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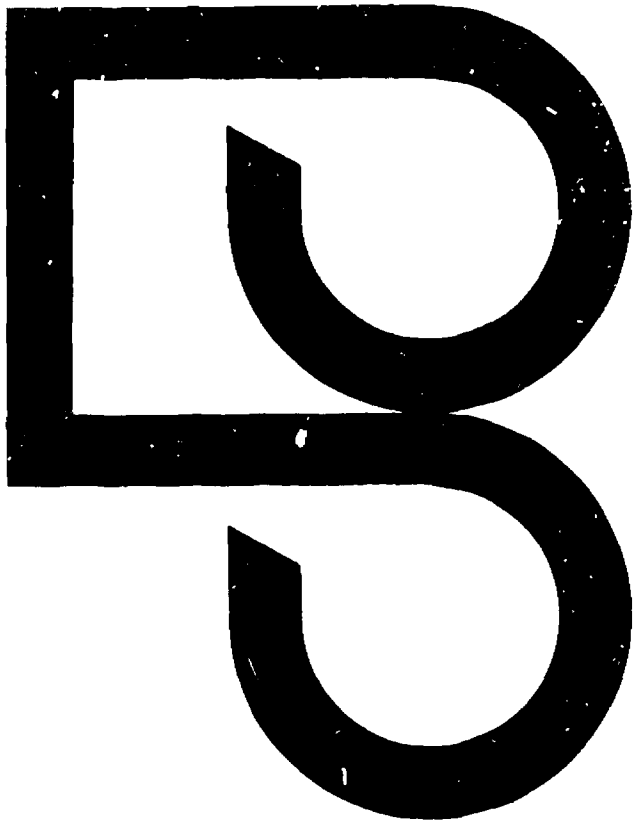
ABSTRACT

The Parkway Program was designed to investigate the possibility that a high school could be organized independently of any fixed institutional facilities, whether these be a school building or a fixed faculty. One hundred and forty-three Philadelphia High School students were selected at random from among applicants representing all eight Philadelphia school districts, and the Program was committed to operate at a cost which would be equal to or less than the amount required to run a traditional school for a comparable number of students. The students were not graded, had no dress codes and few "rules"; in return they had to find their classrooms, their curriculum, and in some cases their teachers from among the plentiful resources of their urban community. The Program was given the task of trying to integrate school children with the life of the community, a life which under normal conditions they were not expected to enter until leaving school behind them--for although schools are supposed to prepare students for a life in the community, most schools so isolate students from the community that a functional understanding of how it works is considered impossible. (Author/JM)

parkway program



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

THE PARKWAY PROGRAM
School District of Philadelphia
c/o The Franklin Institute
20th Street and the Parkway
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103
(215) 448-3761

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SCHOOL WITHOUT WALLS

On February 17, 1969, 143 Philadelphia High School students took to the streets, without leaving school. They were the first students of the Parkway Program, a new kind of high school which challenged many traditional concepts of secondary education: There were no grades, no dress codes, few "rules". There was not even a school building -- instead, students were encouraged to find their classrooms, their curriculum and in some cases their teachers from among the plentiful resources of their urban community. They were sent to learn where the action was.

The Program tested many long accepted principles in educational organization, however, Parkway students and teachers were not the first to test them. What set Parkway apart from many recent educational "experiments" were three important features: The Parkway Program was a public program, fully accredited and supported by the School District of Philadelphia; the students were not specially screened or hand-picked, but were chosen by random lottery from applicants representing all eight Philadelphia school districts; and the Program was committed to operate at a cost which would be equal to or less than the amount required to run a traditional school for a comparable number of students.

The question underlying the Program's foundation was simple: could the resources of the urban community, concentrated as they were within a relatively small geographical area, be used to educational advantage for a broad cross section of secondary school students? Few doubted that they could be, however, methods of how they might be utilized so that both the students and the city would benefit mutually were yet to be established. The Program was left with the task of trying to integrate school children with the life of the community, a life which, under normal conditions, they were not expected to enter until leaving school

behind them -- for although schools are supposed to prepare students for a life in the community, most schools so isolate students from the community that a functional understanding of how it works is impossible. Few urban educators now deny that large numbers of students are graduating from our urban secondary schools unprepared for any kind of useful role in society. Since society suffers as much as the students from the failures of the educational system, it did not seem unreasonable to ask the community to assume some responsibility for the education of its children.

However, if community institutions --cultural institutions, business institutions, scientific institutions-- were to accept students, take students into their organizations, it was clear that the students themselves would have to learn to operate differently than they did in their former school situations. The structure of the Parkway Program is designed, then, not only to expose students to the community but to meet the demands of the community. Neither the educational system nor the community can do the job alone: what is necessary is a structure in which the two can interact, in which the educator and the community professional can combine their abilities to provide students with the most profitable educational experience.

If such cooperation is to be achieved, it is obvious that the educational institution and the community institution have to stop operating by different rules: the student can not be expected to go from a passive, unresponsible role in the classroom to an active, effective one in the city. The structure of the classroom must change: rather than encouraging the student to accept, it has to teach him to challenge; instead of teaching him that success comes with inaction and dependence, it has to show him that action and independence bring results. Teachers have to teach differently -- teach skills which work in life as well as on paper, because in a "School without walls" the students need to use the skills they picked up this morning the same afternoon.

The objective of the Parkway Program, then, was no less than to put the school in step with the pace of the community, so that students could operate in both. The organization of the Program is not unlike that of a successful business, a business in which individuals, independently and in groups, must work effectively and responsibly toward real solutions to real problems. The structure of the Program is as much the work of the students as of the educational administration, for one of the first problems presented to students was "How do you make a school which teaches students what they need and want to know?" The students continue to take an active role in the planning and administration of their school, for it is their goals which must determine the Program's future directions. Parkway does not aim to be a "school of the future" - but it is not a school of the past. What Parkway hopes to be is a school for now, and a school which will be able to keep up with "now" as the years go by.

ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

The Parkway Program is organized into several "units" or "Communities", each of which is limited to 180 students. Each unit operates independently of the others, has its own headquarters, its own staff and its own curriculum. While each unit conforms to a common structural organization, each unit will interpret that organization according to the needs of its immediate population. The principle is simple: condense a large number of people in a small area and you necessarily sacrifice your capacity to treat each member of the group as an individual. Each individual's effectiveness within a group is reduced each time the size of the group is increased. So, if one wishes to maintain an organization in which flexibility, and effective individual action are possible, it is necessary to keep the group relatively small.

Therefore, as the Parkway Program expands, it does not increase the size of existing units, but forms new ones. Few new students at Parkway, then, walk into a pre-existing organization. Instead, a new student finds that he and 179 other new students, in addition to a given number of staff--some of whom may also be new--face before anything else the job of setting up an organization and making it work. They are not bound to do things as former units have done them: it is entirely possible on the other hand, that they will find a better way, which older units might later adopt. Day to day administrative functions are performed within units by staff and students under the guidance of a volunteer "head teacher".

All Parkway unit operations are coordinated by a small central staff working with the Director of the Program. This staff is primarily concerned with planning and development, as well as maintaining communications among units.

STUDENT SELECTION

The Parkway Program is a public
igh School, and as such, is open to
ny Philadelphia student in grades
-12 who volunteers for it, regardless
f his academic or behavioral back-
round. If more students apply than
laces are available, Parkway students
re chosen by lottery. An equal number
f places are allocated to each of the
ight geographically determined school
istricts in Philadelphia so that a
ross-cultural, heterogeneous repre-
entation is insured within the Pro-
ram's student body. To further ex-
and the scope of the Program's internal
opulation, a limited number of places,
lso filled by lottery, are made
vailable to applicants from suburban
nd parochial systems.

STAFF

Like the students, staff members must volunteer for the Parkway Program. The Program maintains a student-teacher ratio of approximately 16 to 1, and for every teacher a "university intern" (undergraduate or graduate students representing both local and out of state and universities) is added to the staff. Teachers are interviewed and hired by committees representing the Parkway organization, the school district, community professionals, parents, and students. Parkway teachers must meet the usual requirements for certification, and the majority of Parkway teachers formerly taught in traditional schools.

The Parkway staff, teachers and interns, are responsible for the basic Parkway curriculum, for student guidance, and for recruiting additional instructional help and materials from within the community. The Parkway teacher's day, then, is likely to be divided between classroom teaching, student counseling, and administrative work with the faculty member himself determining the proportions according to his own interest and skills.

FACILITIES

One of the most outstanding aspects of the Parkway Program is that it has no school building. Although central headquarters are provided for each Parkway Program unit where teachers have office space and students have lockers, all classes operate in community facilities. It can accurately be stated that the first obligation of a Parkway teacher is to find a place in which to teach his class: the finding of space is an activity shared by all members of the Program, including students, and is considered an educational activity in itself, requiring a thorough investigation of the city and its spatial resources. The city offers an incredible variety of learning labs: art students study at the Art Museum, biology students meet at the zoo; business and vocational courses meet at on-the-job sites such as journalism at a newspaper, or mechanics at a garage. Academic classes are likely to be found meeting anywhere, with churches, business conference rooms, vacant offices, and public lobbies among those facilities most commonly in use.

The search for facilities occupies a good part of each semester, and may become almost a full-time occupation for those members of the Program who are best at it. Old Parkway students seldom pass an empty building without noting the address and passing it on to someone who will try to find out who owns it, and whether the Program can 'borrow' it. The Program pays for none of its facilities, but instead looks for "wasted space", space which is maintained 24 hours a day, but which is in use perhaps less than five or six of those hours. Students then, in going from class to class, will travel around the city (normally on foot), and may visit as many as five or six different institutions in the course of a day.

FUNDING

The operational and instructional costs of the Parkway Program are roughly equal to those of traditional schools in Philadelphia on a per/student basis. The Program was established on a Ford Foundation planning grant, however after less than a year of operation, most of the Program's operational expenses were assumed by the School District of Philadelphia. The District will continue to support the operating costs of the Program, but additional funding from private sources may be sought to develop organizational models which will make further expansion of the Program possible, and to devise an evaluation model which will determine Program's long-term effect.

As the Parkway Program expands, it is anticipated that it can be operated at a per/student cost which is less than that required by a traditional school building: the bigger it grows, the less expensive it becomes. The saving lies in the fact that the Program does not require the School District to provide or maintain expensive school buildings, equipment and grounds. As students are added to the Program, the Program expands its exploration into the resources of the city--both physical and human. New areas of the community are opened so that, instead of being concentrated in one area, Parkway students are spread out to make the greatest possible use of the city's industrial, cultural, and scientific organizations. No part of the community is void of resources which can be turned to educational value: even a semi-rural or rural neighborhood offers possibilities. The expansion of the Program, then, is limited only by size of the total community--a community which, at present, has been only barely penetrated.

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

The Parkway student finds, at the beginning of each semester, between one and two hundred courses of study available to him. Studies are classified according to subject areas in which student must meet requirements for graduation, however, a wide choice of alternatives is offered in each area, and each student may choose his own way of approaching the subject. In English he may study Shakespeare, Television Production, or Basic Reading. A study of municipal government can be substituted for a study of the Civil War for American History credit. "Math" may mean Algebra, Accounting, Computer Programming, or Retail Merchandising. Science can be Biology, or work at a local hospital. The choice in each case is the student's, but it can be made only after a thorough examination of the student's needs, interests and goals. It is the faculty's job to see that each student makes this self-analysis.

The Parkway curriculum can be broken into five basic areas, each described briefly below. These five areas can be further divided as follows: Faculty Offerings and Institutional Offerings are concerned primarily with the instruction of the student; Tutorial, Town Meeting, and Management Groups involve the student in the operation of the Program itself in an educational way. While each student puts together his own program from activities available, choosing his own ways of learning, each student will in some way be involved with all of the following activities:

Faculty Offerings

This group includes all of those courses taught by the Parkway staff, including interns, and it represents the basic Parkway curriculum. While all major subject areas are covered--English composition, Geometry, Typing, Languages, and so on, many staff members take the opportunity to teach in areas where they have a special interest--17th century poets, for example, or the history of civil disobedience, the ecology of the city, medieval art, advanced music theory. It is because the Program permits its teachers to teach in their own areas of interest and specialty that the catalogue of Faculty Offerings more resembles a college catalogue than the usual high school course list. Curricular flexibility of this kind also enables each faculty member to work up to his greatest potential, with the benefits going to the teacher, the student and the Program alike.

Institutional Offerings

Faculty offerings comprise roughly half of the courses of study available to the Parkway student. The other half is made up of courses taught by individuals and institutions in the community within specialized areas. These individuals and institutions are recruited by Parkway students and teachers as interests in a given area are recognized: student interest in medically related professions led to the establishment of a series of courses in local hospitals--cooperation from the hospitals was not hard to solicit in the light of the shortage of trained para-medical personnel. Auto Mechanics is taught in a garage by the garage's employees. Art students study at the Art Museum and at local Art Colleges under the guidance of these institution's staff members. Journalism students study with reporters at a newspaper; an architect teaches architecture; a series of community mothers teach home economics; a local jeweler teaches her specialized skills; a large industry teaches business management. Given the variety of resources which together make up an urban center, no student should find the guidance in a preferred subject impossible to locate. If the course isn't available, the student and staff set to work to make it available at the earliest opportunity. Parkway students have studied leathercraft, veterinary medicine, Swahili, and child psychology, with the best specialists the city can offer. If a student interested in Cemetery Management should join the Program, there is little doubt that a person would shortly be found to help him.

Community professsionals are not paid, and are generally motivated to assume responsibility for the education of students out of an interest in the future of their own fields. Few professions have been untouched by the shortage of adequately trained personnel --many have seized gladly the opportunity to interest students in chemistry, insurance, nursing, and so on as early as possible. The advantage to the student of "trying on" a number of professions while still in high school is enormous. A student who has been "turned off" by the system for years, may find his interest in academic subjects re-kindled when he begins to study, say, architecture, and has the chance to finally see to what use those academic skills may be put.

Tutorial

The Tutorial group consists of two faculty members and roughly sixteen students, selected randomly. All students and teachers are committed to this group, meeting four hours weekly.

The functions of the Tutorial are several, and central to the successful operation of the Program. Listed briefly, the Tutorial is a basic skills unit in which all students are provided with essential background in English and Mathematics; a guidance unit, in that the Tutorial leader is responsible for helping students choose courses of study intelligently and for seeing that the student is enrolled in courses which will help him meet his goals; an evaluation unit, in which the objectives and progress of the Parkway Program itself is regularly discussed; and a human relations, or support unit, for while a student may be engaged in a constantly changing course of study according to his own interests, the Tutorial remains a constant in the sea of variables--a place where he is expected to learn to work effectively with a group which he did not choose, a group which is likely to contain many people very different from him in background. Learning to function under these conditions is not easy, but it is perhaps the most important thing a student should learn.

Activities in Tutorial sessions

re determined by the group, and may ary widely. The eight or nine Tutorial groups within one unit may all, at he same time, be doing completely ifferent things: One group may be oncentrating on math skills, while nother is planning the establishment f a lunch program. Still another ight be planning a trip to a local ovie, with an eye toward discussing t later. A fourth might have elected o study the question of the value of ollege as opposed to alternative plans uch as Peace Corps, Army, or a job. he important thing is for the group to efine and attack a problem, the solution of which will benefit all members f the group, and ultimately, perhaps ther members of the Program as well.

Management Groups

Management Groups are student rganizations which help run the Parkway rogram. The procedure is simple: a pecific problem or question is identified, and a Management Group is organized to solve or answer it. The purose of the Management Group is both to nvolve students in the administration f the Program in a genuinely serviceble way and to provide them with an pportunity to develop real leadership nd management skills. Past Management roups have undertaken to work in the reas of Public Relations, finding pace for classes, determining ways of mproving communications within and etween units, discovering "who <u>really</u> as the power at Parkway". The groups lo not always succeed in solving the roblem they have undertaken, but ailures to solve a problem may be as ducational as success, if the student an identify the reasons for the failre, and re-structure the problem ccordingly.

Town Meeting

Each week, a student will usually a own meeting, a gathering of the dent body and staff of his unit to discuss, fight about, and perhaps solve problems facing the community. A town meeting may be chaired by a teacher, an intern or a student. An agenda is compiled and the items, which may range from how to get a water cooler to a discussion of whether teachers should have veto power over students are discussed. Town meeting is the House and the Senate of the Parkway organization, and it alternately provides lessons in group organization and group frustration. It also insures that not a week goes by without each member of the Parkway community finding out what is on everyone else's mind.

From these activities--Tutorial, Town Meeting, Management Groups, courses in the classroom and in the community, the Parkway student makes his schedule. With that much to do, it is little surprise that most Parkway students commit themselves to a longer than average school day, often starting at nine and ending after five. There is unlimited opportunity to vary the schedule and few students get the chance to fall into a tedious routine. As one student put it, "It's better than regular school, but it's tougher. Because you're on your own. No one is going to tell you what to do and how to do it--you have to decide for yourself. And if you make the decisions, you take the responsibility. That's just the way it is."

EVALUATION

Evaluation at the Parkway Program is an ongoing process in which the student must take at least as great a part as the teacher. In many respects, evaluation is itself the central course of study at the Parkway Program: students must constantly evaluate their goals, needs, and objectives in order to choose courses; they must daily evaluate the effect of those courses in light of their needs and interests. At Parkway, evaluation is a living part of daily activity, not a post-mortem which takes place after the damage has been done.

A formal evaluation takes place at the end of each semester--three times a year. At that time, students and faculty take time to assess their progress, each other's progress, the Program's progress. No "grades" or "marks" are assigned. Each student's record is composed of documents written jointly by the teacher and the student in each course the student takes (including tutorial and work/study programs). The evaluation form will include: The teacher's description of the course and the teacher's evaluation of the work of the student; the student's evaluation of the course, and the student's evaluation of his own progress in it; and the student's evaluation of the teacher, with suggestions for improvement. Reading lists, portfolios of significant work and test scores such as college boards may be added. Three times a year, the whole packet is xeroxed and sent home instead of a report card by tutorial leaders.

The formal evaluation may take as long as two weeks, however it is considered a part of the curriculum without which the other parts would be useless. Soon some scholar (or perhaps a management group) might like to review the history of the Program, and compare the changes which have taken place with the changes suggested in the evaluation forms. He will find a high degree of correlation. Based on evaluations, courses of study have been abolished or initiated,

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"A STATE OF MIND"

Making inquiries about the Parkway Program can be a frustrating business. Nearly every question one might have about our operations, methods, and procedures is likely to meet with the same unrewarding response: "It depends." No description of the Program can pretend to be inclusive, or even completely accurate, for Parkway is a Program based not on rules, but on exceptions. It is a Program in which learning is defined not as a subject, a teacher, a classroom, but as a process--a process which may take place anywhere, in many forms. Even a question as simple as "how do you teach algebra" is likely to meet with a barrage of answers--a different one from each math teacher on the staff. A Parkway student put it concisely: "Parkway, you see, isn't a place. It's a state of mind".

In a way, then, the most outstanding features of the Parkway Program--the lack of a building, the use of community resources, the small informal classes--are not really what Parkway is about. What Parkway is about is an attitude toward learning, an attitude which suggests that learning is an enjoyable, profitable experience--not something which one stoically endures. In order to serve this attitude, and to encourage it, the Parkway Program draws on the spectacular resources of the Philadelphia community. However, to say that without those resources better education is not possible is a denial of accepted educational principles. Even in a traditional class, within a school building, with a traditional curriculum, it is possible to structure the educational experience so that the student feels he has a stake in it. But it must first be admitted that each student has a right to make decisions about his own education, and that unless the student is permitted to make those decisions, his education can never be as useful to him as it might be.

"A State of Mind": Until learning is recognized as exactly that, and

not a programmed encounter with pre-set ideas and materials, the educational system will continue to slide backward, instead of moving forward. By setting the boundaries of students' education, educators do students a great disservice, for if the student is permitted to set his own boundaries, he will likely end up going much farther and much deeper that his teacher would have prescribed. One Parkway teacher explained the effect of a self-determined curriculum this way: "You take two students studying physics, and you want to know which is studying physics because he has to, and which is studying it because he wants to. In lab, they may both look like they are doing the same thing. You could, of course, ask the students which is which. But my way would be to wait until the end of the semester and see which one knows the most about physics. The kids who wanted to study it will come out ahead every time."

Without the community influence, without the help of the specialists, without the access to cultural and business centers, would there be a Parkway? According to most Parkway students, there would be. "Parkway means teachers caring about you, and listening to you, and helping you learn what you want to learn", one student said. "That doesn't have anything to do with the place or the subject. In my old school the teachers were good and the subjects were OK--but the truth was, nobody gave a damn."

Unless the student has the support of the educational institution, unless he feels that it is working with him and not against him, unless he feels that his interests and needs and goals will be taken into account, no wealth of resources will help that student learn. If the student is assured of all these things, however, he will learn almost anywhere. He can't help it. For learning almost like breathing, is a natural thing. We need only to encourage it and show the student how to channel it.

Educators are perhaps fortunate that they have to work with raw material which is ultimately capable of taking over and processing itself--if they let it. If we put a student on the right track, and lend him our support, he will solve most of his own problems--and maybe some of ours as well. We can start to look forward to a time when schools are graduating effective, capable, happy individuals. If, however, it continues to be the case that the best a student can hope for is to be processed by a machine--even a good machine--we can only continue to rely on those few who have, against all odds, still somehow managed to learn something in spite of their education.