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CHANGING SCHOOL NEEDS IN RURAL AREAS.

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AS THE RURAL ECONOMY HAS BECOME MORE AFFECTED BY AUTOMATION, RURAL SOCIETY HAS BECOME MORE INDUSTRIAL. FARM POPULATION AND THE NUMBER OF FARMS HAVE DECREASED, WHILE NON-FARM RURAL POPULATION HAS INCREASED. THE CHANGING RURAL SCENE IS REFLECTED IN CHANGES IN RURAL EDUCATION. EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES HAVE GREATLY INCREASED DUE TO SCHOOL REORGANIZATION, CONSOLIDATION, AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERMEDIATE ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT, BUT THE MAJOR JOB OF IMPROVING RURAL EDUCATION REMAINS TO BE DONE. ADEQUATE APPORTIONMENT OF STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDS AND GREATER EQUALIZATION OF THE TAX BASE ARE PRIMARY REQUIREMENTS FOR FINANCING RURAL EDUCATION. THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOL-SUPPORT TAX ON LAND AND PROPERTY IS OUTDATED SINCE WEALTH NOW EXISTS PRIMARILY IN FORMS OTHER THAN LAND. THE RURAL POPULATION IS AN IMPORTANT MINORITY WHICH AFFECTS ALL SEGMENTS OF OUR SOCIETY, AND THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF THIS GROUP SHOULD BE OF CONCERN TO ALL. THIS SPEECH WAS PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SCHOOL FINANCE (ST. LOUIS, APRIL 5-6, 1962). (JEH)

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NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SCHOOL FINANCE
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April 5-6, 1962

Changing School Needs in Rural Areas

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The changing needs and practices of rural schools were demonstrated to me rather dramatically recently when I spoke at a school dedication ceremony. It was the dedication of a new building that replaced a little two-room frame structure that had served one of the more rural corners of our county for over fifty years. The interesting thing about this dedication, at least to me, was the fact that I had started my teaching in this little school over thirty years ago. It was exciting to return now to participate in the dedication of a new building that, by contrast with the old, brilliantly illuminated the changes that have been taking place in this rather typical example of rural America.

The Old and the New in Rural Schools

My memory of the little school in which I served as a beginning teacher is well expressed by Edgar Logan, a Detroit high school teacher who, writing in the Clearing House, recalled his days in a similar school. He wrote:

> "Thirty-odd years ago, I attended a little red schoolhouse in a Kentucky village. The school was only a mile away from my home, but it took my brothers and sisters and me a long time to walk to school. There were so many interesting things to do and see along the way ...
>
> "We learned our ABC's from stiff-backed readers; drank water from a long-handled gourd in the corner; poked coal into the squat, black stove in the middle of the room; carved our initials into desk tops; inhaled that rare mixture of chalk dust, soot, paste and ink aroma that comes only from little red schoolhouses; ate bologna sandwiches, hardboiled eggs and chocolate cake out of brown paper bags, and fell in love with each pretty new teacher. And each year as we grew in both mind and body, we moved from the rows of tiny seats in the front to the big seats in the back that were reserved for gangling legs and dangling arms."

Perhaps such a picture has not faded from your memories, at least for some of you, as you look back a few years. And, even if you did not share such an experience, you

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probably find it easy to visualize the setting, for this is the stereotype that still exists in the minds of most people when they think of the rural school.

But, education in rural America has been changing. To point up the contrast, I would like to describe the school that we dedicated.

The new school is a four-room building of modern architectural design. It is set amid rolling hills, surrounded only by scattered farms. Children arrive by modern school bus, and pass thru covered walks to the spacious classrooms in which they work. The rooms are well illuminated, acoustically treated, and automatically heated. The windows of non-glare glass look out upon the panorama of beautiful green hills that lie in all directions from the school.

The classrooms are equipped with modern, movable furniture, and the children don't carve their initials in the desk tops. These desk tops are plastic and are too hard to cut; and the children are too busy and interested in their work to take time for carving, even if they could cut the desks.

The teachers are not particularly pretty, but their work is better than "pretty good." They are well trained, have excellent teaching equipment, and are regularly and frequently served by teaching consultants and specialists (we used to call them supervisors). They are assisted by up-to-date courses of study and teaching guides, have access to a well stocked professional library in the County Superintendent's Office, and participate regularly with other rural teachers in a variety of professional activities that help them to improve their work.

The pupils use a wide variety of modern textbooks provided to them without charge by the State and by the County Schools Library. All rooms are equipped for the use of instructional motion pictures and filmstrips, which are drawn from a large central library in the County Superintendent's Office. The County Audio-Visual Service also keeps the school well supplied with study prints, models, maps, globes, transcriptions, tapes and other such materials. Cooperative buying of school supplies and equipment through the County Superintendent's Office keeps the school well and economically supplied with the newest and best teaching tools.

A school nurse visits regularly to help teachers and parents handle the health problems of the pupils. A specially designed and equipped nurse's room is available in the school. An audiometrist makes an annual visit with a mobile, bus-like audiometric lab in which 25 children at a time may be screened in group testing, and those cases which require further attention may be given careful individual examinations. Each pupil's vision is checked regularly.

The learning ability of each child is measured several times during his elementary years, and achievement is measured every year. Such testing is primarily diagnostic, and results are studied systematically by teachers, consultants and guidance counselors, who work together to help make the school program meet the special needs of each individual child. Psychologists are available when needed to assist children or advise teachers.

Special aptitude and ability tests and interest inventories, in addition to the regular ability and achievement tests, are taken by all 8th grade pupils in preparation for their consideration of career objectives and plans for high school, and throughout the eighth year, before graduation, the pupils and their parents, with the help of school personnel, engage in a systematic program of career planning in which the test data are used.

Sometimes pupils are found to need special educational help because of unusual physical or mental handicaps. If these children cannot effectively be handled in the regular school, they are enrolled in special classes to which they are transported each day. In this way, the cerebral palsied and other orthopedically handicapped children, the hard-of-hearing, the mentally retarded -- both educable and trainable -- are given necessary educational help by specially trained teachers in specially equipped classrooms.

A speech correctionist visits the school regularly to help children who have speech problems and to advise the teachers in working with such children. Any child who is prevented, for one reason or another, from attending school regularly, or who has special problems in his home or community that affect his welfare, is served by an Attendance and Child Welfare Supervisor. The janitor and the bus driver are advised by specialists made available through the County Superintendent's Office, and even the members of the Board of Trustees receive special help that enables them to provide better educational opportunities for the children in their charge.

In citing this example, I have described at some length the kind of educational opportunities afforded by one fairly typical rural school of today as contrasted with a typical school of a few years ago. I do not claim that the new school which I have described represents all of our present day rural schools; it does not. But, I do claim that it exemplifies a trend in the present development of rural education.

The significant point in this illustration is that the school in which I started my teaching over thirty years ago had practically none of the many advantages that I have described. Furthermore, my description would fit many rural schools in different parts of the country today, a fact that would not have been true thirty years ago. Although we have far to go to reach desirable accomplishment, the nature of the trend is clear.

What is "Rural"?

Before we go further we should pause to be sure that we know what we mean when we use the term "rural." This term is not easy to tie down, for it has rather different meanings in different contexts. There is little difficulty in distinguishing the two ends of the rural-urban scale, but the point where one fades into the other causes confusion. In this indistinct area are the urbanite who likes country living, and the ruralite who wants to be in the city -- almost. These are the people who create one or another form of suburbia -- people who want rural-type living, but also want something more than the little general store down at the crossroads. So, in our discussion I shall assume that, while we are speaking particularly for the open-country rural scene, we are also talking, at least in part, for the "rurban" society that is growing so rapidly today.

The distinctive character of the open-country rural scene is well described and delineated by Dr. M. L. Cushman, of the University of North Dakota, in the following words:

> "First, there is a relatively low density of population. People just live farther apart than in cities, and communities simply are small. Secondly, most of the people in rural communities are primarily dependent for their livelihood upon the immediately surrounding resources and the uses made of them. These resources may be rich soil, lakes, minerals, or trees, but the inhabitants secure their living from them rather directly. When a population aggregate grows so large that the majority of the people make their living by the processing of raw

> materials brought in from distant places into manufactured goods ..., people take on the social and economic characteristics usually associated with cities, and the community is no longer rural."

The other element of the term "rural" -- the "rurban" society -- needs only brief mention. It is included here as a part of the rural scene not so much for its economic characteristics as for its social or domestic. To call suburbia rural in the economic sense would distort a useful term, but there is a quality of living that, if not always found, is commonly sought in much of suburbia -- a quality that in this one respect, at least, makes suburbia akin to its strictly rural neighbors. It is in this sense that reference is made to the "non-farm rural" in this discussion.

The Changing Rural Scene

The focus of this conference, basically, is on change. Changing school needs particularly are cited, but since educational practices are rooted in the needs of our society, we cannot understand the changes in education without sensing clearly the changes in society. Time does not permit detailing of the dramatic changes that are going on about us, but I wish to note a few examples to set the stage for some later comments. To do this, I would like to borrow the words of my friend, Winston Brown, Superintendent of Schools of Waukesha County, Wisconsin, which he voiced in a speech not long ago. Brown told how his daughter, in a conversation with him, got the notion that he was quite an oldtimer. He then went on to recount the conversation.

> "Why, Dad," she said, "When you were a kid I bet there wasn't even sliced bread!" I agreed and then told her something worse. "Barbara," I explained, "I want you to know that I am 20 years older than nylon stockings!" That really "shook" her.
>
> "But," he continued, "I, too, was "shook" somewhat when I reviewed my high school days. I'd like you to consider them with me for a moment.
>
> "I didn't learn a thing in high school about penicillin, television, guided missiles, automation, atomic energy, or radioactive fallout. I didn't learn about two cities called Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I didn't learn -- and this is hard to believe, but it's true -- I didn't learn about Communism, Nazism, or Fascism. I didn't learn about plastics, credit cards, frozen orange juice, instant mashed potatoes or even bubble gum.
>
> "The unfortunate thing was this: My classmates and I were not even taught to expect very many changes!"

But, expected or not, the changes have hit us -- all of us. Rural America, as with all of America, is a very different place from what it was thirty years ago. Truly, the old grey mare ain't what she used to be a few short years ago.

The New Rural Economy

And, perhaps, the old grey mare is the key to understanding the changing rural scene. The old mare has been replaced by the terrible genie of power -- power from the gasoline engine, the diesel engine, rural electrification and the electric motor. The man behind the plow has climbed aboard a tractor. He moves earth, tills the soil, fertilizes and irrigates his fields, sows and harvests his crops, cuts his timber, chops and stores his silage, milks his cows, hauls his produce to market and brings his supplies home by power harnessed to machinery. He dusts his crops, inspects his fences and sometimes feeds his cattle by airplane.

But, we haven't seen anything yet. Listen to this.

> "Farms of the future will be handled largely by computers," predicts Science Newsletter of last February 17. "Computers will be used by farmers to tell them when to plant crops, what to feed the animals and how much water is needed by the crops ... animals will be monitored and pampered by computers that could determine the animal's health and when feeding would be best. Data obtained from transmitters placed on cows would be fed to a computer and a report would be made outlining the animal's needs."

Not long ago I visited a moderate-sized dairy in northern California. Having had some experience milking cows during my boyhood years on a farm, I thought that I knew a little about a dairy. But, I might just as well have found myself in a textile mill. I recognized the stanchions, all right, even though they were of a new fangled design; but from there on, except for the cows, I was in a new world.

It was a Rube Goldberg's delight. The milking machines were attached to the cows and the power turned on. Milk flowed through hoses up to a meter above each cow, then through long glass tubes to the processing rooms at the end of the barn. There it went automatically through pasteurization, homogenization, vitamin enrichment and, I suppose, several other processes designed to give a cow a severe sense of inadequacy. Finally, it was automatically fed into cartons which were sealed and delivered to the waiting trucks by machine. From cow to the truck with the help of two men, one to attach and remove the milking machines, and one to see that things went right in the processing room! It almost made me wonder whether the next step might not be to train the cows to don their own milking equipment. To top it all with capitalistic justice, the milk meter over each cow regulated the flow of feed graciously placed before each cow during the milking (automatically, of course) so that the more milk that was given, the more feed was paid out. The operators reported that the cows catch on to the trick quite readily.

Such illustrations could be recounted endlessly, but this makes the point. Today's farm, like today's factory or office, runs on power and machinery -- not on men and muscles.

The New Rural Society

As a result of the new technologies, there has evolved in many places, and is spreading rapidly, a new type of rural life -- a life that is more industrial than domestic. The traditional family farm that provided a home as well as family support is giving way to the industrial farm which is merely an operating unit in a huge agricultural enterprise. As should be expected, such farms, while much greater in acreage, employ fewer people. (And, the fewer people produce much larger crops, too.)

You have probably heard the statistics:

-- A decreasing farm population -- down about 1/3 in 30 years (1930-1960); down from 30½ million to 20½ million people in those years. Or, expressed more dramatically in percentage of total U.S. population, down almost 2/3, from about 30% to a little over 11%.

-- A relatively constant amount of land in agricultural use (about 1,903,000,000 acres), but the number of farms decreased about one-half, from 6½ million to about 3 million in the same 30 years.

-- The value of farm land increased in value per acre only about three times (from $48 to $120), but the average value per farm increased about 4½ times (from $7,300 to over $33,000). (Inflation is involved in these figures, of course, but it does not change the relationships).

As the farm home has suffered, so has the rural community. The farmer who used to live on the land that he tilled, now lives in town or, perhaps, on one farm that serves as headquarters for his operation of several farms. As people have moved off the land, many little villages have gone with them. In the county where I live many localities carry names which merely identify regions or farm neighborhoods. These once were commercial centers. Today there is only open farm land where they once stood, and no trace of the past remains except in the names that linger on, and carry less and less meaning.

Finis Engleman had this process in mind when, in a recent address forecasting the year 2000, he said,

> "Economic interdependence, a greatly improved communication system, and rapid transportation will tend to destroy the independent community in America as we have known it. Larger and more complex communities will form. Small political governmental units will disappear rapidly. The county and the old New England town will be either greatly enlarged or eliminated."

But the picture is not completely one-sided. As clear as the fact of our shrinking agricultural society may be, we should not jump to the hasty conclusion that rural America is doomed to extinction, or even that it will become unimportant. Obviously, the rural farm population is a minority, and will become more so, but let us not forget that there are many minorities in our society that are tremendously important to our economic and social body as a whole. The rural farm minority is one of these.

There are two factors which will guarantee that, like England, there will always be a rural America. First, if we read the statistics carefully and distinguish between the two segments of rural population, the rural-farm and the rural non-farm, we will note that it is the rural-farm population that is shrinking so noticeably. The rural non-farm population actually is growing. In fact, since 1950 it has grown three times as fast as the urban population. This growth has been so great that it out-balances the drop in rural farm population to result in an increase in the total percentage of rural population, both farm and non-farm taken together, as related to the national total.

The second factor assuring the continuation of rural America is the probable limit of shrinkage in the rural farm population. Howard Dawson, writing in An Overview of Rural Education, asked the question,

> "To what limits will the reduction in farm population go?" He answered his own question in these words. "I believe it almost has reached the point

of stability. Official estimates place the national population by 1970 at 200 million or more. Just how it can be estimated that less than 8% of the population can be engaged in the production of food and fiber is a little hard to understand. Such a contingency hardly seems probable.

"The point here is that the total farm population may become a smaller percentage of the total population than in 1960, but the total number of such people has probably reached the point of stability."

The Constants and Variables of Education

As we turn now from a glimpse of the changing rural scene to consideration of the educational changes that accompany it, a major point should first be made. It is this: in any consideration of change in education -- be it rural, urban, or other -- we must be careful not to confuse the variables with the constants, or to mistake one for the other.

It is the constants that provide the broad common denominators in American education -- for example, the need to prepare a citizenry capable of self-government in a political democracy; the need to develop each person to his maximum in order that he may enjoy the opportunities of a free society, and to assure that he shall contribute his best to that society. Such basic aims are the constants in our system of free public education.

But, the variables are just as important. If the constants are to be well achieved, the form of education must be suited to the circumstances. Schools must be adapted to the communities they serve. Education must be flexible enough to meet the needs of people in their endless variations of living. There must be responsiveness to change if the constants are to be served in terms of the realities of any given situation in time or place. But it must always be remembered that the factors of variability are quite different from the constants, with which they are sometimes confused.

I make this point in order that, as we turn to view changes in rural education, we shall see these changes in proper perspective. Any changes that are occurring in respect to the constants are, or should be, occurring in all of American education -- rural, urban and suburban alike. The changes that are occurring in respect to the variables are the result of a changing rural society and economy, and should be particularly characteristic of rural schools if they are to serve the constants effectively.

I also make this point because questions are being raised these days as to whether or not "rural" education really is any different from education generally. My answer is that it is not a bit different in respect to the constants; but it is quite different in respect to many of the variables -- and it should be, if it is to do its job well.

If we believe that rural schools should have unique characteristics in form, yet should be expected to achieve effective results in respect to the broad objectives of education, it follows that we must all be responsible for making things happen much more effectively in some rural schools than has been true in the past, for not all such schools have kept in tune with the times as well as they should. Some rural schools are not fulfilling their obligations in respect to the constants as effectively as must be expected of them.

The Changing Rural School

It is in light of these expectations that we turn now to see what the changing times have brought to rural education.

The statistics are not entirely encouraging. While it is good to know that during the decade of the '50's, there was a marked reduction in the percent of the U.S. population that is without schooling or with only a very few years of schooling, it is not so good to note that the least of such reduction was in the rural-farm areas. While the median number of years of schooling completed by the total population increased 18% (from 9.3 years of school to 11.0), there was only about a 4% increase among the rural-farm population (from 8.4 to 8.7). By comparison, the rural non-farm population increased its years of schooling by 26% (from 8.8 years to 11.1), suggesting perhaps, the effect of both better schools and certain selectivity in the process of population mobility.

Illiteracy dropped significantly throughout the country, much more in rural-farm areas than elsewhere; but some of the edge is taken from this encouraging fact when it is noted that illiteracy was greater to start with, and still continues at a much higher rate, in the rural-farm area than elsewhere. In brief, the statistics tell us that a major job of improving education remains to be done in the rural areas.

As we turn from the statistics to look at educational practices, we may be encouraged by the signs of better things to come. In many parts of the country, rural schools have found ways to extend the instructional program well beyond the 3-R's to a scope that compares favorably with the offerings of schools anywhere. They have demonstrated that it can be done in rural areas. Teachers are better trained and have better facilities with which to work. School libraries are becoming more adequate, and instructional films and other audio-visual aids are used much more extensively. Guidance, psychological, and school health services are found more frequently. Special educational programs for physically and mentally handicapped children are more common, and more attention is being given to the needs of special groups such as the migrants. Vocational education and adult education are receiving more attention, and there are some good beginnings in special services for those who are academically gifted.

Organization and Administration of Rural Schools

Much of this advancement has been made possible by improvements in the organization and administration of rural schools. This was an essential prelude to improvements in program and services, and must continue to be so in the future, for the little rural school and its small independent school district, as we have known them in the past, have neither the financial strength nor the functional ability to develop or support the full spectrum of services that are essential to a modern program of education. If the constants of education, to which I have referred, are to be served as America requires, there must still be further change in rural school district organization and administrative structure.

School District Reorganization

Throughout the United States, tremendous changes are taking place in respect to school district organization. In all parts of the country, this subject is one of the most commonly discussed problems of education. In state after state, school districts are being consolidated into units that are more capable of supporting and operating educational programs of high quality.

Note what has happened. In the 28 years from 1932-1960, 117,000 operating school districts have been reduced to a little over 35,000 -- a drop averaging almost 3000 districts a year, or about 2½% per year. Consider the fact, though, that in the five years between 1955 and 1960 the rate of drop averaged about 6% per year. Clearly, the changes are coming faster.

These changes have resulted chiefly in the elimination of non-operating districts and districts with fewer than 10 teachers, especially the one-teacher districts. In 12 years, 1948 to 1960, one-teacher schools have dropped almost 75%, from just under 75,000 to a little over 19,000.

While many other interesting facts might be recited to reveal progress in reorganization of school districts, these are enough to identify the trend. Of the 3070 counties in the United States, about 1190 constitute some type of county-unit district, which leaves approximately 1880 counties in which there are some 34,210 operating districts -- an average of about 18 per county. Much work remains to be done in the further improvement of district organization, but the progress thus far has been tremendous.

The Intermediate Unit

Comparable changes are occurring in the administrative structure of rural education. One of these -- the development of the intermediate unit of school administration -- is worthy of particular note because it is of considerable magnitude, it is a logical concomitant to district re-organization, and it holds particular promise for bringing quality education at reasonable cost to rural areas in which even the best district organization will not meet all the needs.

The intermediate unit is the office that operates at a regional level (often a county), working with and through local school districts to supplement and coordinate local services, and to link together the district and the State Department of Education. In many states (other than the 13 county-unit states), the Office of the County Superintendent of Schools has been the nucleus around which the newer intermediate unit structure has developed.

There is good reason for having an intermediate administrative unit. In fact, Dr. George Strayer has stated on numerous occasions that had such a unit not evolved, someone would have to have invented it. School systems in most states are in the awkward position of serving two masters -- local control on one hand, and state requirements and objectives on the other. The schizophrenic result probably is more severe in rural areas, where local control is most vigorously defended, but where choice of action, a necessary ingredient of control, is seriously restricted because of the inability of generally weaker districts to support, or effectively utilize, a full range of school services. Although rural school districts are becoming stronger, hence able to provide high-quality educational programs within reasonable cost limits, many districts in areas that are thinly populated probably never will be able, regardless of reorganization, to provide a full range of services at reasonable cost while operating separately and independently. It would be necessary in such districts, in order to gain a sufficient tax base or a large enough pupil population to make full and effective use of specialized services, to extend district boundaries far beyond all reasonable sociological or geographical limits -- with attendant loss of local identification and control.

The answer to this problem is in sharing. With the help of an intermediate unit, the boundaries of such school districts may be set where they will be consistent with sociological cohesiveness or community identity. The district's own services may then be supplemented on a cooperative basis, sharing with other districts in the area of the intermediate unit those services that it cannot fully, efficiently and effectively provide for itself.

The intermediate unit has three main functions which may be described as "articulative," "coordinative" and "supplementary." The "articulative" function is the one that has usually been identified with the Office of the County Superintendent in the past. Through this function, the intermediate unit localizes the administrative operations of the state school system, particularly those of a ministerial or "housekeeping" nature. At the same time, it represents and interprets local school needs at the State level.

Through the "supplementary" function, the intermediate unit brings specialized services to school districts on a shared basis, as I have described -- services needed by pupils and teachers for a complete and well balanced educational program, but which local districts cannot provide adequately by themselves.

Through its "coordinative" role, the intermediate unit provides leadership in the general improvement of education. It functions as a unifying factor among school districts, helping them to work together on their common problems. It does this in a way which protects the local control and independence of schools at the same time that it helps local school personnel and citizens to use the opportunities of such independence to best advantage.

In the days when schools did no more than provide their pupils with teachers and textbooks, there was little need for the intermediate unit as it is known today. Education then was a relatively simple process. Not much was known about the technical nature of teaching and learning, the curriculum was narrow and limited, there were fewer people, their educational needs were less sophisticated, and each school served a rather small and self-sufficient community. Under these circumstances, there was little need for coordination among schools, for each school could be quite self-sufficient. As education became broader and more specialized services became necessary in the schools, need developed for an administrative device that, in addition to articulating the various units of the public school system, could coordinate and supplement their work. From this need came the intermediate unit as it exists or is developing in many parts of the country today.

Implications for School Financing

Let us now look for a moment at the problems of financing rural education. The points that I have been making -- that rural life and rural education are experiencing significant changes; that there are constants in American education that rural schools must be expected to serve; that new instructional programs and special services are developing in rural schools, but have not yet progressed nearly enough; that tremendous advancements are being made in the organizational and administrative structures of rural education -- suggest important financial considerations. I do not consider that it is within my role here today to deal to any great extent with problems of financing. Rather, it is my purpose to set before you some of the major considerations against which your studies of financial need must be made. However, I would like to suggest two points for your consideration.

Equalization

First, if you interpret as I do the statistics that reveal the severe need for better education in rural America, if you agree with me that the rural population is a vitally important segment of our society (in spite of the fact that it is a minority), if you share my concern for accomplishment of the constants of education in all American schools, if you are stimulated by the examples of good educational development in rural areas that show that good education is possible in rural schools, you will conclude with me that much more should be done in applying the principle of equalization to the financing of public schools throughout rural America. Adequate apportionment of funds from the state level for basic school support, supplemented by Federal assistance, is a primary requirement. Also, much can be done through the further reorganization of school districts, for larger units of school administration mean better equalization of the tax base within each district. The intermediate unit of school administration, while it is not a financing agency, does provide an element of equalization in the form of shared services. This is most effective in equalization when funds received from the State or from a broad taxing base are converted into services which are extended to local districts on the basis of need. There are many methods by which the principle of equalization may be applied more effectively in the financing of our rural schools.

Tax Sources

My own experience suggests another problem of school financing that is of particular concern in rural areas. This is the problem of making equitable use of the various sources of taxation in supporting the public schools. The tax on land and property has been the traditional basis for school support. In many parts of our country, where State support is meager, the local land must carry a major share of the burden. Perhaps this was a suitable practice in an agrarian society, wherein wealth generally existed in the form of land. Perhaps it would still be suitable for our present rural society if such society were completely independent from the rest of the American economy. But this condition does not exist. Not only is our rural life intimately related to the rest of America, but wealth now exists primarily in forms other than the land. Until our methods of securing and distributing funds for school support take these changes into account, we shall suffer educational anemia, particularly in rural areas where the effects of the changes in wealth are felt most severely.

Rural Education Concerns Everyone

I wish to conclude with the thought that rural education, no less than all of American education, is everybody's business. I have pointed out that the farming population of this country has shrunk almost to 11% of the total population and that rural people now constitute a minority in American society. But this is a minority which cuts across all groups and affects all segments of our society. Our national welfare is dependent upon our rural people, or is deeply affected by them. If there is any doubt of this, discuss the "gray area" educational problems with any large-city school administrator, for one example.

The protection and improvement of this minority group depends upon the understanding and appreciation of the needs of rural America by all Americans. We need not be altruistic about this. In a very real sense, our individual and collective welfare is closely linked to the improvement and enlightenment of our rural people.

Rural schools and the society they serve have many needs. They need a broader contact with all of American society. They need a better quality of education. They need the kind of support that will make such quality possible. While we may be encouraged with progress that is being made toward meeting these needs, it has not gone far enough nor fast enough.

As in all of our schools, there is urgent need to emphasize the kind of education that will prepare for the unseen future -- an education designed to develop those qualities of creativity, critical thinking and problem solving that are essential in citizens who will be called upon to solve the unknown problems of tomorrow. Above all, there is need to preserve the spirit and practice of democracy in all of our schools and in our society. Perhaps we need to be reminded that in the rural setting there is a natural fountainhead for the democratic spirit which should be nourished and encouraged by every possible educational advantage that America can provide. With proper understanding of rural needs and adequate support of rural education, we may yet preserve rural America's major contribution to our society of tomorrow.