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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet describes a program to promote effective home-school relations and reflects the belief that parent-teacher cooperation is essential for the best education for children. Discussed are specific steps that teachers can take to involve parents in the classroom and some of the fears and attitudes that may influence the behavior and effectiveness of parents. Suggestions are given to help teachers plan activities which are appropriate for parental help in class (nursery through grade 6). A final chapter sums up problems which may be encountered, enumerating teacher fears and rewards in a parent participation program. (NH)

PARENTS: Active Partners In Education

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Mary Lou Sayler
March, 1971

WHY PARENT INVOLVEMENT?

> Call in your parents. Draft them. Bring them into your classroom. Turn them into assistant teachers. Make teacher-aides out of them. Every single day have two or three or four parents working right beside you, teaching in the classroom with you.
>
> Schools and children and teachers need a revolutionary approach right now. We need a device immediately to insure that every child can find some intellectual content that he can master and put to good use. Drafting the help of parents is the only solution that will overnight let the boys and girls in school today have the teacher-pupil ratio that decent education demands.[1]

James L. Hymes, one of America's foremost authorities on early childhood education, gave this admonition to educators nearly ten years ago. Along with many others, he believes that the involvement of the parent, both physically and emotionally, in the education of his child represents the ultimate in school-home relationships.

The fact that American children, in general, are treasured, worked for, and cared for makes effective home-school relations possible. Nothing touches a parent so deeply as information about his child — an extension of himself — in the school situation. A parent w. ny times sacrifice his own needs and desires to help his child.

Some educators are of the opinion that the home and the school today tend to operate more and more independently of one another. They see a need for greater cooperation. The first step in establishing a cooperative climate is to recognize and act upon a well established fact: *The school and the home need each other.* The goals they seek in the lives of children should be mutual goals. If the goals of the home and the school are in conflict, children often become confused and develop anxieties which prevent learning.[2]

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[1] James L. Hymes, *A Child Development Point of View* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), p. 96.

[2] Maurice Applegate, *Everybody's Business — Our Children* (Evanston, Illinois: Row Peterson and Company, 1952), p. 60; Irving D. Harris, *Emotional Blocks to Learning*, pp. 39-52, 70-95; Richard R. Gariepy, *Your Child is Dying to Learn!* (Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Publishers, 1967), pp. 156-170.

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The Necessity for Two-Way Communication

Educators who desire more effective school-home cooperation recognize that schools must develop a two-way effort. The emphasis cannot be one of "selling the school" to parents, nor can the effort be considered a parent education program wherein the parents "learn" what the school wants them to learn. Parents also are teachers. They, more than anyone else, determine the success of their child in school.

The use of parent volunteers in classrooms has proven to be of mutual benefit to teachers, parents, and children. *Teachers* profit from the specific knowledge that parents have about their own children; *parents* profit from the general information that teachers have about many children; and *children* profit from the understandings gained by both parents and teachers. As parents and teachers grow to understand their mutual problems and some possible solutions, their time with the children is more effectively used.

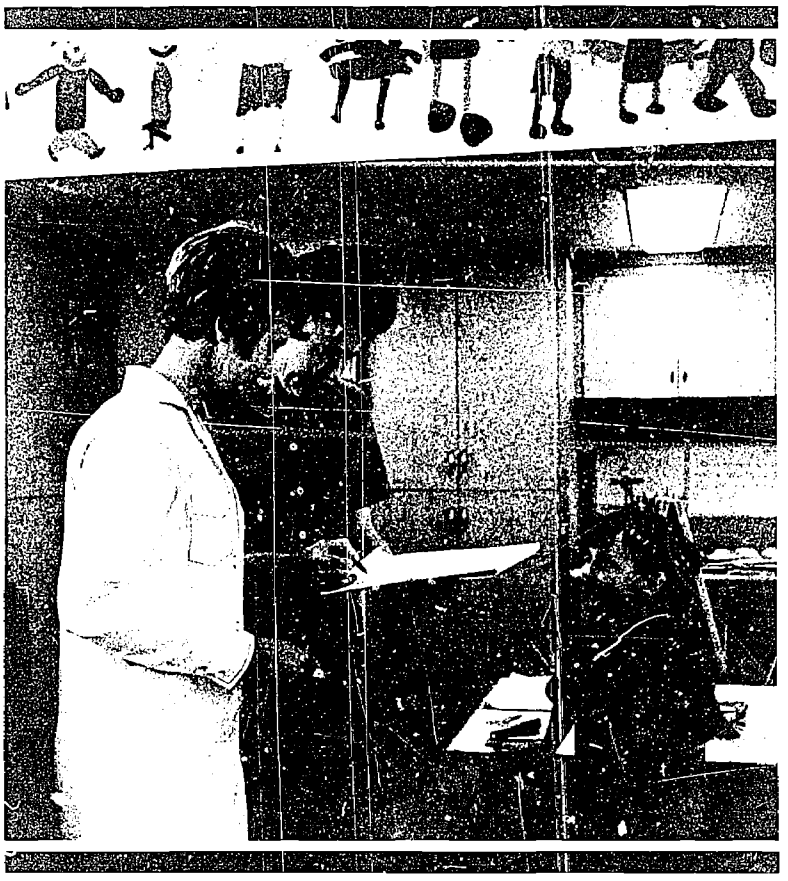
The general characteristics of most school-home communication efforts today, however, do not promote the type of relationship that is so badly needed. Too often the following situations exist:

- Communication is a one-way street, school-to-home, with a minimum of human contact between parents and their children's school. For example: school-to-home bulletins, P.T.A. newsletters, youth correspondence, and brochures prepared by curriculum writers.
- Communication increasingly takes place by means of sophisticated mass media. For example: local and city media are used for dissemination of news of unique or timely school and district activities.
- Advisory councils serve to maintain communication between the superintendent, the board of education, and leaders of the total community.
- Local advisory committees interpret the needs of the school community to the administrator.[3]

Effective parent-teacher relations are not fostered adequately by too formal and structured practices, such as optional parent-teacher conferences, scheduled open-house invitations extended twice a year, and special-events visitations. But what is needed?

A San Diego City Schools district-wide study about future communication efforts recommends the following:

[3] San Diego City Schools, *The Elementary School of Tomorrow, Toward New Design and Direction. Phase II: Evaluation and Future Planning* (San Diego: San Diego City Schools, 1968), pp. 24-26.



The complications in school and community relations are essentially those brought about by human relations factors. We are living in an age of changing social and human rights interpretation and as such our need for revitalized and refined communication with the community is imperative. To organize our efforts alone on the basis of school needs is not realistic. *In some manner or form, we must involve our partners in the pursuit of what is best for children. In doing so, we make our major contribution to a good school and community working relationship* (italics not in the original).

The process of providing realistic two-way communication between the school and the community has a variety of facets for consideration. Each communications vehicle needs to be utilized; each needs to be considered for constant evaluation and refinement.[4]

[4] Ibid., p. 27.

The Trend Toward Community Involvement

The development of parent and community involvement programs may be seen as a part of the trend away from the self-contained classroom where one teacher is responsible for the learning experiences of one group of children. Educational factors which are contributions to this trend are:

- A greater emphasis on individualized instruction.
- Innovative programs developed through compensatory education practices.
- The knowledge explosion.
- An increase in team-teaching assignments.
- The addition of paraprofessionals to the teaching staff.
- Required parent participation in Head Start programs.
- The development of school learning centers equipped with new technology.

Parent volunteers and paraprofessionals can assist teachers in meeting the needs of individual children. The added staff also allows the teacher to plan a greater variety of learning activities. Their contributions can enhance the environment of the classroom. The increased ratio of adults to children increases the opportunities for meeting the unique needs of each child. Children, like adults, are attracted to a variety of personalities. By adding more adults to the classroom, we increase the likelihood of making available the adult who will spark "that which is already waiting"[5] in each child.

The expressed need of most elementary schools to develop and grow, to set aside outmoded practices and to create more effective programs implies an acceptance of change. If improvements are to be accomplished, however, parents must be willing to accept change.

Public understanding of education is vital to a quality public school system in a democracy. The following statement of the National School Public Relations Association in 1952, however, poses even a greater challenge today:

> In a community where the people understand the school program and have faith in the staff, the quality of education is usually high. . . . Where schools are not good, the cause may often be found in the indifference,

[5] John I. Goodlad, *Planning and Organizing for Teaching*, Project on the Instructional Program of the Public Schools (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1963), p. 158.

[6] *A Teacher's Guide to the PTA* (Chicago: National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1962), p. 39.

misinformation, and distrust among the people. Public education is not likely to be better than the public's understanding of the schools.[6]

The current trend toward rejection of school bonds and tax elections may be due to the failure of the profession to communicate the needs of today's education in a relevant manner. It is increasingly important that parents and other citizens have firsthand information about the schools if they are to internalize the values and goals which are supportive of quality education. One elementary principal I recently talked with recognized that "the schools today are vulnerable." She feels that "the better informed parents are about today's schools, the less they will see the schools through the eyes of the past because their evaluation will be based on the needs of today."

Goals of the Program

I assume that no influence upon the child's early years is as powerful as that of the home. With such an assumption, it is obvious that the school has a responsibility for doing whatever it can *to help the home help the child learn effectively in school.*[7]

The parents can do the most good in the *prevention* of learning difficulties.[8]

The impact of the above quotations becomes more pertinent when we attempt to relate their meanings to the establishment of goals and hoped-for outcomes of a parent involvement program. Basically, the goals are these:

- To enlist and strengthen the cooperation of the parents in the education of their children.
- To provide volunteer help to the classroom teacher to better meet the individual needs of children.
- To develop an environment that encourages friendly two-way communication between home and school.

Accepted principles for planning programs for nursery, kindergarten and elementary education demand that a true partnership exist between home and school. This publication is designed to present practical suggestions for implementing a successful parent involvement program in your school.

[7] John H. Niemeyer, "Home-School Interaction," *Profile of the School Dropout*, ed. Daniel Schreiber (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 352.

[8] Irving D. Harris, *Emotional Blocks to Learning* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), p. 154.

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INITIATING A PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

Each teacher must develop his own plan for involving parents in the classroom. The individuality and uniqueness of the program in each classroom cannot be overstressed. The teacher must feel comfortable with the additional adults in the classroom. He must feel that he can be himself in the situation. Therefore, he is the only person that can adapt and adopt a plan which is workable for him and his pupils. Ideally, the program will allow him more time for planning and supervising the instructional program.

The teacher must resist feeling pressured into trying to do more than he is able or willing to do. He should not hesitate to begin inviting parent volunteers even though his plan may call for a much smaller degree of involvement than other teachers in the school. Neither should he hesitate to be the first teacher in the school to initiate a program.

Planning Specific Steps

Some specific steps the teacher may take are:

1. Determine the number of parent volunteers he is willing to involve initially.
2. Decide upon one or two activities in which he feels parents can be of assistance.
3. Set up an activity program so that only one or two children are working with a parent at one time. (Later, parents and teacher may wish to depart from this guideline.)
4. Decide how he is going to invite the parents to participate. Will it be by:
   - A letter to all the parents?
   - Personal notes to a few parents?
   - A telephone call?
   - Extending a personal invitation when the parents visit school?
5. Schedule a conference with the principal. Let him know about plans. He *depends* on his staff to keep him informed.

Knowing the Community

The general aim of a parent involvement program must be the same for each school: *to develop a dynamic, cooperative partnership with the home in the education of the child.* However, the emphasis and the specific expectations will be determined by the needs, resources, and attitudes of the parents and the community in which they live. Educators must work within the realistic family and community circumstances. These circumstances must be considered to an even greater degree in setting goals for the program. Above all, the goals *should be realistic* in terms of the general welfare of the community, and should not add any frustration to either teachers or parents!

In a high socioeconomic community, fathers will represent many of the professions, and they can be invaluable as resource persons especially for the social studies program. However, in some schools in a low socioeconomic area many families do not have a father in the home, or the fathers are not able to take time off from work for this purpose. Whatever the situation, the teacher who recognizes the value of the male image to youngsters will call upon men friends or volunteers from the community to meet this developmental need. Young boys, especially, need to associate and identify

with men in order to develop a positive self-image which incorporates desirable masculine characteristics.

Many parents in low socioeconomic conditions are unable to participate regularly in a parent volunteer program because of a combination of factors:

- There are several school-age children in the family.
- One or more preschool-age children are at home.
- Often a member of the family is ill.
- The mother is chronically tired because of poor health, lack of rest, and a taxing work schedule in the home.

The teacher who is aware and understands some of these problems faced by parents does not make unrealistic demands. The teacher may need to rely on other more traditional means of communication, such as parent conferences, home calls, written communication, and telephone calls. *However, unless the teacher extends the invitation, he will not know how many parents would find it possible to accept.*

Understanding the Fears and Attitudes of Parents

When we consider the development of a new program which brings parents and teachers in closer contact than before, it may be well worthwhile to review some of the fears and attitudes, recognized and unrecognized, that may influence the behavior and effectiveness of parents.

The Parents' Fears. The teacher who understands and respects the needs and fears of parents is best equipped to deal with them in a constructive way. Some basic concerns and suggested ways of handling them are:

- Some parents fear the teacher because they recall their own unhappy experiences in school.

  A warm, friendly, interested attitude on the part of the teacher when he makes the initial contact with the parent is a *must* if he expects the parent to accept the invitation to help in the classroom.

- Some parents feel that the teacher does not appreciate the difficulties of parenthood and blames parents for the child's failure in school.

  A comment by the teacher can show the parent that the teacher understands: "Mrs. J., I know it must be difficult to raise three boys when their father is away on duty overseas for long

periods of time." The teacher's awareness of the family situation enables the parent to talk more freely and to be more responsive to the teacher as he seeks to establish a closer bond with the home.

- Some parents feel that the teacher doesn't know how to handle their child.

  By observing and participating in classroom activities, parents can gain respect for the teacher's professional skills and come to understand that he can be trusted to act in the best interests of each child. *The parent, too, comes to understand that by interpreting her child's behavior the teacher can better understand how to handle the child.*

- Some parents feel that the school does not spend enough time teaching the "three R's."

  After participating in a primary classroom, they may actually wonder whether the school doesn't spend too much time on the three R's. They will know that phonics is taught. They will understand that, regardless of the efforts of the teachers, some children have difficulty learning to read even in a small group and that they do profit from individual help.

- Some parents feel that the schools do not operate efficiently. They feel that the taxpayers' money is wasted on frills.

  By participating regularly in the classroom, parents can come to appreciate the need for the variety of textbooks, audio-visual materials, and equipment used. Through a closer, informal contact with school personnel they may gain an understanding for maintaining and improving a quality instructional program. They may come to appreciate the need for a teacher aide on a full-time basis.

- Some parents fear that the schools encourage a lack of discipline.

  By participating in the classroom program, parents come to a realistic understanding of the problems faced by the school.

  One parent said, "I had no idea that teachers had to put up with so many problems!" Parents come to appreciate the importance of their role in the life of a child.

- Some parents feel that they will not be able to do anything worthwhile to help the children.

  By participating in classroom and playground activities, parents will discover that the individual attention which they can provide for children may be the missing element of good elementary education.

The Parents' Attitudes. Parents are eager for knowledge about their own child. They want to know:

- About his school activities.
- How he responds to other children in the classroom.
- How other children respond to him.
- How he gets along on the playground.
- What he particularly enjoys or dislikes about school.
- Whether the teacher takes a personal interest in him.

Parents need to experience the thrill of knowing fully what their children are doing and to have the opportunity of watching them participate in school activities. Teachers can make this possible.

Parents not only want to know about their children's school events, but they want an active share in the activities as an additional way of expressing their love and concern for their children. The opportunity to be useful is a satisfaction that people, particularly parents, need more and more as they go through life. Our modern technological world has robbed parents of the opportunity to be useful to their children in as many ways as they could in the past. The adult, in general, must look for ways to give of himself, to relate to a larger cause, to do for others.[9] The school can provide this opportunity to the mutual benefit of parents, children, and teachers.

Working With Parents' Reluctance or Inability to Participate

If the classroom teacher should fail to get a response to the invitation for parent volunteers, he may wish to consider the reasons for lack of response and what he can do to improve the situation. Some *typical nonverbalized reasons* for not participating and suggested action on the part of the teacher are:

- The parent feels inadequate and is fearful of the teacher and the school situation.

  Make a visit to this home. The parent needs to find out, on her home ground, that she can communicate with the teacher. She needs the reassurance that the teacher is a friendly, understanding person who has a genuine interest in her child.

- The parent feels that it is the job of the school to educate the child and to provide for his well-being during school hours.

[9] Richard C. Cornuelle, *Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), pp. 55-64.

Schedule a conference. (Sometimes, with some parents, a telephone call can be just as effective.) Explain the purpose of the program to the parent. Help her to understand that her child as well as others will benefit by her participation. Keep the communication door open.

- The parent does not feel needed at school.

  After the initial visit, parent observation does not hold the appeal for parents that active participation does. Plan to involve the parent in classroom activities.

- The parent does not approve of changes in the present school system. She fears parents in the classroom will disrupt the instructional program. She feels that her place is in the home just as the teacher's is in the classroom.

  Do not become defensive. Explain the need for more adults in classrooms for meeting the needs of individual children. Try to help the parent understand the reasons for the developing trend toward individualized instruction and nongraded units of school organization.

Sometimes, actual conditions and demands of the home preclude parents' participation in the program. Situations of this type and suggested teacher approaches are:

- The parents have younger children who are not in school.

  Two parents may arrange to exchange babysitting chores, so that they can come in on alternate days of the week.

  Parents may hire a babysitter if they are convinced that the school child will benefit.

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A conference may be necessary to clarify the goals of the parent involvement program.

- Lack of transportation.

  Schedule parents who know each other and who can form a car pool, or introduce two parents who live near each other for the purpose of working out transportation arrangements.

- The mother is too busy in the home.

  Schedule a conference to discuss with the parent why it is important for the school and the home to work together.

  Find out if the parent has a friend among the participating parents. If she does, a telephone call from someone who is enthusiastic about the program may be all that is needed.

  Assure parents that fathers are equally welcome in the classroom.

- Mother is employed during school hours.

  Ask the mother if it is possible to arrange for time off during the work week.

  Let her know that the father may come instead, if this is possible.

  Let her participate in some way at home. Could she make something for the class?

  Encourage her to come to school one day a month if this is possible for her.

- The parent does not speak English.

  Enlist the aid of another parent in the classroom, whenever possible.

  Schedule two parents who share a common language (one of whom speaks English) on the same day.

  Let the parent know that she can help in areas where language is not involved.

  Help her to understand the goals of parent involvement.

  Let her know that the teacher speaks her language—if this is so!

Establishing Rapport With Parents

The first few visits to the classroom are vital to the success of the program. Teachers should make the parents welcome and involved as soon as possible. Initially, parents will probably be most comfortable if they are allowed time to observe. Encourage parents to walk around the classroom to observe groups of children at

work. After the first observation, many parents feel ready to assist with activities. Other parents may need a longer observation period.

If parents indicate a willingness to participate in classroom activities, provide the opportunity for them to assist in a special area of interest. One parent, who was musically talented, added a great deal to the program by playing the piano for music and rhythmic activities. Let parents assist children by listening to their ideas and thoughts, by answering questions, and by helping to create interest. It is important for parent volunteers to know that in many ways they too are teaching.

Parents need to feel that their ideas are accepted as worthwhile. It is reassuring to parents to know that the teacher is not a critic, and that he realizes that the problems a parent faces in handling children at home often differ from those that arise in the classroom.[10]

Orienting Parents to the School Situation

The School Plant and Staff. Parents should become acquainted with the general layout of the school plant, the location of lavatories, workroom, supplies and equipment, the general office, and the teachers' lounge. Members of the school staff should be introduced to parents.

The physical arrangement of the classroom should be explained to parents. They should know how, when, and why children move about the room, where supplies are stored, and how playground equipment is handled. The daily schedule should be available.

Professional Ethics. Teachers should be sure that parent volunteers understand the need for following certain ethics of the teaching profession. Any person working with children in the school situation should:

- Keep problems or information concerning pupils or members of the staff confidential.
- Avoid evaluating children.
- Give an honest and fair impression about any situation involving the class, the school, the teacher, and other volunteers.

Political Activities. The teacher should make sure that parents are aware of state or local laws regarding political activities in the schools. The distribution of political materials on school property is generally prohibited unless the materials are used as an instructional aid with no attempt to bias individual viewpoints.

[10] Ethel Kawin, "Implications for Parent Education," in *Prevention of Failure,* ed. Helen Heffernan (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Elementary-Kindergarten-Nursery Educators, National Education Association, 1965), p. 84.

Maintaining Classroom Control

The teacher is responsible for maintaining classroom control, even though other adults may be working with children in the room. The teacher should help the parents to become aware of the standards of behavior in the classroom. It is, of course, important that all adults in the classroom be consistent in their requirements of children.

Parents will learn to appreciate the professional skills of the teacher who creates a flexible, comfortable classroom "climate." They will soon see the value of planning situations which insure success as a means of providing subtle, positive control in the classroom. If a behavior problem seems to call for physical restraint or punishment, parents should call the teacher.

The teacher may wish to review the following suggestions:

- Consistency is vital.
- Be sure that parents are aware of classroom and playground procedures and rules.

- Be positive. Praise progress toward established goals.
- Be patient and kind. This attitude will help the child to develop self-control.

Demonstrating Teaching Techniques

Many parents will need the opportunity to observe the teacher working with small groups of children in order to become effective "volunteer teachers." Parents are anxious to help the children learn, and they are grateful to the teacher who helps them to improve their teaching skills. Teachers may be of special help to parents by explaining, before the actual demonstration, the background of the activity, the plan for the activity, material to be used, and the expected learnings. For example, "Zoo Lotto" may be considered "just a game" by parents. However, if its use is explained in terms of language development, attention span, and reading readiness, parents are able to extend the learnings into the home situation, thereby complementing the school's efforts.

Interpreting Child Growth and Development

As parents become more involved in the actual classroom situation, they will tend to ask the teacher for information on child growth and development patterns. Teachers who are initiating parent involvement programs may find it very helpful to review the physical, emotional and social characteristics of children at each grade level. Such a review will help teachers to become more articulate in interpreting child growth and development patterns to parents.

Conferring With Parents

The character of parent-teacher conferences *does* change as a result of the involvement of the parents. A kindergarten teacher reports that before initiating a parent activity program, parents requested many conferences. They appeared to be anxious about the child's progress. Now, because they participate and *know* what their child is accomplishing, they request very few conferences. So, actually this teacher has more time for planning and preparing than she did before. At the first-grade level more conferences are requested by both teachers and parents. However, the conferences tend to be shorter and much more informal, and they tend to focus on a specific problem which either the parent or the teacher has identified as an area of concern. A cooperative effort based on sincerity and mutual respect for the part each plays in the life of the child can pay handsome dividends.

MAINTAINING A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

Planning With and For Parents

The premise of this publication — *the classroom teacher should be the one to develop a program of activities which is appropriate for both the children and the parents in his classroom* — has been well delineated. However, for most teachers, planning and supervising the activities of other adults in the classroom will be a new experience.

Planning is essential for developing effective, meaningful parent volunteer activities. Usually, parent volunteers arrange to spend one hour on a certain day of each week in the classroom. Some teachers plan for helpers every school day; others, on only one or two days a week. A first-grade teacher tells how she has incorporated fourteen parent volunteers into her class schedule:

> Enough mothers come now so that I can count on two mother-helpers every day to help with the independent reading group and the story table. On two days a week, two additional mothers come in to help at the manuscript writing table. We all work together in the same room. When they are here, we go right on with our regular schedule. Each morning from 9:00 to 10:00, I have a reading circle at the front of the room. A mother-helper has the independent reading circle at the same time, and my third reading group chooses an activity. Some of these children go to the story table or the manuscript writing table. The mothers at the writing table work with two children at a time for twenty minutes. The mother at the story table works with one child for ten minutes listening and writing the children's stories.

With more adults to supervise the classroom, it is possible to enrich the learning environment so that it is more challenging to pupils in many ways. The classroom can be arranged so that it stimulates interest, promotes curiosity, and motivates the pupils to pursue self-initiated activities both at home and at school. For example: under the supervision of a father or grandfather, the tool kit and the sawhorse corner can now be used more meaningfully than it was possible in years past when the committee approach under the guidance of one adult many times ended in confusion through a lack of adequate supervision.

The secret of success, then, from the teacher's point of view, is to organize his classroom and plan the program so that he can *capitalize* on the help which parent volunteers can give.

Selecting Appropriate Activities

Just as there is no one way to initiate a parent involvement program in your school, there is no prescribed set of activities that would be appropriate for all parent volunteers. The selection must be based upon the needs of the children, the goals of the schools, and the unique talents of the parents. Because of the diversity of the people involved, there will be much diversity in the activities selected.

Teachers who are contemplating the use of parent volunteers in their classrooms should find helpful, however, the list of activities that I gathered from observing and interviewing teachers in the San Diego City Schools who have tried to develop a more effective partnership with the home through the involvement of parents. In their classrooms, representing nursery through sixth grade, the following activities were performed by parent volunteers:

- preparing art materials (mixing paints, cutting paper into different shapes and sizes)
- supervising the "easel corner" and writing the names of children on the paper
- assisting with outdoor play activities
- supervising the classroom while teacher works with a small group in reading
- checking out of reference materials
- assisting with audio-visual equipment as needed
- guiding creative writing table activities
- helping to solve minor concerns before they develop into discipline problems
- helping children check their papers
- helping at the listening table or post
- writing autobiographies
- presenting drill games in mathematics
- helping set up and handle science experiments
- reviewing work with pupils
- using manipulative objects with slow learners to demonstrate basic facts in mathematics

- helping at the manuscript handwriting table
- leading small group discussions
- interpreting for a parent who speaks a language different from the teacher
- interpreting for the teacher while making home-calls to parents who do not speak English
- serving as a parent-volunteer chairman to schedule other parents into the classroom or school program
- assisting the teacher on field trips with planning and supervising
- contacting parents by phone to inform them or to remind them of activities
- providing a one-to-one relationship for those children who need this ratio of adult assistance to experience success in school
- staffing Learning Centers. (A number of elementary schools are converting a portion of the school auditorium into a resource room for research and independent activities. Students from many classes are scheduled in and out of the Learning Center during the day.)
- reading favorite books to small groups of children
- tutoring individual children when requested by the teacher. (The teacher should supervise tutoring by parents closely in the beginning. The teacher must plan so that both the parent and student can experience success.)
- assisting with special art, holiday, or learning activities requiring additional art guidance
- assisting the teachers in evaluating new curriculum materials
- assisting the teachers in planning and evaluating curricular experiences for their children both at home and at school

Using Additional School and Community Resources

Big brothers and sisters too can enrich the classroom experience of the young child. It may be possible to invite sixth-grade pupils to assist the kindergarten and primary-age children with a special project that is appropriate to both age groups on a one-to-one basis. This experience may be very valuable to sixth-grade boys and girls who do not have younger brothers and sisters.

Many upper grade pupils can serve ably as resource persons for primary classrooms. Their special skills, talents, interests, or first-

hand experiences may qualify them as "guest speakers." The skillful teacher will plan the presentation so that the "speaker" will find himself involved in a learning situation along with his audience.

The term "parent volunteers" as used in this publication has referred to the parents of the pupils in a particular classroom or school. However, it should be noted that, in some schools, the number of parents who will participate may be very small. After the teacher has reached those able to volunteer, he should explore the possibility of involving other members of the community. As "good human beings" they, too, enrich the classroom by bringing in new thoughts, attitudes, and ideas.

Adults in the community are more frequently asking, "What can we do?" In San Diego, women from the San Diego County Medical Society Auxiliary, the San Diego Chapter of Hadassah, Faculty Dames (wives of faculty members at San Diego State College), and other women's clubs are volunteering their services as tutors in the compensatory education program. The organization is flexible. After an initial get-acquainted session, the tutor and the teacher agree upon a time and date for assignment. Some organizations supplying volunteer tutors appoint a coordinator to work with school district personnel. A coordinator serves many purposes: retaining the interest of the volunteers, enlisting new volunteers, serving as a liaison with schools, helping to arrange in-service meetings and workshops, and generally expediting the mechanics of the program.

As the public and the profession come face to face with (1) the recognition that valuable service can be rendered to the instructional program by many adults properly supervised and (2) that funds for aides outside of the compensatory "target areas" are insufficient, more and more school systems are reaching *out* to the community for the human resources needed. These resources have been in the form of volunteers, often parents. In isolated school systems where the potentiality of the community involvement both for improving the quality of the instructional program and for improving the relationship between school and community has been truly valued, a coordinator has been added to the administrative staff to coordinate and administer the volunteer programs. Written reports of two such programs. Winnetka, Illinois, and Cincinnati, Ohio, deem them tremendously successful. The community resource volunteer program in Minneapolis, Minnesota, operates with the help of a volunteer coordinator and has been especially successful in enlisting many fathers as resource persons in the social studies program.

TO
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UP

There Will Be Problems

No innovative program is without problems, and the parent involvement program is no exception. The mere fact that more persons are involved in the educational process means some conflict is to be expected. If problems are anticipated and the means for resolving issues are made available through conferences and group meetings, differences should be minimal. The time-tried-and-proven devices of planning and evaluation are great "problem preventers," and the honest, straightforward approach to problems still seems to be the best one. Areas of concern are:

- Parents may recognize problem children at school and may add to their problem by making the community aware of school behavior.
- Parents may compare professional and personal qualities of staff members. This possibility poses a threat to the professional staff and must be dealt with on a professional basis.

Problems can often serve as springboards for learning. In one instance, a principal asked the parent to face the teacher with her complaints. The teacher realized for the first time how his behavior was perceived by the parents, and the parent gained an understanding of the various ways in which teachers may behave and yet serve the best interests of the children.

The principal of the school utilizing parent volunteers must expect to devote some time to their needs. Meetings (often short) must be scheduled to keep lines of communication open. In this way, small problems are kept small.

Teachers May Have Fears

Teachers may fear that the parents will:

- Take up too much of their time.
- Create confusion in the instructional program.

- Be critical of teachers.
- Increase already overwhelming responsibilities.
- Share confidential information acquired at school.

Teachers may fear that they will not be able to:

- Establish a working relationship with the parents.
- Teach with other adults in the classroom.
- Get along with all the parents.

The teacher who is apprehensive of what parents might do to his instructional program may consider inviting one parent whom he knows well to assist with just one activity for one hour per day. Such activities might be:

- Taking charge of the independent reading circle. (The parent is usually so busy that she doesn't have time to watch the teacher.)
- Assisting individual children who need help with seat work while the teacher works with a reading group at the front of the room.
- Writing down the stories or sentences dictated by individual children.
- Assisting children with reference materials in the Learning Center.

But the Rewards Are Great

Teachers who previously were reticent about inviting parents to the classroom have discovered that a number of parents:

- Have worthy ideas for enriching the instructional program.
- Have excellent ideas for presenting instructional materials and for clarifying concepts.
- Extend the school learnings into home activities.
- Are eager to learn, and they do; they learn from the teacher, the children, and from each other.
- Are good teachers. The children, the teachers, and other parents profit from their participation.

The Time To Act Is Now

> Teachers need to work more closely with the parents so that problems can be discovered early. There is very little the young child can do to help himself. He is dependent on his home.

These are not the words of a distinguished lecturer in a post-graduate education course, nor of a speaker to a PTA meeting, nor

of an expert in urban affairs, nor of a principal speaking informally to staff members, but of one who "knows of what he speaks": a high school boy who, because of his disruptive behavior and incompatible attitudes, has finally reached "the end of the road"—the special high school for adjustment cases in a large district. The boy was a member of a panel presented to a group of teachers discussing the roots of juvenile delinquency.

The young man's words are not particularly those that many educators want to hear because we have too often failed in our attempts to actively involve parents in the education of their children through our institutions.

Much is said about the impersonality and non-involvement of modern day life. Parent involvement programs can turn the tide in the opposite direction. They have the potential to develop close, intimate relationships between parents and children, between teachers and some parents, and between the principal and members of the community. *The time to act is now.*

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About the Author

Mary Lou Sayler has had a varied background in elementary education. Beginning her teaching career in 1951 as a third grade teacher in Tucson, Arizona, she has worked with children since that time from nursery school through the sixth grade. From 1966-1970, Mrs. Sayler was a district resource teacher in compensatory education under the Elementary-Secondary Education Act taking time out during the 1968-69 school year to complete her Masters Degree at the United States International University in elementary school administration. It was during her time as a resource teacher that she authored this manuscript. Mrs. Sayler is now vice-principal of the Vasco Nuñez De Balboa Elementary School in the San Diego (California) City Schools.

Mrs. Sayler was born in Antofagasta, Chile. She came to the United States at the age of eight and was educated in the public schools of Nogales, Arizona. She received her bachelor's degree at the University of Arizona. Mrs. Sayler is married to a high school social studies teacher and is the mother of two teen-age sons.

The author is a member of numerous professional organizations in addition to E/K/N/E. Mrs. Sayler is currently serving as parent education chairman for the 9th district of the California Congress of Parents and Teachers.

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