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SOME LESSONS  
FROM A DECADE OF RURAL  
SUPERVISION

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## CONTENTS

	Page
Introductory statement.....	1
Chapter I. Factors leading to growth in the extent of rural-school supervision.....	1
Good roads and transportation facilities.....	2
Awakened public interest.....	2
The teacher situation.....	2
Chapter II. Some results secured through rural-school supervision.....	3
Provision for professional contacts.....	4
Provision for individual conferences.....	5
Formation of teachers' councils.....	5
Improvement of teaching technique.....	5
A modern course of study.....	7
Attention to selected groups.....	7
Improved equipment and housekeeping.....	8
General stimulation to pupils and community.....	8
Strengthening the work of the county superintendent.....	9
The supervisor and prepared teachers.....	10
General community spirit.....	10
Social and personal problems.....	10
Chapter III. General problems affecting success.....	11
Professional preparation of supervisors.....	11
Preparation of county superintendents.....	12
Teacher-preparing institutions as a factor.....	12
Organization problems.....	12
Distance, number of teachers, travel expense.....	14
Chapter IV. Agencies helpful in promoting supervision.....	14
State departments of education.....	15
Teachers' reading circles.....	15
Health agencies.....	16
Educational associations and institutions.....	16
Conclusion.....	17

# **SOME LESSONS LEARNED FROM A DECADE OF RURAL SUPERVISION**

## **INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT**

Rural supervision is a comparatively new field in education. Therefore its method and practice are not definitely formulated; and supervisors at work, as well as those educators who are formulating courses in the subject, have learned and are learning in part through their own experience and that of others. For this reason they are eager to strengthen their work and increase its efficiency through a wider knowledge of actual experience and the lessons learned from it through constructive criticism and suggestion. Because of the many calls for practical aid in meeting everyday problems of rural supervision, this bulletin has been prepared with the hope that it will be helpful in modifying and reshaping courses and plans of procedure toward greater efficiency and accomplishment.

No effort is made to set up principles. The object is to consider lessons from experience of the past decade, during which, for the first time, rural supervision has had a fair trial over a reasonable extent of territory; to suggest ways in which cooperating agencies have stimulated rural supervision and have in turn been stimulated by it to help further the cause of rural education; to give suggestions looking toward further improvement; and to consider obstacles to supervision in the hope of assisting eventually to overcome them. Finally, it is the conclusion that supervision of rural schools, especially of small rural schools, is both necessary and possible, and that there is much hope for the improvement of rural education through the extension and improvement of supervision.

## **Chapter I**

### **FACTORS LEADING TO GROWTH IN THE EXTENT OF RURAL-SCHOOL SUPERVISION**

Growth in the extent of rural-school supervision, the success the movement has attained, and the increasing confidence of educators in its possibilities are largely the accomplishment of the past 10 years. However, this growth rests upon a number of contributing factors operating during and before these years, some of which must have attained

real strength before supervision could hope to recommend itself to county superintendents and rural people generally. Among these factors the following seem worthy of special mention.

*Good roads and transportation facilities.*—American inventions are the forerunners of progress in things of the spirit. This is illustrated in the dependence of rural supervision upon improved highway construction, the latter in itself both a cause and a result of the popularity of the automobile among farmers. While the automobile is among the most important factors in enlarging the horizons of rural people and the teachers of their children, the growth of suburban trolley service and the multiplication of bus lines have been factors greatly enhancing the ease of rural travel in favored localities. The relation of good roads, automobiles, trolley lines, and busses to rural supervision is significant. Rural supervision could not be successfully accomplished until supervisors were able to reach many schools scattered over a large extent of territory and find satisfactory living accommodations at the end of the day.

*Influence of an awakened interest in elementary supervision.*—During the decade there has been a general movement in cities and large towns in favor of elementary-school supervision. In small systems in which supervisory principals were formerly able to supervise elementary schools, the rapid growth of better ideals in administrative practice and supervision, the growth of high schools, and similar factors in progress now consume much of the principal's or superintendent's time. The rural principal looks toward the cities, where success in improving elementary work through employment of supervisors has been marked, and aims to avail himself and his system of similar advantages. Thus the movement has naturally crept from the cities to the smaller towns and into the country.

A large number of State and county educational surveys and investigations have recently been made. These point out the comparative failure of rural schools to live up to standards set by cities and call attention to the absence of constructive, well-planned, and professional supervision in country schools and to the great need for it. Biennial reports of State departments of education, educational and popular magazines, have called attention to the necessity of extending this educational opportunity to rural communities. The result has been a general awakening on the part of all persons interested in rural education to the need for supervision as an efficient and immediately possible method of securing more nearly equal educational opportunities for rural schools and rural-school children.

*The teacher situation as an influence.*—Rural people might have been content longer without supervision if adequately prepared teachers had been forthcoming. They were not. The war, with its resulting economic unrest, delayed to a considerable extent the

reaching of standards in teacher preparation which 10 years before seemed possible of attainment. Progressive State and county superintendents who felt that some immediate measure must be taken found at least a partial remedy in the employment of well-trained supervisors who were able to do what administrative officers alone are not able to do; namely, spend their full time in assisting teachers to improve the quality of instruction. They felt that, while a prepared teaching staff was necessary, as well as supervision, it was far better to do something toward remedying the situation than nothing at all. Hence they made a special effort to secure rural supervisors.

Legislation passed in Wisconsin illustrates this point. The number of rural teachers beginning work without even one year of professional preparation was still considerable. It was thought that perhaps a number of well-prepared rural supervisors distributed throughout all the counties of the State could make up in part for what the unprepared teachers lacked. In consequence of this view, a law (the first of its kind) was passed in 1915 providing for state-wide rural supervision. Eighty-one supervisors, with salary and expenses paid by the State, began work in 1915. At present there are 104 rural supervisors in Wisconsin.

The demand for supervision has not been confined to administrative officers and patrons. The teachers, even those who began with a hostile or indifferent spirit, desire to have the kind of practical help that supervisors are able to give. In showing teachers the possibilities of better methods of instruction, supervisors have created in the teachers a desire to add to their professional training in order that they may be still more capable. Thus supervision, in raising the standard of teaching and of qualifications on the part of the teachers, has created and fostered an increasing demand for more and better supervision from the group most vitally affected—the teachers themselves.

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## Chapter II

### SOME RESULTS SECURED THROUGH RURAL SCHOOL SUPERVISION

The past decade has been one of growth in the scientific attitude toward education and in the formulation of more definite ideas concerning the place of supervision in the educational scheme. It is recognized that the primary purpose of supervision is the improvement of instruction. All other activities of the supervisor, if their value is significant, should be contributory to this end. City supervisors can attack this problem directly. Rural supervisors have been obliged to assume a variety of duties with which city supervisors have not been burdened. Securing necessary equipment, promoting good

schoolhouse keeping, taking a place of leadership in the educational and even social activities of the community—these and a variety of more or less general and preparatory activities, rural supervisors must learn to use toward the larger end sought, i. e., improved methods of classroom instruction.

*Provision for professional contacts.*—Many rural supervisors begin preparing the ground for definite accomplishment by providing means of professional contacts on the part of the teachers. To overcome the isolation of rural teachers, to establish a cooperative basis of work among the teachers of the group and between teachers and supervisors is the first step in many a supervisor's work. In the past rural teachers have attended few professional meetings. Supervisors have therefore provided for many local and county meetings, encouraged teachers to form habits of attending them, and stressed the importance of this means of professional growth. They have urged teachers to belong to sectional and State associations and to attend meetings held by these larger groups. Here many of them have heard for the first time in their professional lives some of the national leaders in education and have been helped to a larger view of the meaning of education.

County teachers' meetings, in which a large group of teachers get together for three or more days of professional association and the discussion of large problems and topics in which all are equally interested, are now augmented by council meetings and meetings of groups of teachers from smaller geographical areas in company with their supervisors where more intimate and definite plans for schoolroom procedure are discussed. In preparing for these meetings supervisors find it advantageous to make special provision to insure active participation on the part of the teachers themselves, by the formulation of a definite program some time in advance of the meeting. Participation on the part of rural teachers is essential in overcoming isolation, in developing leadership, in cultivating the ability to "give and take" in informal discussion. When the supervisor sends out in advance the program for discussion and assigns to particular teachers a part in this discussion, they are able to contribute definitely to the good of the meeting and are prevented from ineffectually seeking for themselves answers to many of the same questions and laboriously exploring ground already charted. The supervisor is able to cover at each meeting a few of the most important problems and later take up others in the order of their importance. Through such careful planning is it possible to avoid the long, complicated programs formerly prevailing in rural teachers' meetings.

Experience shows that the supervisor's presence adds greatly to the value of teachers' meetings. However, when roads or weather or a multiplicity of duties prevent the attendance of the supervisor,

small groups of teachers are able to meet by themselves following the definite plans laid out, the secretary of the group keeping the supervisor in touch with proceedings and their results.

*Provision for individual conferences.*—The main reliance of the rural supervisor has been on the personal visits she is able to make the teachers at work. These visits enable the supervisor to familiarize herself with the work of the teachers, the needs of the children, the condition of buildings and equipment, the characteristics of the community, and other general information necessary to her success. From the various needs of the teacher the supervisor must select one or two of the most important for emphasis at each visit. It may be that the teacher is unfamiliar with the subject matter, that she sticks too closely to the text, that she has not properly classified the pupils, that her method of presentation is at fault. Whatever is selected as of greatest importance, the supervisor must herself assist in offering a remedy. This may be done through helping in the organization of the pupils, through giving a demonstration lesson herself, through formulating a daily schedule, or what not.

The supervisor's visit should always be followed by a conference in which the supervisor assists in planning to overcome difficulties, encourages the teacher to discuss problems not apparent in this day's work, discusses means of securing better equipment, and gives such other help as seems possible. Many supervisors follow such conferences with letters sent out from the main office giving additional directions, outlining reading courses, and in general following up with written suggestions the personal help given in the conference.

*Formation of teachers' councils.*—The belief in the value of a small representative group of teachers in every county serving as a teachers' council has grown far more rapidly than has the practice. Such momentum as the movement has attained in rural communities is due to the efforts of supervisors. A number of teachers' councils now formed are working effectively with the county superintendents and the rural supervisors for the improvement of educational conditions in the territory served; in securing cooperation of patrons generally, and especially in insuring cooperative effort among teachers. The council also gives an opportunity for the recognition of teachers above the average in ability and stimulates the growth of leadership within the group.

Council members grow in ability as public speakers as well as in professional attitude and often are of assistance in promoting among the people the plans of the superintendent and supervisor.

*Improvement of teaching technique.*—Education is a growing science as well as an art. The rural teaching force is made up in large part of untrained, inexperienced teachers on the one hand, and of untrained



but experienced, mature teachers on the other. To this heterogeneous group the supervisor must introduce newer concepts in education. This must be done in large part through demonstration teaching on the part of the supervisor herself or on the part of teachers who develop under her guidance. It is part of the successful supervisor's creed that "to improve instruction the supervisor should be able to show the teacher how. No one should assume to supervise instruction who can not demonstrate." At group meetings, as well as during the supervisor's visits, demonstration teaching is an important part of the program. In this way the rural teachers learn that such new ideas as the project method, the socialized recitation, the use of tests and measurements, are understandable and practicable. Here they learn to develop and use the initiative and resourcefulness of rural children; to present such subjects as history and geography in ways other than through the conventional assignment and formal textbook treatment to which they have long been accustomed. Rural supervisors throughout the country have promoted the use of standard tests as valuable teaching instruments. Through them they have shown teachers how to discover the attainments of pupils as compared with the standards they should meet and have helped teachers to plan remedial measures to insure improvement. Experience shows that the use of these modern tools of teaching in rural schools is directly proportionate to the presence of and to the interest and information possessed by rural supervisors.

A number of rural supervisors have recently made use of stenographic reports of recitations as case studies in supervision. Such reports, mimeographed and distributed to teachers, furnish many opportunities. For example, by critically going over and discussing the recitations given, the group of teachers may see where and how unwise practices can be eliminated; through the type of weaknesses discovered, they can recognize and appreciate the necessity of teaching pupils how to study. For the supervisor the occasion furnishes opportunity to draw out a number of principles of good technique.

Rural supervisors find it possible and desirable to lead teachers to pursue courses in professional reading, to familiarize themselves with articles in magazines, with school surveys and the like, and, because of their own familiarity with current professional literature and through attendance at State and national meetings, to renew the faith of teachers in education as a living, growing activity.

Many teachers have never thought of sitting down at the close of the day and asking themselves such questions as, What is my greatest strength? What is the best piece of work I have done to-day? What is the poorest? The supervisor may start the teacher on this road to efficiency; help teachers to recognize their own weaknesses as well as

their own merits, and to capitalize such skill as they attain. In so far as the supervisor helps teachers to grow and trains them in service, she is successful in improving the quality of instruction.

*A modern course of study.*—Perhaps the services of rural supervisors have nowhere been more needed than in the formulation of better courses of study for rural pupils. In some States the State department of education compiles a State course that is satisfactory. Rural supervisors then interpret and adapt to local conditions the State course of study, and see that it is understood and followed by rural teachers. In many States, however, there is no common understanding as to what shall be taught in rural schools. While the services of rural supervisors in the field of curriculum building have not been commensurate with the need (they have had too many other duties awaiting their immediate doing), a beginning has been made; the ground has been cleared of some of the mistaken views held concerning the objectives of an elementary school curriculum, and experimental work under guidance is now possible.

There has been a steady increase of sentiment as to the need of enlisting the services of selected rural teachers themselves in trying out units of a proposed curriculum. At the present time a number of promising ventures in curriculum making are in process of accomplishment.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that such experiments are under way in at least two States in which rural supervision has attained considerable success.

*Special attention to youngest and oldest groups.*—Supervisors find it necessary to help the beginning teacher to find herself in relation to her two most crucial problems, i. e., the work of the first and of the last year of the rural school. Finding the youngest children timid as a result of few contacts with other young children in their pre-school experience, and knowing little of methods with beginning children, the rural teacher has in the past done little for the 6-year-olds during their first year in school. Many rural children still spend two years covering the work of the first grade. The rural supervisor knows full well that if the over-age conditions so prevalent to-day in the rural schools are to be prevented, the problem must be definitely attacked at the beginning of the child's schooling. She encourages plays and games and often herself leads the school as a whole in these games, thereby inspiring the young teacher to do likewise and showing her how to do it. She suggests that the primary language class, made up of first and second grade children, may, during the pleasant weather of the fall, divide into groups of two or three and go out into the yard and tell one another the stories or play the

<sup>1</sup> An interesting report of the success of such an undertaking has recently come from the press: An Experiment with a Project Curriculum.—Collings. Macmillan Co.

language games taught them. This work will need planning and supervision but pays in results, because it arouses the children to an interest in one another and gives them the stimulus that comes from contact with one's contemporaries. She may extend this opportunity by suggesting that each second-grade child take out her reader and read a story to a first-grade child. These cooperative activities indirectly, as well as directly, cause timidity and lethargy to give way to poise and alertness. Thus the way is prepared for more rapid progress in the regular work.

Many rural supervisors follow the plan of copying in a notebook the names of the seventh and eighth grade pupils in every school and of writing a comment on the work of each as they find it. Such class records should be kept for at least two grades in each county. Later on, in the spring, when the common-school diploma examinations begin, there is something besides the standing on the pupil's paper and the personal equation, which occasionally figures so largely at such times, to help the examiners to decide who shall be promoted.

Rural supervisors usually direct some special county-wide activities or projects carried on by the seventh and eighth grade pupils, such as county play days, field excursions, or other worth-while experiences for all the school children in the country or at least for the group which is completing the work of the eighth grade.

*Improved equipment and housekeeping.*—Rural supervisors have found a tremendous waste resulting from the lack of proper equipment in rural schools. Sometimes the teacher has made little effort to secure better equipment because she herself did not recognize its need. Sometimes she has failed, and it is necessary for the supervisor herself to take the matter up with the board or superintendent before proper equipment can be secured. While it is regrettable that so much of the supervisor's time and strength have been used in securing materials which the board of itself should have supplied in advance, it is true that schools in which supervisors are employed have far better equipment than others. In this field supervisors have made a notable contribution.

It is equally true that the supervisor has done much to encourage and enforce better school housekeeping. This has been in part a matter of training the teachers to demand from the school janitors and the school board a clean, well-kept schoolhouse.

*General stimulation and encouragement to pupils and community.*—Supervisors throughout the country have stimulated education and promoted ideals and standards in rural communities through their active interest in the general welfare of the people in the communities in which they work. The rural supervisor frequently helps to arouse the interest of the children in a high-school education several months before they finish the eighth grade. She suggests to near-by

high-school principals that during the good weather of the fall a program may be arranged in the high school which will make it possible for many country boys and girls to familiarize themselves with the high school and its work. During the first year of high school of pupils who have completed the elementary grades under her supervision the supervisor watches their progress and often helps them to adjust themselves to a new situation.

Under the leadership of the supervisor several small schools get together for a township fair or school program. Occasionally the supervisor may take with her on her rounds a member of the upper-grade class to visit other schools. On his return the visiting pupil will have much to tell his classmates of his visit. Occasionally meetings of classes about to complete the eighth grade of several of the small schools may be held by the supervisor with the teachers. Other ways of bringing rural children together are found by supervisors with intelligence and initiative. Sometimes correspondence follows meetings of this kind. Standards are set among schools within the supervisory territory, and friendly competition among pupils in the schools is encouraged.

Among the most important contributions which supervision has made to rural education is that of stimulating teachers and communities to realize the necessity of special care for exceptional children. Thousands of rural children suffering from various physical ills, or who are feeble-minded or psychopathic, have been crowded into small schools with normal children, much to the detriment of themselves as well as of the other children. The rural supervisor who is familiar with modern progress in remedial measures has made it possible for large numbers of children to receive medical attention or special help in their school studies.

*Strengthening the work of the county superintendent.*—Much of the county superintendent's time is necessarily devoted to administrative problems and to educating the community toward a more adequate appreciation of education and a more liberal support of schools. It is generally true that the county superintendent has been so overburdened that it is impossible for him to reach a high standard of efficiency as a supervisor or to take much pride in his work. One educational officer in a county can make so little progress that, unless he has unusual physical strength, much administrative ability, and unbounded professional zeal, he will have little stimulus even to attempt real supervision. Discouragement due to these limitations has been a factor in the resignation of many a good superintendent. The appointment of a rural supervisor changes this feebleness or absence of directed effort into real educational guidance. Union of effort of the county superintendent with that of the supervisor becomes the leaven which before long permeates the indifference of

teachers and patrons and causes the schools of the county to rise to their opportunity. Discouragement is no longer common as it was when there was no coworker. County superintendent and rural supervisor together are able to accomplish something.

*The supervisor's interest in prepared rural teachers.*—Rural supervisors have contributed definitely toward rural teacher preparation by active cooperation with the teacher-preparing institutions and by encouraging teachers to add to their professional knowledge by attending those institutions in which the most effective courses are given. As a result supervisors and instructors in teacher-preparing institutions are visiting each other's work and discussing defects and possible improvements. By cooperating in carrying out observation and practice work they have made the preparing of rural teachers a cooperative project equally beneficial to all concerned. Country teachers frequently begin teaching before they have graduated from normal schools. They profit by the advice of the supervisor in the selection of courses and are able, when they return from summer school, to put into effect under the professional guidance of the supervisor the newer methods learned.

*General community spirit.*—So far rural superintendents have not succeeded to the extent that city superintendents have in acquainting their communities with school conditions and school needs. In the organization of parents and patrons, in promoting greater interest in the cooperation of parents and teachers, in arousing interest in more generous support for rural schools, supervisors have been valuable assistants to the administrative officers. They know the needs of the schools and how economically to supply them better than any one else. They have the confidence of the teachers and the community, and have therefore been unusually successful in promoting school-community interest. Money raised through parent-teacher and other associations by means of entertainments has been spent, under the direction of the supervisor, for useful equipment of educational value, which otherwise would have been spent on more or less useless material or such material as should be provided at public expense.

*Social and personal problems.*—The health of rural teachers, their status in the communities in which they work, problems concerned with living places and general housing conditions, a variety of more or less personal problems with which young teachers have to deal on taking their places in unfamiliar communities, are all matters which have engaged the attention of rural supervisors. If the supervisor is, as she should be and generally is, a woman of experience, poise, strong personality, and relative maturity she can by virtue of her greater experience and wider opportunities extend to teachers disinterested advice and service which often turns the scale and brings success

where otherwise failure was imminent. The supervisor is often able to interest the women of rural communities in the social and physical welfare of young teachers and in making more at home young men and women teachers, city reared, who are attracted to country life, but who without guidance find difficulty in adjusting themselves to living under unfamiliar conditions.

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### Chapter III

#### GENERAL PROBLEMS AFFECTING THE SUCCESS OF SUPERVISION

While the achievements of rural supervision are sufficiently noteworthy to give us every encouragement for the future, the road to better educational facilities for rural pupils through this agency has been strewn with a number of obstacles. Perhaps their discovery and consideration have been as much worth while as anything that has been done. A few of them seem worthy of attention in this bulletin since they still must be met. The complete success of supervision, as well as full returns on the investment made in it, requires conditions at least reasonably favorable.

*Professional preparation of supervisors.*—The dilemma which has confronted rural educational leaders in some States is shown by the following remark of a State superintendent: "I had to choose. It was either to get a law providing for rural supervisors without the qualifications I believe in or to get no rural supervisors. I chose the former." There is little doubt that there is in all States a shortage of persons adequately prepared and experienced for success in rural supervisory work. Supervisors themselves have been among the first to recognize this—a fact indicated by the action of the rural supervisors in Wisconsin. At a recent annual session these supervisors passed a resolution requesting county superintendents, when recommending candidates for supervisory positions, to consider only applicants who have, as a minimum, education equivalent to graduation from a standard normal school and five years of successful experience demonstrating ability and leadership. The cooperation of educational leaders and of higher institutions for the preparation of teachers, supervisors, and superintendents is much needed in this field. Supply and demand go hand in hand here as in other vocations. Leaders should take the initiative in creating the one and at the same time in providing facilities for supplying the other.

In the majority of the States and counties we are confronted with the condition of a rural teaching force, a large percentage of which has neither the academic preparation equivalent to graduation from a standard high school nor the professional preparation of two years in normal school or college following high school, now generally recog-

nized as the minimum standard for efficient teachers. Besides unprepared teachers with whom supervisors must deal, there have been since the war a number of more mature former teachers, including married women with homes, who have returned to the work. They bring with them an experience that is worthy and helpful, but many are not familiar with the fact that new ideas have taken possession of the educational world during their retirement. They need to become acquainted with the new principles and ideas and to give their professional duties and obligations first consideration.

A few States have new laws requiring for any certificate the minimum education and training indicated above as essential. Other States it is hoped will soon follow with laws, facilities for training, and salary provisions which will make it possible to staff rural school and supervisory positions with professionally prepared men and women.

*Preparation of county superintendents as a factor in success.*—An argument sometimes advanced against the feasibility of demanding adequate preparation on the part of rural supervisors is that the qualifications of supervisors can not well be raised higher than those of county superintendents in the same State. Trained supervisors do not look forward to working under the direction of superintendents of inadequate preparation; nor are such superintendents often willing to have as their assistants supervisors who have better training and receive higher salaries for their services than the county superintendents. Often the county superintendent's salary is so low that no rural supervisor adequately prepared for her work can be found willing to work for it. The necessity of increasing the number of rural supervisors and of continuing to demand high qualifications in their appointment, if fully understood, should furnish at the same time an effective argument for raising the qualifications of county superintendents wherever they are not as high as standards now accepted.

*Teacher-preparing institutions as a factor.*—It is well known that the whole question of the preparation of teachers, including supervisors and superintendents, offers problems not yet satisfactorily solved. In financial support, qualifications demanded of instructors, and other important factors, these institutions are not yet on as high a plane as they should be or as State universities generally are. Those responsible for courses in these institutions have overlooked the needs of rural schools and have not provided for the preparation of and do not prepare a sufficient number of supervisors and teachers for this field.

*Organization problems.*—Unprepared rural supervisors have learned to do their work largely by the trial and error method. There has been little literature bearing directly on their needs; they have

worked at times in offices lacking modern equipment and with men who have not acquired the habit of organizing their work. Occasionally, where there have been two or more supervisors to a county, no one has been held responsible for a certain area or a certain group of teachers, but all the schools were visited in turn, first by one, then by another supervisor. Thus it has not been possible for one supervisor to spend enough time with any teacher to determine her needs and give the help required to insure improvement in instruction and management. The untrained teacher has found it difficult to coordinate into a workable program the recommendations (at times conflicting) of two or three supervisors, although she could be depended upon to carry out effectively the suggestions of one.

In many counties schools are still so poorly administered that it is difficult to supervise them well. County superintendents have had to divide their time so constantly between administrative and supervisory work that they have thought of a supervisor as one who can help with both administrative and supervisory duties. Moreover, the supervisor's correspondence has naturally increased the clerical work of the office, and thus in some instances she has been expected to do the work of a clerk as well as her own work. Rural supervisors have rightly held that they should not be regarded as sharers in all the work of the county superintendent's office regardless of its nature. While it is necessary that the county superintendent be both an administrator and a supervisor, it is equally imperative, if the supervisor is to do a good piece of work in improving instruction, that she be relieved from administrative and clerical duties.

In a number of counties in a few States, especially where there are several consolidated schools, provision has been made for special supervisors of music or drawing, or both subjects, before the appointment of supervisors of general elementary subjects. Frequently these special supervisors teach once a week or once or twice a month, for the regular teacher, and then confer with her regarding the work she is to do in their absence. Thus they become in effect special teachers, though the title commonly given is that of supervisor.

Experience in the past 10 years indicates that the work of supervision in any county should be begun by the appointment of a *general* supervisor who can include supervision of the teaching of music and drawing. In the professional preparation given rural teachers a due proportion of time should be assigned to these special subjects. The comment made in a recent publication is to the point: "It ought not to be necessary, at least in the sixth and lower grades, to employ special teachers to teach music, drawing, and even penmanship, as is now so frequently done."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Public Education in Indiana. General Education Board.



Besides the organization of the supervisory staff, the question of the organization of teachers within the territory to be supervised is important. The rural supervisor deals with teachers having a variety of preparation and experience, from the young, immature, and inexperienced to experienced and mature teachers with fixed habits and traditional methods. There are in most counties a large number of one-teacher schools, some schools of two or three teachers, and some consolidated schools. Topography, distance to travel, type of schools, preparation and skill of teachers, must all be considered in the plans for visiting and holding meetings. The supervisors who have been most successful in their work are those who have met these problems squarely at the beginning of the year and followed out consistent plans of organization and procedure.

*Problems of distance, number of teachers, travel expense.*—The success of supervision is largely conditioned by the number of teachers to be supervised and the time necessarily consumed in traveling among them, other things, such as ability and training, being equal. The dissatisfaction caused by trying to work with too many teachers scattered over too large an extent of territory has also counted much in the decision of many successful rural supervisors to seek other avenues of usefulness. We may as well face the truth that rural supervision is not possible with a group of teachers numbering over 50 and scattered over a wide territory. Thirty is a more desirable number with which to work. One State has provided by law for a maximum of 40 teachers per rural supervisor. It is to be expected that others will fall in line.

The difficulty of supervising many teachers is augmented when the travel allowance is insufficient. Real economy suggests that it should rather be generous, encouraging the supervisor to visit schools as often as conditions permit. Rural supervisors are assigned to one of the most difficult and exacting of school tasks. In return for efficient service there should be assured to them an adequate income and living, working, and health conditions conducive to success.

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## Chapter IV

### AGENCIES HELPFUL IN PROMOTING THE SUCCESS OF SUPERVISION

The efforts to secure rural supervision, and its success when secured in promoting better schools for rural children, have enlisted the interest and activity of a number of agencies whose cooperation has added to its success.

*Supervision and State departments of education.*—Many State departments of education, in fact, the majority of them, now compile State courses of study and are active in helping rural supervisors and teachers to interpret them. More and more special courses are prepared for the different types of rural schools. When this is neglected by the State department supervisors must, with the assistance of their teachers, formulate local courses. Modern daily programs based on alternation and combination of grades are printed in many State courses and have proved most helpful. Through them the time of the rural supervisor is freed from helping each teacher individually to reorganize her school. Time schedules should be prepared by experts, show acquaintance with principles of program making, and limit the daily recitations in small schools to a reasonable number. Freedom for adaptation in both course of study and daily schedule, and the possibility of developing experimental work when desirable, should be provided. Assistance from the State departments in these directions has had excellent results.

A large number of State departments help also with a variety of publications—reports on work done with standard tests, circulars stating progress made in work with exceptional children, biennial reports setting forth usable information and suggestions, and the like. Such publications, valuable as they are, are not often read by rural teachers unless rural supervisors suggest their reading and direct it in the most effective ways.

In the majority of States at the present time there are State supervisors specially assigned to rural schools, who spend part or all of their time with county superintendents, rural supervisors, and teachers. These officers bring the State departments in direct contact with rural school problems. They offer practical help to supervisors and teachers, plan progressive projects for the benefit of rural education on a state-wide scale, and bring inspiration and encouragement to school officials and patrons.

The observance of American Education Week is full of possibilities for familiarizing people at large with the needs of rural schools. State and county supervisors cooperate with administrative officials in giving public addresses, arranging educational exhibits, and otherwise stimulating patrons to improve educational conditions and opportunities. In general it seems safe to say that all educational reforms, particularly those emanating from the State department, are far more apt to be successfully carried out when rural supervisors are in the field to help with them.

*Teachers' reading circles.*—Teachers' reading circles organized on a State or county-wide basis are promoted by a large number of rural school officials. Where such State organizations are active,

the acquaintance of teachers with recent professional literature may be expected to follow. Rural supervisors have done much to make effective the work of reading circles. They have followed up the reading of the prescribed books by teachers with such guidance and discussion as more nearly insures the use in the everyday classroom practice of the suggestions offered by the books selected. They have also aided in evaluating the strength and weakness of the plans for basing certificate credit wholly or in part on such reading.

*Cooperation of health agencies.*—County public health nurses, either alone or in cooperation with Red Cross nurses, have given excellent service in improving rural health. Often the nurse and the rural supervisor visit schools and homes together, appear on the same program at public meetings, and otherwise give mutual help in promoting better conditions in the territory affected. Rural supervisors have been instrumental, in many instances, in securing the appointment of public health nurses, because they realize that the physical foundation on which the work of teachers and supervisors depends needs the attention of experts.

In many States county superintendents, and especially county supervisors, cooperate with county agents who assist farm mothers with better methods of preparing and serving food and with higher standards of housekeeping, and in other ways promote the health of rural children.

*Educational associations and institutions.*—More and more State teachers' associations are adopting the custom of devoting time to the special problems of rural teachers and supervisors on their State and sectional programs. While in the past it has been difficult to find people who have a real message for rural teachers who combine ability in public speaking with first-hand acquaintance with rural-school problems, the growth of rural supervision has done much to remedy this. The choice of rural supervisors as speakers on educational programs is to be commended.

Besides meetings in the regular State teachers' associations, special meetings—regional, State, and national—for rural supervisors have become customary. In these meetings they discuss their particular problems, plan better means of organizing their work, receive suggestions and criticisms from teachers who are supervised, and in other ways profit by contact and association with those engaged in the same kind of work and meeting similar problems.

During the decade just passed many teachers colleges and some State universities have begun to show a special interest in rural education and especially in rural supervision. Comparison of present-day catalogues of teacher-preparing institutions with those of 15 years

ago shows an encouraging awakening on the part of institutions. Country schools have been with us from the beginning, but teachers colleges and State universities in comparatively recent years only have shown that they realized that institutions of college rank could become factors in their improvement. In summer schools and during the regular sessions special courses for rural teachers are now provided by an ever-increasing number of higher institutions.

*Educational literature.*—A growing amount of professional literature in the field of supervision is now available. A few books, a large number of articles in leading educational magazines, a rural education journal<sup>3</sup> devoted in large part to the problems of administration and supervision, a large number of publications of the United States Bureau of Education and other educational organizations, can be obtained where only a few years ago very little of practical value in this field was available.

### CONCLUSION

*Increased confidence in rural supervision.*—This résumé of the work of rural supervisors is incomplete, partly because many who have perhaps worth-while achievements to their credit have not yet felt impelled to write about them or to give them publicity in other ways. Many supervisors have learned incidentally what they know about the technique of supervision. Many have attempted to learn more about it while in service by attending summer schools, reading professional books, and by using all agencies which affect or may be made to affect their work. In spite of handicaps and in some cases lack of definite preparation for their work, rural supervisors have won more and more the respect of country teachers, county superintendents, other rural supervisors, normal-school instructors, and rural people themselves.

*An educational campaign in the interests of rural supervision.*—Naturally there are few eligible candidates for rural supervisory positions in any State when a law providing for rural supervision is first passed. A professional future in rural work had been practically closed for several years to both men and women, and they had ceased to think of the rural field as providing an outlet for ambition and ability. As increasing opportunity for promotion is provided, increasing numbers of superior people will enter and remain in rural education. Rural supervision and administration now offer acknowledged opportunities for service.

<sup>3</sup> The Journal of Rural Education, Dept. of Rural Education, N. E. A.

In order that with the growth of the supervisory movement there may be no lowering of standards and at the same time that it may be possible to find rural supervisors, an educational campaign to interest the right kind of men and women to prepare themselves for rural supervision may be necessary in a State planning to inaugurate and extend rural supervision.

It may be helpful in such a campaign to keep in mind the essential qualifications of a rural supervisor:

1. Pronounced possibilities of leadership, including an inspiring personality and skill in effective public speaking.

2. Special ability in stimulating rural school improvement through such means as demonstration teaching and the holding of successful group and individual conferences.

3. Several years of successful teaching in elementary schools, including preferably some rural-school experience.

4. Graduation from a standard normal school and in addition the attaining of a college degree.

5. First-hand acquaintance with and sympathetic interest in rural conditions and rural needs.

6. Capacity for professional growth, as shown by the undertaking of progressive activities in school work, attendance at summer schools, etc.

7. Industry, versatility, good judgment, health, and vitality.

8. Ability to cooperate with county superintendents and normal instructors in preparing rural teachers.<sup>4</sup>

Concerning the last point it should be added that, so far as is compatible with loyalty to administrative officers, the supervisor has the right, in common with any citizen, to assist educational leaders to improve the administrative machinery or secure the passage of needed laws. The supervisor's work, however, is not to attempt to change the administrative machinery except as conferences with administrative officers provide the opportunity; the ethics of the situation demand that loyalty to the administrative officers under whom the supervisor works should be the first consideration.

*Rural supervision pays.*—The experience of the past 10 years proves convincingly that rural supervision pays. Its ultimate and complete success is conditioned by the administrative system under which the supervisor works; travel conditions in the territory supervised; rural teacher preparation; the supervisory load given to one person; the support received from the State department of education, the county superintendent, and the State teachers' association; the cooperation secured from teacher-preparing institutions of all

<sup>4</sup>Adapted from a circular of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

kinds; the strength of the organization effected by the supervisors themselves; and adequate provision for securing definite, thorough preparation for the work of supervision.

Rural supervisors hold a strategic position. The future of rural education is largely in their hands. On the successful efforts of the thousand or more rural supervisors at work through the country to-day depend to a very large degree the progress and influence of the rural schools they serve. Without rural supervisors at work in every part of every State where rural schools are found there is very little hope for rural education.