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THE PROBLEM OF THE SMALL HIGH SCHOOL.

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THE AUTHOR PERCEIVES THE JOB OF THE HIGH SCHOOL AS OFFERING GENERAL EDUCATION AND PREVOCATIONAL TRAINING TO ALL ON THE SAME BASIS. DEFINING THE LATTER AS COLLEGE PREPARATORY, COMMERCIAL, AND VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS, HE DISCUSSES THE PROBLEMS IN THIS DUAL PRESENTATION BY A SMALL HIGH SCHOOL. A CURRICULUM PROGRAM FOR A COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOL, SUITED TO A MINIMUM OF 300 STUDENTS FOR EFFICIENCY, IS PRESENTED. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS DISCUSSED INCLUDE (1) CONSOLIDATION, (2) COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN DISTRICTS FOR PERSONNEL AND MATERIALS, (3) EXPANSION OF SERVICES OFFERED BY THE INTERMEDIATE DISTRICT, (4) COOPERATION WITH REGIONAL TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS, AND (5) REORGANIZATION OF GRADES IN THE SIX-SIX PLAN. A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RELATED PUBLICATIONS IS INCLUDED. THIS DOCUMENT IS ALSO AVAILABLE FROM THE OFFICE OF FIELD SERVICES, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, URBANA, ILLINOIS, FOR $0.15. (FS)

The Problem of the Small High School

A brief analysis of the problem faced by every small high school today, together with some possible solutions

BY M. R. SUMPTION

Office of Field Services
College of Education · University of Illinois
1958

OFFICE OF FIELD SERVICES
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 309 GREGORY HALL, URBANA, ILLINOIS

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THE PROBLEM OF THE SMALL HIGH SCHOOL

As our society grows more complex the task of education becomes ever greater. Children must be taught more if they are to become successful citizens. We want our boys and girls to be worthwhile community members as well as successful in earning a living. We want them to know how to live as well as to know how to earn a living. In the days of the early settlers much of this learning took place in the home. Even then, however, parents recognized that there was much their children should know which parents themselves did not know or had no time to teach. As our society became more specialized the need for school training became more and more evident. Today there are many homes which, for various reasons, place practically the entire responsibility of education on the school and other institutions. Much as this may be deplored, it is nevertheless a fact and must be taken into consideration if we are to be fair to all our young citizens.

It is generally agreed that at least the first six years of a child's school training should be uniformly directed toward the acquisition of skills and attitudes and habits which will make it possible for him to profit by specialized training later. In the elementary school he should learn to read, to write, to spell, to express his thoughts, and to use numbers. He should also gain some knowledge of good health habits and of safety precautions, as well as good habits of study, of behavior and attention. Since this type of learning should be acquired by all, there is not the problem of diverse needs which is encountered in the high school.

The picture changes, however, when the pupil enters high school. To be sure there are many things which all high school pupils should learn but there are also some choices to be made. The type of training which all high school pupils should have is usually called *general education*. This type of learning is necessary for good citizenship in the broadest sense. A knowledge of such fields as history, literature, mathematics, civics, and science is needed by all.

However, we cannot stop at this point. The high school, in view of the age of its students, must help them prepare to earn a living. This type of training is usually called pre-vocational. Subjects which are usually considered pre-vocational include: (1) *college preparatory subjects* such as higher mathematics, foreign languages, and advanced science; (2) *mechanical subjects* such as farm shops, auto mechanics, and fundamentals of electricity; (3) *commercial subjects* such as distributive education, bookkeeping, shorthand, and commercial art.

It will be readily seen that those high school students who are plan-

ning to become lawyers, doctors, teachers, ministers and the like will need to take the college preparatory courses. How well the high school meets their needs will depend not only on how well the school is equipped, and how good instruction is, but also on how many and what kind of college preparatory courses are offered. If, for example, a high school does not offer chemistry, the student who wants to become a chemist will be handicapped when he enrolls in college.

We live in an age of machines. Much of the work formerly done by hand on the farm is now performed by machines. We now have machines which serve us food, hot drinks and numerous other items. Many high school students wish to become skilled mechanics, building tradesmen and electricians. If their high school training is to be most beneficial to them it must offer subjects which will help prepare them to earn a living. In some cases these students will go on to trade schools or serve apprenticeships but in many cases they will go to work upon graduation. In either case, the high school to be most helpful to them must offer mechanical subjects. Courses in higher mathematics, foreign languages and advanced science such as offered to those going into engineering, law, medicine and similar fields would be of dubious value and contribute little to preparing such students to earn a living.

In our third category we have those students who wish to become proprietors of stores, secretarial workers, bookkeepers, commercial artists and the like. The subjects offered in categories one and two do not meet their specific needs. In many cases the high school training these people receive will be the extent of their formal training, although some will go on to business colleges, secretarial schools and commercial art schools. If the high school is to contribute most effectively to their educational needs, it must offer commercial work.

Granted that all high school students need certain training (general education) we still face the problem of providing for pre-vocational needs. How can this problem be met?

(1) One way would be to disclaim the responsibility of the high school to offer pre-vocational training. This would eliminate the need for anything beyond general education. Those who wished to go to college in order to become doctors and lawyers would go to private preparatory schools for this pre-vocational training.

(2) A second way would be to define the responsibility of the high school as being the offering of pre-vocational training only to those who wish to become professional people, i.e., lawyers, doctors, and the like.

(3) A third way would be to define the job of the high school to be

the offering of general pre-vocational training to all on the same basis.

In examining these alternatives, we find that the first would be totally unacceptable in a democracy. The second, although well illustrated by the early Latin grammar school, would likewise be unacceptable to most people today, since it gives preferred treatment to one group of students at the expense of others. Therefore, the third alternative appears to be the only acceptable one.

THE RELATION OF SIZE TO PROGRAM

It is at this point in planning that the real problem of the small high school must be faced. How can a small school with a limited student body offer both general education and pre-vocational training and at the same time spend tax money efficiently? Such a program might well include as many as ten courses in each of the pre-vocational areas and twenty courses in general education. This could mean fifty courses in all and, in a high school of 200 students, the resulting number of classes would probably require at least sixteen teachers and a great deal of space and equipment. Obviously, a high school of 200 students cannot provide all these and at the same time operate efficiently.

The following listing illustrates possible subject fields a comprehensive high school might include in general education and in the three pre-vocational areas.

HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

General Education

English
- Grammar
- Literature
- Speech

Science
- General Science
- Biology

Mathematics
- General Mathematics

Social Studies
- American History
- Civics

Practical Arts
- Home Economics
  - Foods
  - Clothing
  - Child Care
- Industrial Arts
  - Metals
  - Wood
  - Graphic Arts
- Consumer Education
- Driver Training

Health and Physical Education

Music
- Instrumental
- Vocal

Pre-Vocational

MECHANICAL	PROFESSIONAL	COMMERCIAL
Vocational Agriculture	*Advanced English*	*Bookkeeping*
Farm Shops	*Science*	*Shorthand*
Vocational Shops	Chemistry	*Typing*
Auto Mechanics	Physics	*Distributive Occupations*
Electricity	*Advanced Mathematics*	*Office Practice*
Radio and Television	Trigonometry	*Business Machines*
Diversified Occupations	Algebra	*Commercial Art*
Building Trades	Calculus	*Salesmanship*
Printing	Geometry	
	Advanced Social Studies	
	Economics	
	Sociology	
	Foreign Languages	
	French	
	Spanish	

The type of high school program which is indicated would certainly require 300 students as a minimum to achieve even nominal efficiency. Twice that number would probably be required to utilize fully the special facilities of a high school offering this type of program.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

What then is the solution to the problem? What can the small school district do to secure the benefits of adequate training for its youth of high school age?

Perhaps the most drastic measure is that of consolidation with one or more adjacent districts. This may solve the problem in question but at the same time it may create other problems involving transportation and physical facilities. Whether or not consolidation represents an acceptable solution to the problem of the small high school depends on the situation in the individual district. In some districts it may not only solve the problem but also result in considerably better education for each dollar spent. In sparsely settled areas and in districts which for various reasons are determined to retain their identity, consolidation or annexation may be unacceptable.

In some instances a limited number of the advantages of consolidation may be obtained through informal cooperative arrangements by two or

more districts. For example, one district might extend its industrial arts training to include students of a neighboring district which in turn would provide a broad foreign language program for students of both districts. Such an arrangement involves transportation of pupils during the school day, but is quite practical when the schools concerned are within eight or ten miles of one another. Under this type of arrangement it is also possible to exchange the services of special teachers in such fields as remedial reading, health instruction, music, art and speech correction. In such exchanges travel is limited to teachers while pupils remain in their own schools.

Financial arrangements may be worked out by the boards of education concerned on the basis of the number of pupils involved, salaries of teachers involved, or a similar basis when there are disparities in the exchange situation.

Another measure, the expansion of services rendered by the intermediate district, offers certain definite possibilities for aid to the small high school. Special services such as guidance, psychological testing and counseling can be made available to the small high school through a central staff provided by the intermediate district. Adequate health services can be economically provided to the small high school by such a district. Supplementary instructional services may also be brought to the small high school by traveling teachers who might serve three or four schools each day.

Curriculum services commonly provided by the intermediate district are of two general types: (1) personnel services such as those provided by a curriculum supervisor or coordinator, and (2) materials such as audio-visual equipment and library supplies. The education of exceptional children is also an area in which the intermediate district can function relatively efficiently and provide considerable help to the small high school.

Furthermore, regional technical and vocational schools can offer programs which effectively supplement the small high school offerings. These schools can operate economically with the relatively large enrollments possible in an intermediate district. They can also provide adult education programs which are beyond the reach of the local high school.

In Illinois, where the county represents the intermediate district, legal and financial factors place certain limitations on the services which these districts can render to underlying local districts.

Under the laws of several states, including Illinois, junior or community colleges may be jointly supported by a number of districts. In this

way students in sufficient numbers to ensure efficient operation of the two-year college may be ensured.

The reorganization of grades is an internal measure which may be used to increase the high school enrollment and thus improve educational efficiency. The most common form of reorganization for this purpose is the incorporation of the seventh and eighth grades into the high school. Such a measure will usually add more than 50 percent to the enrollment of the typical, small four-year high school. This grade organization is known as the six-six plan. It can be accomplished without district boundary changes. It provides opportunity for exploratory experiences in the program for pupils in the seventh and eighth grades. In some six-year high schools, the younger students spend one-half the school day in homerooms and the remainder of the session in departmentalized courses. Departmentalized courses usually include those which require specialized space facilities and equipment such as science, physical education, shops, and home economics.

In the six-year high school, specialized spaces and equipment as well as teaching personnel can be more efficiently utilized than would be the case in the four-year high school. The increased enrollment secured by expanding the grade range often permits broadening of the curriculum without increasing the per-capita cost of the program.

The fact that in the United States today approximately 2,000 public high schools enroll fewer than fifty pupils, and that over one-half of all public high schools enroll fewer than 200 pupils, should be a matter of serious concern to professional educators and lay citizens alike. In a society which grows more complex year after year the responsibilities of our educational system grow apace. Add to this the fact that financial needs of our schools are rapidly outgrowing the archaic taxing systems of many states and straining financial resources of others, and we find ourselves in a situation which demands a solution to the problem of the small high school. A united effort by professional and lay people directed at this problem is essential if education is to meet the challenge of changing times.

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