteem or school pride. Instead, schools must develop myriad ways, inside and outside the classroom, for students to succeed and be recognized. For example, frequently updated bulletin boards can acclaim academic progress, or a good piece of writing, or a service to the school by a class that kept the entrance clean and attractive. Students see their efforts applauded and also realize that the school has learning and service goals which are being achieved. This helps to increase their pride in the school and makes them value it more highly. This in turn serves to increase their self-esteem. Destructive behavior decreases as pride in

school and self are built.

The development of an appropriate environment for learning is the goal for the achievement of school safety. Each of the areas dealt with by the subcommittees is related and successful efforts in one will have a positive affect on the others. Viewed from this perspective, the task seems less overwhelming and the prospects for making a substantial difference are enhanced. For example, a school-wide effort to clean up and beautify a building helps students to identify personally with the structure and take pride in its appearance. This leads to a reduction in graffiti and other forms of vandalism. The student has more reason to feel good about his school and himself. Also, as students and staff work together to improve the physical surroundings, students who feel alienated begin to feel less so and a sense of belonging begins to develop. Each of these elements contributes to a reduction in violence and misconduct, an increase in self-discipline, and an improved environment for learning.

The School District now has a series of recommendations to consider, but it also has completed the groundwork for a concerted effort to deal with the problems. The superintendent, by reaching out and inviting wide participation, enlisted the support of the individual members and the bodies with which they are affiliated. In discussing the problems and their solutions, there was a sharing of views and perspectives and the opportunity to develop working relationships. This will enable the School District to mount a more broadly-based, cooperative effort which enhances the potential for greater success.

The Task Force members gave generously of their thoughts and time. Many have indicated a willingness and desire to continue. All of this demonstrates that many people, inside and outside the School District, care about the schools and are willing to work hard to improve them.

The School Safety Task Force issued an excellent report that is not going to just sit on the shelf. Superintendent Clayton, having identified a serious problem, sought assistance in its solution. One can be confident that she is going to utilize the Task Force's work. She has, in fact, designated a high level administrator to work on implementation and those efforts are underway. 8/25/83

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BILINGUAL EDUCATION SHOULD BE VALUED AND SUPPORTED

Across America in the last two decades, many cities have experienced an influx of families fleeing from oppression or poverty. Controversy has swirled around the question of how to educate these students. Some of it springs from prejudice against the newcomers. Some comes from honest differences of opinion, or a lack of agreement on the goals. Should these children leave their home language and their culture at the school door, or should the schools value their heritage and develop their language while teaching them English at the same time?

There are those who hold strongly to the view that students lacking facility in English should invest full time in that pursuit because total immersion is the best way to learn a language. While this may work for highly motivated adults, it is often unsuccessful with children.

Children, lacking proficiency in English, have more than one important mission in going to school. First graders, for example, need to begin to learn to read and write and do computations. A child newly arrived from Puerto Rico who must learn English before receiving instruction in other areas falls behind his peers in what is regularly taught in first grade. Often, he gets so far behind that he is retained in grade and in time comes to view himself as a failure. This may well be the prelude to dropping out.

In a bilingual program where two languages are used to teach the curriculum, that same Puerto Rican first grader receives English language instruction, but also spends a major portion of the day learning in Spanish what other first graders are learning. Provided with books written in Spanish, he is able to begin to read. He can develop his vocabulary in Spanish and progress intellectually because he is not being held back by his limited English. Over time, as his proficiency in English increases, he is taught more subjects in English.

Since the 1960's, there have been large numbers of children entering the Philadelphia schools who speak other languages and have little or no facility in English. Last year Philadelphia served 7500 such children. Large numbers of children recently arrived from Puerto Rico speak Spanish, but little or no English. Other children come from many different language backgrounds — Cambodian, Vietnamese, Laotian, Spanish, Portuguese and more. The numbers have gradually increased and are projected to stay steady, or grow, in the next several years as more people who speak languages other than English move to Philadelphia. Nationally, there is no broad consensus on how to best educate these students who come to school with little or no understanding of

English.

As a nation, our urgent quest for peace and good international and trade relations certainly will be furthered by people who are fluent in foreign languages. It is also in the national interest to educate all non-English speaking students to the level of their potential so that they can become good citizens, hold jobs, and be lifelong learners. Yet our practice undermines both of these goals. Appropriately, we teach non-English speakers to talk, read and write English but we neglect the development of their facility in their home language and by so doing squander a national asset. We often fail to recognize and value the cultural heritage of those who come to us from another language background. This adversely affects the children's concepts of themselves, their parents and their homes and, by undermining their self-image, reduces their ability to learn.

THREE PHILOSOPHIES

In Philadelphia, the Foreign Language Division has responsibility for developing programs to meet the needs of students who come to our schools lacking facility in English. The first program started in 1966. Many have been developed since then. Current practice represents three different methods and philosophies.

(1) Many students who come from other countries are not taught in their mother tongues, but study English so as to understand, speak, read and write it. In Philadelphia this program is called English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Students are tested when they enter school and, depending on their English language ability, are placed in a beginner's, intermediate, or advanced level class. Teachers present subject matter too, but only in English. Students move into the regular curriculum with the English-speaking student population when they are able to do so.

(2) Students in a Transitional Bilingual Education program receive intensive English language instruction, but are also taught using their home language until they are able to switch over to English exclusively. This keeps students from falling behind. In high school, for example, recently arrived students who lack English facility can keep up with their classmates because subjects like biology and algebra are offered in their native tongues. However, because the school drops the home language at some point, many students stop learning it, forget what they once knew, and lose a valuable skill.

(3) Still other students in Philadelphia receive intensive instruction in English, but also study their home language on a continuing basis. The goals of this bilingual program are to develop intellectually in both languages and speak, read, and write both fluently.

There is one elementary school that is unique and demonstrates an ideal way to increase the numbers of people fluent in two languages. All the children at Potter-Thomas, which goes from prekindergarten through grade 5, are being taught a second language. The school population is almost evenly divided between those proficient in English and those proficient in Spanish. In the beginning years, kindergarten and before, those with English as their mother tongue are taught in English except for a small part of the day when they study Spanish. Those with Spanish as their mother tongue spend most of their time being taught in Spanish with a part of each day reserved for learning English. By first grade, the English speaking children are spending just over an hour each

day studying Spanish and that continues through the fifth grade. The Spanish speaking children spend less and less time learning in Spanish until they are functioning in English all day except for a little over an hour when they study Spanish. There are times when the children are mixed for instruction as well as activities. The school system should encourage these students to continue their language study and provide them with interesting and challenging courses. The system would then be contributing importantly to the resources of the city and the country. It would also give these students an advantage because they would have a special skill that would increase their employment potential and their ability to contribute to cross-cultural understanding.

Children who have a home language other than English come from a different culture. If they are to be comfortable and flourish in the schools, they must have confidence in themselves and take pride in their backgrounds. Teachers and schools must make the children feel that they belong and have a contribution to make to the school and the community. School staffs must incorporate history and culture into classroom instruction. They must provide many cross-cultural activities that help children appreciate different customs, values and attitudes and also foster the development of mutual respect and friendship. This can be challenging when, as at one school that I visited in the northeastern section of the city, there are nearly two hundred children who represent at least eleven different mother tongues. The majority of the children are from Indochina, but other countries and languages are represented too. This school has a teacher/coordinator who works to increase understanding across these multiple cultural lines. Activities, such as trips, bring children together to share common experiences.

HISPANIC STUDENTS

While Philadelphia schools have to educate students from many different language backgrounds, the great majority come with Spanish as their mother tongue. Representatives of the Hispanic community brought suit against the School District in 1975 because of their dissatisfaction with the service being offered. The suit ended with an agreement based on a November 28, 1977 Board of Education resolution. It called for trained personnel to identify students needing service and the provision of either a bilingual/bicultural or an English for Speakers of Other Languages program to all such students.

The Hispanic community remains concerned because they believe that many of these students are still not being successfully educated in the schools. They have the dropout rate to support their view. It is a strong indicator of how well students are achieving and how they view school and their education. Students from Hispanic backgrounds have the highest dropout rate in the system. In 1979-80, the latest year available, it was 16%.

In analyzing the quality of education offered to students whose first language is Spanish, several factors must be considered. This school system, like others across the nation, had no opportunity to gear up to serve these children. Suddenly, it needed teachers. However, in the continental United States very few people learn a second language and only a small number of certified teachers were bilingual. When the search turned to finding people who spoke, read and wrote Spanish, few were certified as teachers.

Likewise, fifteen years ago, there was no pool of people spe-

cifically trained to teach the English language to those who come from other language backgrounds. Because English is a difficult language to learn, teachers must use appropriate techniques and materials and understand the problems faced by the students. This shortage was another obstacle to providing these students with quality education.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is always an important component of a bilingual program, but the School District should move away from serving students just with ESOL programs in as many situations as possible. Wherever and whenever the School District has competent staff, it should provide a bilingual program that teaches students English and their home language and uses their native tongue for some subject matter classes.

ESOL alone should be available as an option to students and families who do not wish to study their home language, provided they have been informed about the bilingual program and understand what it offers. Also, ESOL will have to suffice in some situations where there are not enough students, even in a cluster of schools, to form a class, or there is no teacher available with facility in the language needed.

What exists in the schools today reflects past and present staffing problems and the lack of a clear policy on how best to educate students who come to the schools not speaking English. I believe that the goals should be facility in two languages, pride in one's own culture, and an understanding and respect for others. Therefore, the School District's policy should be to provide bilingual/bicultural programs from prekindergarten through grade 12 and strongly encourage students to develop their skills in both languages. There should be more schools like Potter-Thomas where all the students, whether their home language is English or otherwise, learn two languages.

Philadelphia can point with pride to some quality programs and committed staff, but there should be an emphasis on upgrading the quality of instruction and increasing expectations for student performance. There should be clear policy direction and vigorous support for the development of strong, high quality bilingual/bicultural programs.

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Vol. XV, No.3 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Nov./Dec. 1983

THE 1983 VOLUNTARY DESEGREGATION PLAN

On October 24, 1983, the Philadelphia Board of Eeucation and the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission voted to accept a Memorandum of Understanding that ends litigation over the desegregation of Philadelphia's schools for at least 3½ years. Superintendent Constance Clayton's newly developed plan for desegregation had been widely endorsed by community and business groups and received unanimous editorial support in the newspapers and on radio and television. Apparently, the Commissioners who had originally rejected the plan were persuaded by further evaluation and the plan's broad-based support to give the superintendent the opportunity to implement it.

The battle over the desegregation of Philadelphia's schools goes back to 1968. Many plans were developed in response to orders from the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, but they were meager and missing some very important elements. They lacked a strong statement of commitment, proposals for educational improvements to accompany desegregation, and expressions of intent to train staff so that they could promote constructive interracial experiences among students as well as transmit new knowledge and understanding across ethnic lines. All of these elements are included in Dr. Clayton's 1983 plan and desegregation is an integral part of planning in every area.

In presenting her plan to the Board of Education, the superintendent explained that two guiding principles served as the basis for it. (1)"Education is the paramount consideration. Any proposed policy or program must be measured by its impact on and potential for educational improvement and access to excellence." (2)Integration, the process that takes place in the mind and heart, is what we are striving for. "Desegregation should be achieved in such a manner as to enhance the likelihood that integration will occur."

Superintendent Clayton's plan, appropriately called To Educate All Our Children, has three major parts that complement one another. They are the Educational Improvement Plan, the Desegregation Expansion Strategy, and the Effort To Reduce Racial Isolation. The Educational Improvement Plan goes to the core of the instructional program for the School District. It can be viewed as the foundation upon which the desegregation plan is built and also as its lifeblood. It provides proof that the plan's developers consider education to be paramount. It makes the assumptions that all children can learn regardless of their backgrounds, quality education must be equally available to all regardless of school location, and all students must be able to function in a pluralistic society. It strives to assure equal opportunity and access to excellence by putting in

place a standardized curriculum and a systemwide promotion policy. Standardization guarantees that all elementary school children will be taught science and that no individual school or teacher can decide otherwise. It requires the introduction of decimals to all students in grade 5. The standardized curriculum provides a broad outline of what must be covered, but does not mean lock step teaching. There is room for teachers to be creative, resourceful, and to exercise judgment. A new policy currently being developed is expected to assist in establishing standards and raising academic expectations by setting requirements for promotion that apply across the system.

The Educational Improvement Plan provides for distinctive educational programs to attract students from different ethnic backgrounds to a common site. In the last several years, new magnet programs have effectively done this but, at the same time, they have attracted many of the most motivated, highest achievers to the detriment of the high schools from which they were drawn. Although those in place will continue, no additional magnets of this type will be developed. However, new foreign language or Montessori magnets, for example, may be developed for placement in existing schools, especially at the elementary level.

The Educational Improvement Plan describes a major effort, already begun, to improve instruction in the secondary schools in areas such as writing, history, languages and critical thinking. It is believed that upgrading of this kind will attract students to the public schools and facilitate desegregation.

The Educational Improvement Plan identifies as Priority One Schools those most in need of upgrading. They will receive additional support so that they can "reach their full educational potential." The staffs of Priority One Schools will select from two major options. They can choose to work with others to duplicate in their school what has proven to be educationally successful elsewhere or they can rely primarily on reducing class size, ideally to twenty, in grades 4-6.

DESEGREGATION EXPANSION STRATEGY

The second major part of the 1983 plan is the Desegregation Expansion Strategy. It has four thrusts. The first is the necessity to maintain racially balanced staffs. In 1978, the School District was required by Federal authorities to achieve staff racial balance in order to be eligible for funding. The School District now believes this is an essential element of a sound pupil desegregation plan. Unfortunately, the Federal regulations have been repealed forcing the School District to defend in court its position that racially balanced staffs provide models for students and can only be maintained if race is a consideration in teacher assignments.

Second, the Expansion Strategy identifies 48 schools which are targeted to be desegregated. For most, the method will be voluntary transfers. Attracted by the program it offers, students from different ethnic backgrounds will seek transfers to a common facility. In some cases, other methods will be used: such as changing the grades that a school serves, changing the schools that feed a school, or working to prevent dropouts.

The School District is working with a modified definition of desegregation based on the current ethnic mix of the student population and a recognition that it has

changed over the years. In 1970, public school enrollment was 36% White, 61% Black and 3% other groups. Last year, it was 27% White, 63% Black, 8% Hispanic and 2% Asian. In the 1983 plan, a school is considered to be desegregated if it is from 25% to 60% White and from 40% to 75% Black, Hispanic and Asian combined.

The schools targeted for desegregation were chosen by a logical process. Those already desegregated, those so distant that transportation would require too much time, and those identified as Priority One Schools needing additional support were excluded. A school was selected if it was located in a neighborhood where the school age population is desegregated, indicating that the school has the potential to be. Others were selected if they are more than 60% White. Almost all of these schools already have significant minority populations and their desegregation seems well within the realm of possibility. For the most part, the remaining predominantly Black schools are 90% or more Black and located in racially isolated communities. For each, desegregation would require the movement of a large number of students and it seems unlikely that it could be achieved at this time on a voluntary basis. In addition, there are simply not enough White students in the system to make it possible.

The School District expects to be successful in desegregating 37 of the 48 schools by 1986-87. If this is the case, 4300 students will change schools. 35% of these will be White students and 65% will be Black/Hispanic/Asian - a ratio approximating the general population of the schools and, therefore, equitable.

Third, to increase desegregation and make it a worthwhile experience, the School District will establish a Desegregation Support Services Unit with several responsibilities. It will assist principals, their staffs and parent-bodies in recruitment. It will inform students, prepare news releases, and encourage school tours and visits. This Unit will be responsible for appropriate counseling of students, getting transfer requests processed promptly, securing dependable transportation, and making sure proper orientation to the new school is provided along with assistance in adjusting.

Fourth, having brought various ethnic groups together in one building, it is essential that the process of integration follows. The goals are to have pupils associate with one another on the basis of complete equality and mutual respect, share experiences in and out of the classroom around common purposes, and develop friendships and understanding. This requires skilled adults who can provide the necessary setting and support. The Desegregation Expansion Strategy provides for staff members to undergo training to increase their knowledge, understanding and awareness of how to successfully foster good intergroup relations.

EFFORT TO REDUCE RACIAL ISOLATION

Many students will attend predominantly one-race schools even if all aspects of this plan are fully achieved. The School District will do all that it can to prepare them to live in a multiethnic society. The curriculum in the racially isolated schools will be augmented so as to increase student understanding of those who come from different ethnic backgrounds. The School District will make a great effort to provide these students with meaningful cross-cultural and interracial contacts. It will endeavor to do this by expanding the substantial

number of existing programs and augmenting these with other opportunities that bring students together. However, this must be a shared responsibility. The public schools must be joined by private and parochial schools, community groups, public and private agencies, educational and religious institutions in the development of programs and activities that will bring children together for constructive and meaningful experiences across ethnic lines.

Progress toward desegregation will be evaluated periodically. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Board of Education and the Commission on Human Relations includes a commitment to report on each of the plan's three components in early December each year beginning in 1984.

Previous issues of The Oakes Newsletter have advocated the assignment of pupils rather than voluntary transfers as the best method to desegregate the maximum number of schools. However, in 1983, demographics, geography, the climate of the times, and the overwhelming necessity for tranquility dictate that desegregation decisions must be left to individual parents and students. Some years ago, the proportion of White students was much higher and they were less concentrated geographically. There was an idealism, now dissipated, that inspired a striving toward desegregation which would have helped to sustain the process of assigning pupils. Sadly, the opportunity was lost. Today, it is of the utmost importance that there be an intense concentration on improving instruction and this can only take place if a calm atmosphere prevails. That leaves a voluntary plan as the only reasonable available option.

There is reason to believe that confidence in the Philadelphia public schools can be built in the next few years and that it will lead to increased desegregation. To Educate All Our Children merits support because it is a sound, carefully developed plan that has the potential to lead to the greatest degree of desegregation and integration.

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Vol.XV, No.4 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania January 25, 1984

COMPUTERS - THEIR ROLE SHOULD BE REEVALUATED

School Districts across the nation are being propelled into investing heavily in computers for student use. Parents, believing that their children will be deprived of future job opportunities if they don't take computer courses today, urge the purchase of computers and often help raise some of the money. School boards and school staffs view them as an important part of the future and feel it is their obligation to make them available to students. Enthusiasts make a strong pitch for the many ways they believe computers can contribute to improving education and preparing students for our technological society. With all of these forces at work, the number of computers going into schools is increasing at a rapid rate. This represents a costly new initiative which should be reexamined in the light of new information and circumstances.

Computers should be considered in the context of the problems facing education. One of the major concerns expressed in many recent studies of the nation's schools is that a great percentage of students are not developing higher level intellectual skills. Students can read and grasp an author's literal meaning, but they cannot apply their personal experiences and intellect to expand on the meaning, make judgments, and create new ideas of their own. Most students can add, subtract, multiply and divide but many lack the skills and understanding to solve mathematical problems. Students are not developing their abilities to analyze, infer, reason, solve problems, examine ideas, evaluate, or draw conclusions.

To correct this very serious deficiency in students, there must be significant change in the schools which goes to the heart of what is taught, how it is taught, and what teachers expect from students. There is a danger that the allure and popularity of computers will divert funds, time, energy, and focus from the difficult task of effecting this essential change.

At a time of scarcity, funds invested in computers will have to be taken from other parts of the school program. This is not a time when dollars should be diverted from the mainstream of education. Because part of the reason that students are not developing intellectually is that they are not reading extensively, Philadelphia should be increasing its purchase of books for inadequately stocked classroom and central school libraries. School districts will have to invest more heavily in science labs and equipment if they are to meet the new recommendations, already requirements in many places, to teach more science.

Across the nation, school districts are developing plans to incorporate computers into elementa-

ry and secondary schools. Yet, computers and circumstances are changing so fast, the plans may be outdated before they can be implemented. One of the first computers, built 38 years ago, weighed 30 tons and took up hundreds of square feet of floor space. Today, there are more powerful computers which weigh only a few pounds and sit on the top of a desk. Prices have nose-dived and information is processed thousands of times faster. However, computers are advancing at such a rapid rate that equipment quickly becomes obsolete and school districts must be wary of making heavy investments now.

HIGH TECHNOLOGY JOBS

Some of the reasons behind the public's enthusiasm for computers may not be valid any longer. The belief that high technology occupations would provide great numbers of new jobs appears to be untrue. According to late forecasts made by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, high technology occupations will account for only a small percentage (6% or 7%) of new jobs between 1980 and 1990. Earlier forecasts cited fast growth in these occupations, leading to the conclusion that it was a fertile field for jobs, but the high percentage increases were calculated on a small numerical base so they do not represent large numbers of jobs.

It is true that computers will be utilized in many, many jobs that today's students will hold in the future, but no knowledge of programming will be required for most of them. Computer manufacturers want their products to be easy to use, even by the uninitiated. "User friendly" is the jargon used and automated tellers are a good example. It is easy to learn which buttons to press to make a deposit or withdrawal and there are directions to refresh your memory should you forget the proper order. Other computers are, or will be, just as easy to learn to use. Except for students who want to become programmers some day, most students will probably not need the computer languages they are now spending time learning.

One of the arguments used to justify the purchase of computers is that learning to program teaches students to approach problems logically and to think clearly and reason through to solutions. Questions have been raised about whether this applies to the computer language that many students are being taught. However, more importantly, there is a lack of proof that this is the best way to teach students how to tackle problems and how to think.

Computers are the wave of tomorrow and students should understand what they can contribute, their use, and possible abuse. Computers are to information what the telephone is to communication. Press a few buttons on your phone and you can be in touch with people all over the world. Press a few buttons on a computer and you have access to masses of information which the computer is capable of rearranging or processing. As is true with the telephone, you don't have to understand how computers work to fully utilize them.

Decisions about the future of computers for student use should be grounded in an understanding of the equipment that is used. Stripped to the bare essentials, a student needs a computer keyboard and a screen. Information can be entered with the keyboard and the computer's output can be displayed on a monitor or screen. However, every time the computer is turned off, the student must start over. If she has more information than can efficiently be entered at each use, there is a need for another piece of equipment, such as a disk or a tape, to store and feed in-

formation into the computer. The same piece of equipment can be used to keep the information produced by the computer. Lastly, a printer is required if the information is to be recorded on paper.

Microcomputers have come way down in cost, but putting a significant number of them in a school, buying the programs to go with them, providing security against theft and vandalism, and training teachers to use them is a very expensive undertaking. Philadelphia estimates that just the equipment for one lab providing one computer for every two students would cost about $25,000. That would almost double for a lab with a computer terminal for each student in a class. Installed in every school across the system, the cost is projected to be about $8 million just for equipment.

Programs, which provide the necessary instructions for the computer, are called "software." Like textbooks, programs of high quality are difficult and time consuming to develop. Software is very hard to protect against copying, gauging what will sell is difficult, and the demand is not yet great. For these and other reasons, many of the programs being produced are of inferior quality and many carry high price tags. It is essential to screen carefully before purchasing, even though this is a time consuming process. As an additional hurdle, programs may be incompatible with a particular computer system.

Computers may be used in the classroom in several different ways. Computer-assisted instruction is a present use. It supplements the teacher's work by providing drill and practice and is seen as a way to help students memorize such things as math facts. The computer has infinite patience, rewards right answers with praise, and may be programmed to select further exercises when a student's performance indicates that they are needed. The computer is also used as a tutor. Ideas or concepts are broken down into small steps that are taught in a sequence. It is appropriate to question the use of computers for these purposes. Are these the best and the least expensive ways for students to learn material of this kind? Over a period of time, does the computer offer advantages over workbooks or over students acting as tutors? These uses put the computers in charge of the students and therefore do not contribute to students learning to control the computer and to use it as the tool that it is.

Computers are praised for their ability to simulate situations from which students can learn. One such program deals with a 2000 mile journey from Missouri to Oregon occurring in the middle of the 19th century. Students are given a fixed amount of money before the trip begins and must decide how much to spend on items like food, ammunition, and clothing. As they progress along the trail, the computer indicates they face problems such as bad weather, Indian attacks, and sickness. Based on decisionsmade in advance and along the way, they die en route or arrive at their destination. Used apart from other study and reading, many students would experience this simulation as only a game with little or no historical impact or significance. If, on the other hand, it were to follow a study of historical, fictional, and firsthand accounts of such an experience, it might well increase student understanding.

COMPUTER LITERACY

Many people believe that it is essential that all students be "computer literate" when they leave school. Unfortunately, there is no agreement on what is meant by this term. It can include understanding how to use computers

and how they work, learning to program, the history of computers, the use and possible misuses of computers in society, and knowing about jobs and careers involving computers. There is controversy about how much emphasis there should be on programming. There is too little stress on using the computer as a tool so that students acquire the facility to get and process information electronically.

School decision makers should take another look at the role of computers in the schools. There is no question about the contribution of computers to the achievement of efficient administration. School systems have mountains of data that can be used to great advantage when speedily processed by a computer and made available. A computer with the proper data entered into it can tell you in an instant how many teachers are one year from retirement age or what schools need roof repairs. Used as a tool to improve the quality of decision making, it saves hundreds of hours of time which then can be used to provide human services.

Students too should have the chance to utilize the computer as the tool that it is. They should have opportunities in their regular course work to get and/or process information from a computer that is directly related to what they are studying. In this way, students would learn the value and significance of the computer as an adjunct to learning and better understand its wide applicability and usefulness. This is a most important use that is not getting enough consideration, nor the priority that it deserves.

The technological society that is upon us demands much more than low level skills and minimum competencies. Students must develop high level intellectual skills if they are to be properly prepared for tomorrow's job market, ready to assume their responsibilities as citizens, and able to develop their own potential. School systems must concentrate their financial and human resources on the achievement of this difficult task.

Computers have a place in the schools. What must be decided is how they should be used, by what age students, and how many are needed. Their purchase must mesh with broad school district goals, reasoned priorities, and limited resources.

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the OAKES newsletter

An Independent Monthly Dedicated To Improving Public Education
Helen Oakes - Author and Publisher

Vol.XV, No.5 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania February 1984

PROPOSALS AND EFFORTS TO IMPROVE PUBLIC EDUCATION

1983 saw the publication of many reports and books about the nation's schools. They identify much that is wrong and make numerous suggestions for change to bring about the improvement that is so essential. In several cases, the research for them was begun three or more years ago. Clearly, there has been deep concern for some time. The members of the task forces that developed the reports came from diverse occupational backgrounds and interests. It is encouraging that there is such a great stress on public education. It indicates a national recognition that the public schools are of vital importance to the nation and their quality directly affects its economic, political and social health.

Although the various studies and reports contain a vast number of recommendations for improving the schools, there are three recurring themes that stand out. The teaching profession must be elevated, students must learn more, and the broad community must be involved in the improvement of the schools.

If public schools are to attract the most able young people to teaching and to hold and inspire the best of the teachers already in the classrooms, prestige must be restored to the teaching profession and it must be made clear that good teaching is appreciated and valued. Confidence in and support for schools has decreased over the last two decades as criticism of low test scores mounted, employers complained bitterly about inadequately prepared employees, and colleges found great numbers of high school graduates requiring remedial help before they could begin college level work. Matters were worsened by teachers' strikes with all that surrounds such bitter conflicts. Over this period, teachers suffered a loss of esteem.

Unfortunately, there are few rewards that come to teachers other than the personal satisfaction derived from helping students to learn. Teachers seldom receive expressions of appreciation from the parents of their students or anyone else. School districts make no distinction between those who excel in the classroom with their students and those whose performance is mediocre at best.

There were many suggestions in the reports for making teaching more rewarding and improving the caliber of those entering the profession. Teachers' salaries should be more competitive with other professionals. They should be raised to reward teachers appropriately for undertaking one of society's most important jobs — the education of its youth. There should be career ladders so excellent teachers could be promoted, assume additional responsibilities, receive increased salaries

and stay in the classroom. Individual teachers who do an outstanding job should be acknowledged, rewarded and honored.

It is essential that there be higher standards for entry into teaching. In order to be accepted, students should be required to have maintained good grades and to provide supportive recommendations.

A second theme that is almost universal in the reports is that students must learn more and develop higher order thinking skills. There is a general view that if students are to be prepared for their futures, they must take more demanding academic courses. It is suggested that requirements for graduation be increased in almost every area: English, mathematics, science, social studies, arts and the humanities. Also, the reports stress the idea that minimal competence in reading, writing and computing is not enough. Students must develop their abilities to analyze, reason, synthesize, critically evaluate, and solve problems.

Recently published books, based on lengthy studies of schools across the nation, echo this second theme and reveal the problem to be one that will require great change to correct. Observers in hundreds of classrooms found that students are expected to sit docilely while teachers lecture to them, assign them pages in a textbook to read, and then test them on what they are supposed to have learned. In most classrooms, there is little or no attempt to inspire students to learn on their own or to become intellectually engaged in learning. The authors concluded that mandating more courses with more challenging content will not be enough. There must be substantial change in how students are taught. Teachers must adopt new approaches in the classroom if they are to effectively help students to become independent, critical thinkers and resourceful, problem-solving adults.

Lastly, several reports strongly recommend the development of partnerships with business, institutions of higher education, and agencies in order to strengthen the schools and bring about the necessary changes and improvements. School systems can benefit from the interest and active participation of small and big business; colleges and universities; city, state and private agencies; and individual volunteers. Cooperative arrangements and partnerships lead to new ideas, more people working on school problems, more people working with students and staff, and increased support for the schools' needs.

ACTION NEEDED

One of the reports, Action For Excellence, was published by the Task Force on Education for Economic Growth. The Task Force was chaired by Governor James B. Hunt of North Carolina and included Pennsylvania's Governor Dick Thornburgh, 11 other governors, 13 business leaders, state legislators, educators and others. Citing a wealth of available research and analyses, this report stresses the need to act and proposes a plan for action supported by a series of recommendations.

At Governor Thornburgh's direction, Pennsylvania has developed its own action plan. Turning the Tide: An Agenda for Excellence in Pennsylvania Public Schools calls for "compatible and mutually supportive actions at both the state and local levels."

The first recommendation on the Agenda is to raise standards by increasing the requirements for graduation. In grades 9-12, students would be required to take four years of English; three years each of mathematics, science, and social studies, two of arts and

humanities, five other course electives, and health and physical education. This adds up to 21 credits over four years instead of 13 credits over three years as it is now.

The Agenda proposes annual testing of students in grades 3,5, and 8 for competence in mathematics and reading. Those failing would be required to take remedial work to improve their skills. It is believed that this early identification and treatment of problems will help students "to successfully complete their education with superior, not minimum, achievements."

In an effort to stimulate high school students to strive for high achievement, the Agenda calls for a Pennsylvania Honors Program. Students would take a rigorous exam based on a demanding four year curriculum. Those meeting the agreed upon score would receive a special diploma. Also, the top one percent of all students passing the test each year would be given a state Honors Scholarship of $1000 to be applied to the cost of continuing their education.

The governor's plan also calls for the Commonwealth to set higher standards for women and men training to be teachers. Programs would be upgraded to attract a higher caliber of student and to provide a stronger, more challenging program. Basic skills and knowledge in a particular subject area would then be tested to ascertain if the new teachers are prepared to take their places in the classroom. The plan urges school districts to give awards and recognition to excellent teachers. It suggests a $2000 "Excellence in Teaching" state award which would be given to up to 5% of each district's finest teachers each year.

Many of the suggested initiatives for local school districts spelled out in the Agenda were already under way in Philadelphia under the leadership of its superintendent, Dr. Constance Clayton. The School District is working closely with The Committee to Support Philadelphia Public Schools. This recently formed organization has a board of directors which includes chief executive officers from some of the city's largest corporations and presidents of several colleges and universities. The Committee has announced a privately-financed $2 million program to promote the humanities in the schools over the next three years. It plans to work in other areas to support public education and bring community resources to bear on the schools.

THE GOALS

Among Dr. Clayton's most significant early initiatives was the development of a statement of Philosophy, Mission and Goals for the School District. It is an eleven page document which makes it clear that the School District is dedicated to achieving excellence, believes that "all children can learn", and will strive to stimulate the efforts of all students and staff toward "lifelong learning as competent and productive human beings." There are four broad curriculum goals which speak to intellectual competence, the development of "human values emphasizing interdependence between people", citizenship skills, and career preparation skills. For each separate area of the curriculum (reading, writing, science, the arts, mathematics, human values etc.), there are specific goals. For example, under reasoning, one goal is the "ability to collect, organize, and evaluate data for application in problem solving." The goals focus on what students are expected to be able to do by the time they finish school. The goals are broad and worthy in keeping with the thrusts urged by the recent reports. They

should provide the School District with a vision of what it should be seeking to accomplish and give it a base upon which to build its program for teaching and learning.

During Dr. Clayton's time in office, efforts have been made to routinize the assignment of homework, improve discipline and the climate of safety in the schools, reduce student and staff absence, and raise expectations for performance. Other initiatives are under current development. A promotion policy will establish standards of achievement needed for promotion from one grade to the next and plan for remedial services for those falling behind. A standardized curriculum will provide a broad outline of what teachers must cover. It is intended to insure similar offerings to students no matter what school they attend. A new testing program will replace the outmoded California Achievement Test. The new test will be directly linked to what is being taught in Philadelphia classrooms, however it will also enable Philadelphia to compare itself with the nation, just as it has done in the past.

* * * * * * * * * * * *

While the entire community can assist in helping students see a reason for learning, it is primarily up to teachers. They are the ones who must energize students to apply themselves. They must help students to experience the rewards of working hard to understand a difficult concept or to produce themes that clearly and correctly state their thoughts. Teachers must make learning meaningful by creating student interest in what is being taught. A school day devoted to trying to pour facts into students' minds via lectures and tests doesn't work. It will not be easy for teachers to modify what they are doing now, but it must happen.

Substantial and fundamental changes must take place in schools. Primarily, they must evolve at the local school level where professional staffs must develop plans to meet the School District's goals and their own. No one should expect this to occur quickly. Change is difficult and no one is certain about how to proceed. Expectations for marked improvement in a short period of time can only lead to disappointment and frustration. This could jeopardize a rare and important opportunity to make our schools into institutions that better serve our youth and our country.

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An Independent Monthly Dedicated To Improving Public Education
Helen Oakes - Author and Publisher

Vol.XV, No.6 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania March 1984

CREATING A CLIMATE FOR LEARNING IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS

There has been a concentration on early childhood and elementary education for two decades. Now, it is time to focus on high schools. We can no longer afford to turn away from working to improve the high schools because what students know when they leave the system is what counts. They must be better prepared to assume their three important lifetime roles of fulfilling their citizenship responsibilities, earning an income, and continuing to learn.

As a result of the effort and resources put into the early years, standardized test scores in the lower grades have gone up. Unfortunately, the expected resultant improvement of achievement in the secondary schools has not followed. The litany has been recited over and over of high dropout rates, illiteracy, and students lacking the skills needed by employers.

High schools face enormous problems. Thousands of ill-prepared students are disinterested in their courses. They have poor attendance and cut classes. Statistics tell the story. One typical month this school year, 7 out of 31 high schools in Philadelphia had average attendance rates between 55% and 69% and 9 had rates from 70% to 79%. A rate of 69% means that ten students out of a class of 33 are absent every day and are not learning. Some students don't attend all of their classes. One high school that has kept accurate records and is working hard to reduce cutting reports that its students cut over 14,000 classes last year. 18% of the student body are considered to be chronic cutters.

Schools must contend with serious student misconduct such as carrying weapons, selling drugs, or assaults on students and teachers. Also, there are the less serious offenses such as abusive language or disrupting classes which also detract from the achievement of a climate for learning.

Thousands of students have difficulty in concentrating on their studies because they must struggle with problems at home such as alcoholism, abusive adults, and poverty, or face hurdles such as pregnancy or drug dependence. High schools must endeavor to cope with all of these problems while pushing, cajoling, and encouraging pupils to learn.

The School District has endeavored to improve the climate for learning by developing a discipline code. It places discipline in the broad context of the necessity for good classroom management, staff and student respect for one another, a sound curriculum, and the sharing of joint responsibility among school staffs, students, and parents for creating a good learning environment.

The code lists nine rules pro-

hibiting serious student misconduct. A violation most often brings a suspension for up to five days and arrest where appropriate. The parent is called in for a conference. Based on the circumstances, decisions are made as to whether the student will be retained in the school, transferred to another school to make a fresh start, sent to a center for diagnostic assessment, or sent to a remedial disciplinary school.

In too many cases, students are being suspended for one to five days for such minor infractions as chewing gum, wearing a hat, or being late to class. The code suggests many alternative responses for less serious offenses such as an interview with the principal, contacting a parent, after-school detention, and in-house suspension.

A local organization, Parents Union for Public Schools did a study of suspensions based on the School District's reports to the U.S. Office of Civil Rights. They found that 25% of the School District's secondary students are suspended at least once each year. National studies have concluded that suspension is an abused method for dealing with school behavior problems. Its use is not limited to serious offenses. Frequently students are put out of school for a significant period of time for being truant, late, or cutting class. It is not logical to strive to convince students that classroom instruction is of the utmost importance while simultaneously suspending them for not coming to class or coming late.

Principals often justify suspensions by stating that they use them to get parents in for a conference. However, breakdowns in communication, or students who are not motivated to get back into school quickly, lead to prolonged absences. Students miss instruction and work, lose ground, and become more vulnerable to failing. If the school does not make a strenuous effort to get the parent(s) in quickly, the students come to believe that they and their education are not important to the school.

ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING

It is hard to create a positive environment for learning. It requires a principal with leadership qualities, a well thought-out plan, and strong staff support. With a population of 3500 students, Bartram High School appears to have been successful in achieving this. It has substantially reduced serious student misconduct. There is almost no cutting and not much lateness to class. The school is orderly and students feel safe and secure. Over the last six years, the number of students passing at least four subjects has dramatically increased. Compared with many other schools, more students enjoy school and want to come.

Louis D'Antonio, Bartram's principal, combines a strong emphasis on the positive aspects of school life with clear standards of behavior defined by strictly enforced rules and regulations. He knows the importance of a positive self-image and school pride. He values student government and the involvement it brings. He believes that when students play a role in the operation of a school its climate is improved. Mr. D'Antonio believes that it is important to recognize and commend achievement of all kinds.

Bartram has an honor roll to recognize high achievers. It also has an All Star Club which each report period recognizes and rewards all students who pass every subject. These students are entitled to attend special All Star activities such as films, dances or other popular activities.

Like other high schools, Bartram has competitive athletic

teams, intramural sports activities, publications, musical groups, marching groups, service groups and clubs. All of these provide opportunities for students to find their particular niche where they can be part of a group, feel that they belong, and be recognized for their contributions.

However, there are eligibility requirements for all such extracurricular activities which make students aware of the importance of their school work and the necessity to pass. To participate, students are permitted to fail one subject but must pass at least four. Students who fail two subjects may also participate in extracurricular activities, but only on a probationary basis. Continued participation requires satisfactory weekly reports from their classroom teachers, as well as faithful attendance and good behavior. The percentage of students eligible to participate has increased from 13% to 49%. This is proof that setting standards has served to raise achievement.

Bartram has worked hard to achieve punctuality. A student who arrives late for school or a class must go to the late room. Unless there is a good reason and the parent or teacher writes a note, this results in an unexcused absence and a detention after school. Several illegal absences from a class can result in a failing grade for the quarter and make a student subject to overnight suspension. The student is suspended at the end of the day and is expected to appear for a conference the next morning accompanied by a parent. Quick reinstatement is usually achieved because students want to be in school and make sure a parent comes.

A policy which considers you late if you're not precisely on time may seem harsh and inflexible, but it has worked in reducing instances of lateness from 300 or more students every period to five or less. It is good preparation for employment. Punctuality means no class time is lost and there are no interruptions from late arrivals. The emphasis on abiding by the rules helps students to understand that the school cares about them and their education.

Mr. D'Antonio's staff knows that he respects and supports them. This creates a climate which enables teachers to do a better job of meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of their students.

Mr. D'Antonio cares deeply for the students of his school and they respect him as he respects them. While he is very firm about what won't be tolerated and sticks strictly to a few rules, he makes every effort to meet the needs of his students and to do what is in their best interests. Students view him as being consistent and fair.

MOTIVATION CENTER

At Bartram, the students sense that the school cares about them. However, caring is taken much further at Bartram's nearby Motivation Center. Twelve teachers work with 250 college-bound students. Because it is small, teachers and students come to know one another well. Teachers come in early and stay late to help students with their course work or their problems. They work to make students self-motivated and confident by building their pride and self-image. They stress again and again that students can be what they want to be and do what they want to do.

Many students enter the program lacking belief in themselves. One student told me that she thought she lacked the ability to do college preparatory work, but she had been given the courage and confidence to do it. Another student spoke of the teachers' deep

concern and the wonderful feeling that it gave her.

The school has a strong recognition and reward system. Hall bulletin boards list the names of those with the highest grade in each subject, display pictures of those on the Honor Roll and the five selected as the Students of the Month. Some teachers post the names of all who have achieved an "A" during the report period.

If the caring experienced by the students in this program could be duplicated in large high schools, it would go a long way to making them better places for young people to learn in. The smallness can't be exported, but strenuous efforts should be made to change large high schools from institutions seen by students as cold and impersonal into schools viewed as warm and caring. Schools could be reorganized into smaller units that would permit students and teachers to get to know one another and develop a higher level of trust. Students could be scheduled to be with the same teacher for a longer period of time. For example, to the extent possible, students could be scheduled to have the same teacher for a subject and homeroom. Homeroom could be changed from a brief and impersonal attendance taking time into something more meaningful. It could be a place where students develop a group identity and a spirit of caring. The homeroom teacher could serve a counselor-advocate role.

Serving the interests of high school students who are not motivated to come to school and to learn poses very difficult problems. In this school district, like others across the nation, the environment for learning must be enhanced and students must come to feel that their schools care about them. Classroom instruction must be improved so that students become involved in their own learning and are motivated to make a much greater effort. There are schools in this city that have found ways to do some of these things. Professionals have much to learn from one another. They could benefit from sharing viewpoints, experiences, and successes. The need for change in our high schools is urgent and great.

With this 126th issue, The Oakes Newsletter completes its fourteenth year. I am most grateful to all those who have contributed to its support.

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Helen Oakes - Author and Publisher

Vol.XV, No.7 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania April 1984

THE PHILADELPHIA TEACHERS' LEARNING COOPERATIVE

Almost every Thursday afternoon from 4:15 to 6:15 P.M., a group of teachers meets during the school year to talk about children and learning. About two-thirds are from the public schools and the rest come from independent and parochial schools. Formed five and one-half years ago, they call themselves the Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative.

Those who founded the Cooperative had been active in the teacher centers that were part of the school system during the 1970's. At these centers, teachers came together for staff development, workshops, and support. Meetings were both formal and informal. Teachers fought hard to keep the centers open but, as dollars became scarcer, the centers were closed down.

Determined not to lose something valuable, a group of these teachers decided to start their own organization in the fall of 1978, and they have been meeting ever since. There are no officers and no executive committee. Decisions are made by consensus. Every six or seven weeks, a meeting is set aside to plan for the future. Members share and rotate responsibility for having meetings at their homes, chairing, presenting and note taking.

The group seeks and welcomes new members. Visitors may attend meetings as often as they wish to see if they share the group's philosophy and interests. There are about thirty members with fifteen to twenty-five attending each meeting.

A typical meeting might begin with a classroom teacher, the presenter, stating a question that he or she would like the group to focus on. For example, she might ask "How can I help Carl who reads the same simple books over and over to broaden his interests in reading?" or "How can I help Mary to make friends?" Next, the teacher describes the child as completely as possible. She covers such prescribed areas as physical attributes, disposition, way of working with others, expression of feelings, major interest and activities, academic learning, and areas of greatest strength and vulnerability. The child's identity and privacy are protected. The name is changed and the material presented to the group is limited to the teacher's observations, samples of the child's work, and information given to the school by the family. At the end of the teacher's presentation, the chair summarizes what has been said. Members of the group then ask questions designed to round out or enlarge on the original portrait of the child. That too is followed by a summary. Next, group members make recommendations which are responsive to the original question and are designed to support the child's strengths and interests and to help the teacher

in working with that child.

Teachers have found this process to be very rewarding. The presenter often learns a great deal as she organizes her thoughts and records and collects samples of the child's work. Also, the presenter may gain new insight as she listens to the chair's summaries and hears the information she has provided reorganized and interpreted by another person. The recommendations often provide new ideas and new solutions, but sometimes they serve primarily to boost the presenting teacher's confidence, or renew her faith in herself as a teacher.

Other teachers at the meeting gain too. They often can see facets of children they work with in the child being presented. Recommendations to help Carl and Mary can often be adapted to other children and other situations. There is also the satisfaction that comes with giving recommendations based on one's own experience that help someone else.

REFLECTING ON A WORD

Reflection is another format used. The group begins by thinking about a word. The day that the School District's promotion policy was to be discussed, the word was "failure." Everyone spent the first five minutes writing down what the word "failure" meant to them. Each teacher in turn expressed his or her thoughts. Following are some brief examples. "Failure to thrive. Having an isolating effect. Being left back. Everyone else moving on." "Power failure and a feeling of helplessness." "Failure can lead to growth if you are mature enough to figure out why you failed." "Students held back because they failed stand out in a school line because they are so tall." "Setting yourself up to fail." "For the scientist, failure does not mean the end, but often leads to another start and an eventual breakthrough." Some people told of their personal experiences with failure both as children and adults. The point was made that to help failing readers, you must change their image of themselves by emphasizing how much they have already learned and know, not what they don't know. Then one teacher described the promotion policy already in place in one district. There was discussion of the ramifications of the city-wide policy now in the planning stage. The group expressed a desire to develop ideas and suggestions for the promotion policy, and then have them heard.

Reflecting on a word affects the discussion which follows. One teacher said that it helps her to screen out the earlier part of the day, concentrate on the subject, and think in a more open way. Another explained that it helps to more fully capture the meaning of a word, extend thinking, and see things from different perspectives. It sparks ideas and helps people to think creatively. For example, a reflection on the word "fighting" brought out not only negative associations, but also positive ones such as "putting up a good fight" or "fighting for ideas." This helped participants to see classroom fighting more broadly and from a different vantage point. It energized them to look for new solutions.

The teachers put themselves in a vulnerable position when they describe and discuss their teaching, their classrooms, and their work with individual children. They feel comfortable doing this because over a period of time, they have come to care about, trust and respect one another. They know that what is said will be supportive, helpful and build on their strengths.

The Teachers' Learning Cooperative has been deeply influenced by Patricia Carini, Director of the Prospect Archive and Center for Education and Research in Vermont. Some members have attended workshops and seminars that Mrs. Carini has conducted in Philadelphia since 1973. Others have attended summer institutes in Vermont. Mrs. Carini's early workshops focused on the importance of observation and record-keeping to help a teacher discover how a child learns and what his interests and strengths are. A teacher noting a child's fascination with the small animals in the room might give him books to read about animals, encouraging and stimulating his reading by building on this interest. Mrs. Carini has always stressed the importance of looking for and supporting a child's strengths rather than identifying weaknesses and trying to remedy them.

TEACHERS HAVE ANSWERS

The experience of the Teachers' Learning Cooperative has confirmed for its members that teachers themselves have answers. They do not need to turn to outside experts in order to solve classroom problems or to grow and develop professionally. By drawing on the skills, knowledge, experience, and creativity found in the group, they can help each other to become more effective in the classroom.

Cooperative members root their practice of teaching in the beliefs that each child is unique, should be valued for what he is, and has strengths which should be built on. The Cooperative views its members in the same way. All members are valued equally as individuals with their own perspectives. The conduct of the meetings validates this. In their discussions, everyone is given the opportunity to speak without interruption or challenge. Each person's viewpoint, comment or question is appreciated and respected.

In an attempt to better understand what the Teachers' Learning Cooperative has meant to its members, I talked with several of them individually. For one teacher, the Cooperative means support from people that she considers master teachers, and the ability to have professional dialogue in a context that always refers back to children and their work. The Cooperative provides intellectual stimulation which she find hard to come by in the teaching profession. It has made her a better teacher.

In giving examples of support, this teacher cited help received with science. With a strong college background in science, she still did not know how to care for insects and animals in the classroom. Other members of the Teachers' Learning Cooperative were very willing to share their knowledge. She also was concerned that one of the animals might die and this would have to be faced with the children. The Cooperative helped her plan for this possibility, and deal with it when it occurred.

Another teacher that I spoke with would have left teaching if she had not found the Cooperative at what was a critical moment for her. She had been moved several times to different schools where special programs involved distinct methods of working with children. At the end, she found herself frustrated, dissatisfied, and with no personal philosophy of teaching. The Cooperative provided the time, the place, and the people to support her as she sought and found an "overarching" frame of reference for her teaching. She views the recommendations that come from the group at the end of a teacher's presentation as "a wonderful

gift which comes from people who want the best for children and want to be as supportive of you as possible."

Another teacher values the diversity of viewpoints to be found in the Teachers' Learning Cooperative. She also sees opportunities for professional growth which come from attending the meetings, access to the professional materials that are available, and the announcements by members of coming conferences and seminars.

The Teachers' Learning Cooperative has been criticized for its unbalanced racial make-up, and members are equally troubled by it. Most of the members of the Cooperative are white women. For unknown reasons, there are very few Black or male members. It appears from talking with a Black member of the group that this has occurred for reasons other than the way Blacks are welcomed and received into the Cooperative. In an interview, this teacher volunteered her views on this subject. She commented that many members of the Cooperative teach in schools that serve predominantly Black, Hispanic and Asian populations. They are "deeply committed to the children in their schools" and to helping them thrive. Many live in neighborhoods that are ethnically diverse. They voice and live the belief that no matter what the ethnic background, people are to be valued and are worthwhile. All of this comes across in the meetings and she feels very comfortable in the Cooperative.

A visitor to a Teachers' Learning Cooperative meeting is impressed with the hard work that takes place. The teachers bring a sense of mission to the afternoon's task. Their presentations and discussions are grounded in their studies of children's work and carefully recorded observations of children and classrooms. The descriptions reflect a love of children and a deep interest in how they think and learn. The teachers report that they leave the meetings inspired and enthusiastic about their profession and eager to return to their classrooms the next morning.

The Teachers' Learning Cooperative is a little-known pocket of excellence that is having a positive impact on the school system. It should help to renew our faith in the teaching profession and in the future of the city's public schools.

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the OAKES newsletter

An Independent Monthly Dedicated To Improving Public Education
Helen Oakes - Author and Publisher

Vol.XV, No.8 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania May/June 1984

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This is an especially significant period for the schools. The system has won back some public confidence and respect. It is perceived by many to be well managed and led. However, what is most important is to find ways to keep students in school, attending regularly, and learning much more. Across the nation, this is the real challenge. It will take time and be difficult to accomplish. Won't you help to keep this Newsletter alive so that you can follow the School District's progress in these pages? Please help TODAY.

THE STANDARDIZED CURRICULUM

The Philadelphia public schools have just introduced a Standardized Curriculum which is to be implemented in September 1984. It outlines what is to be taught in each subject area at each grade level. It was developed to insure that students in every school in every part of the system will share certain common experiences and have the opportunity to learn a certain body of knowledge.

In the past, teachers and schools have made decisions about what would be taught to students. They could decide to devote so much time to reading and mathematics that there was no time for science. The new Curriculum calls for science in every grade in the elementary school. Some teachers felt under so much pressure to cover everything in the basal readers that they devoted almost no time to literature. The Standardized Curriculum requires teachers to familiarize children with all kinds of literature from fairy tales to science fiction. It

calls for students to read books regularly and to use libraries. Literature and science are now mandatory, not optional!

While "standardize" can be defined as "to make uniform" or "to cause to be without variations" that is not the meaning of the word in this context. Instead, as is stated in the foreword to the new Curriculum, "standardize" is used in the sense of "to compare with or test by a standard." The School District's "standard is that of equity and excellence — equity in that we are saying what shall be due all students who study and learn with us, regardless of where they attend school in our School District, and excellence in that we commit ourselves to delivering the best in quality of educational product that our resources can provide."

The Standardized Curriculum is divided into three sections: grades 1-3, 4-6, and 7-12. Each section is divided into eleven subject areas: art, career preparation, computer science technology, foreign language, library instruction/reasoning, mathematics, music, physical and health education, reading/English language arts, science and social studies. At the beginning of each section, there is a listing of the curriculum goals for that subject. These goals come from the School District's 1983 Statement of Philosophy, Mission, and Goals. They describe what a student should learn or be able to do by the time he completes high school. For example, one of the goals is "the ability to write clearly and honestly in personal, formal, and creative discourse."

The goals are accompanied by objectives. In grades 1-3, some of the objectives to reach the above stated writing goal are that pupils will write a story, letters, and a paragraph describing a personal experience or a favorite character. In grades 4-6, four of the twelve objectives are to have pupils keep a personal journal, write four to eight lines of original poetry, take notes, and use figurative language. In secondary school, objectives include writing essays, reports, research papers, and an autobiography.

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

At the end of each subject area, there is a scope and sequence chart which outlines what is to be taught in each grade to reach the goals and objectives. In an area like writing, students throughout the twelve years are to write frequently so they will become fluent. The steps for writing, including drafting, revising, editing, and preparing a final high-quality copy, are to be taught and utilized from the early grades all the way through. However, while fourth graders are to be taught to write persuasive essays, business and social letters, poems and plays, the emphasis in twelfth grade is to be on writing literary criticism, letters of application, research papers and answers in essay form. The scope and sequence section also includes more narrowly defined items to be taught such as end-punctuation marks, capitalization, and the use of correct verb tenses.

The Standardized Curriculum tells teachers what is to be taught, but not how or when. Much of the prescribed content in the scope and sequence section is broadly defined. Elementary school children are to be taught to make oral reports, but the subject, the occasion and the context are up to the teacher. Tenth graders are to read poetry and focus on imagery and symbolism, but the titles, the time and the approach to the poems are left up to the teacher. 8th graders studying American History are to come to understand how the issue of slavery divided the nation. The social studies teacher

may combine use of a textbook with reading from primary sources. She may encourage students to read biographies of important historical figures, or read plays and poetry that deal with slavery. Obviously, there is to be no lock step with all classes in a particular subject on a certain page in a particular book on any given day.

For too long, students who couldn't read at grade level or do simple arithmetic have spent much of their time trying to shore up these weak points. The Standardized Curriculum says to students and teachers that, regardless of problems in reading and computing, students are to be taught all parts of the curriculum at grade level. For example, students in elementary school are to be taught in science how to observe, classify, measure, and predict. They are to know about barometric pressure and magnetism. In mathematics, they are to be taught to read thermometers and identify solid figures such as pyramids, cones and spheres. Teachers are challenged to find new ways to reach students so that they can learn skills and concepts on grade level.

Implicit in the Standardized Curriculum is the expectation that even if students read poorly, they will be taught science, social studies and an appreciation of literature. A novel too difficult for a student to read can be listened to on a tape while the student follows along in the book. Poetry and plays can be read in class. All students are to have the opportunity to respond to literature and increase their "skill in literal, critical, and interpretive levels of reading literature" as required for twelfth graders in the scope and sequence section.

The Standardized Curriculum represents a reshaping of existing curriculum guides, but little that is new. Adhering to it will represent a major change only for those teachers who have not followed existing guides as they should have.

The Standardized Curriculum is not going to be shelved and forgotten. Each teacher has a copy of that portion which pertains to what he or she teaches. A lot of stress will be placed on it next year, and all teachers will be expected to follow it closely. It is clearly written, compact, and organized to make it easy to use. Principals will be expected to check teachers' lesson plans against the document to make sure everything is being covered.

NEW TESTING PROGRAM

Another important reason for teachers to follow the Standardized Curriculum is that a new city-wide testing program to begin next year will be based on its goals and objectives. The California Achievement test which has been used for many years will be dropped, and a test that is directly related to what is being taught in the classrooms will be substituted.

The School District will sign contracts soon with one or more publishers who will develop the tests. Tests will be given twice in 1984-85. The questions will probe how well students are learning the mathematics, science, social studies and reading that is being taught and, at the same time, enable Philadelphia to compare itself with the nation. New technology makes it possible to have customized questions related to the local curriculum that also provide comparisons with national norms. It will also be possible to make comparisons between the new test and the old California Achievement Test so that the data gathered over the last decade will remain useful.

The new testing program will tell students and teachers how

well students are learning what is being taught. It will tell parents how their children are progressing. It will tell principals how well their schools are doing, and it will tell the general public how the school system is doing.

The School District will probably put a new promotion policy into place next year which will also have a direct connection to the Standardized Curriculum. For example, in the Curriculum, the Reading/English Language Arts Division has placed a strong emphasis on literature and writing. The Division recommends that this be carried over and reflected in the new promotion policy. To pass literature, students would have to read a required number of self-selected books which they would report on by conferring with the teacher, conferring with a classmate, or making a written or oral report. To pass writing, students would have to complete a given number of pieces of writing of a quality suitable "to display within the room or be sent home to parents." The message is clear and consistent. This School District wants students to develop the habit of reading on their own and considers this to be an important part of their education. Similarly, it wants students to learn to express themselves in writing for the same reason.

A large committee spent several months developing this promotion policy proposal. It has been submitted to the superintendent. She is having it reviewed by groups of administrators, teachers, and parents and will then make a recommendation to the Board of Education.

The Standardized Curriculum is another part of the foundation upon which a revitalized school system can better help students to learn what they need to know to become lifelong learners and successful wage earners and citizens. It charts the course for achieving the learning goals and objectives of the school system. It raises expectations because it mandates that students are to be taught the content of the curriculum on their grade level.

The Curriculum is considered so important that on May 21 the schools were closed for students so that school staffs could study and work on it. Because the Curriculum provides only a broad outline, its successful implementation depends on the professionalism of teachers. The School District is relying on their knowledge, resourcefulness, creativity, and enthusiasm to translate the Standardized Curriculum into increased learning for students.

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