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## A Study of the Attitudes of Parents in Sections of Virginia and Florida toward their Schools

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A STUDY OF THE ATTITUDES OF PARENTS  
IN  
SECTIONS OF VIRGINIA AND FLORIDA  
TOWARD THEIR SCHOOLS  
by  
JOHN GIBSON REVELEY, JR.

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
OF  
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1941

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## CHAPTER I

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

#### Introduction

American educators are continuously striving to improve and enlarge the role that education plays in the life of the people. This improvement assumes many forms and reaches out to touch every phase of life connected with the schools. Desirable changes are constantly being made in the curriculum, in methods of instruction, and in methods of evaluation. In order that these changes may be effected, the educator must enlist the sympathetic cooperation of the public, by interpreting the schools to the community in such a manner that the people understand and appreciate what he is attempting. This study is concerned with the attitudes and appreciations of the community in regard to the educational problems.

In order to change existing attitudes the educator must know something of what these attitudes are, and he must build upon or change them accordingly. Confidence is built upon the degree of understanding between two people or between two groups, and in order to get this understanding there must be a common meeting ground or point of contact. The interpreter must be able to speak both languages fluently, and no educator can do a good job of

interpretation if his only knowledge is the knowledge of what his profession thinks and believes. He must also know the layman's attitude toward education, and as much as is possible of the reasoning behind that attitude, if he is to enlist the cooperation of the layman.

### The Problem

It is a difficult problem to get at the real attitude of the patrons of the school. If the principal is talking to the parent, the views which the parent expresses are likely to be influenced to a great extent by the presence of the school officer. In the same manner, in meetings of parents and teachers, the parents usually express themselves in accordance with the effect that it may have upon the teachers or upon other patrons, or else subscribe blindly to opinions voiced by a dominating personality. Thus, in order to get at the true attitude of a person, that person must feel reasonably free to express himself in such a manner that he is not influenced by others. The most practical method of accomplishing this end is by use of the unsigned questionnaire.

There are many inherent weaknesses in the questionnaire, but in attempting to measure subjective qualities which involve a certain amount of introspection it is perhaps the most useful instrument. Attitudes

and opinions are at best tenuous things, and any attempt to measure them cannot be treated as if facts were being sought. Anything that involves introspection is very difficult even for the trained scientist; and for the layman, it is especially difficult to distinguish between what is actually believed and "wishful thinking". Attitudes and opinions are valuable, not as statement of fact, but as indicators of thought and must be interpreted accordingly. Symonds is not quite certain as to what the attitude questionnaire measures:

But the high reliability which these questionnaires possess show they do measure something quite consistently.<sup>1</sup>

Bain,<sup>2</sup> in his study of the literature on the measurement of attitudes and opinions, finds that the questionnaire is used more frequently and with better and more reliable results than any other method. Good, Barr, and Scates say of the attitude questionnaire:

There is a legitimate field for the questionnaire in getting a cross section of thought....The opinions and attitudes represented are facts in so far as the responses are typical responses of the individuals, but they are facts of opinion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Perceival M. Symonds, Diagnosing Personality and Conduct, New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1931, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup>Read Bain, Theory and Measurement of Attitudes and Opinions, The Psychological Bulletin, 27:357-79, May 1930.

<sup>3</sup>Carter V. Good, A. S. Barr, and Douglas E. Scates, The Methodology of Educational Research, New York: D. Appleton-Century Company.

The writer's problem is, then, by means of the unsigned questionnaire, to attempt to obtain some of the parent's attitudes from their expression of opinions on various phases of the public school curriculum and administration. These opinions will then be contrasted and compared with other work done in the same field.

### Review of the Literature

In 1926 Bagley and Kyte<sup>4</sup> made a survey of the attitude of the public in the State of California in connection with a curriculum revision in the elementary schools. The questionnaire sent out asked for the opinion of laymen on the number and type of subjects in the elementary schools. It consisted of a group of six questions with subdivisions and was in the form of a check list. The questionnaires were sent to members of service clubs, trade and professional associations, and other organizations, in order to obtain as representative a sampling as possible of the lay population. They obtained a thirty-one per cent return of the questionnaires from this group. However, for the purpose of obtaining a check against the selective character of this sampling, they sent another set of questionnaires to

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<sup>4</sup>William C. Bagley and George C. Kyte, The California Curriculum Study, Berkeley, California: University of California Printing Office, 1926, pp. 249-53.

a random group of names chosen from telephone directories; they received a return of only eight per cent. The returns from the lay groups were compared with those from superintendents, principals, and teachers; and it is rather interesting to note that the public disagree most with college teachers of education, and agree best with public school teachers. As a result of this study, the California law, which required thirty-three subjects in the elementary schools, was changed to require only twelve subjects after 1925.

In 1926 Todd made a study of what the citizens know about their schools. He constructed a "yes-no" questionnaire which asked for definite facts about administration, curriculum, finances, and pupil population. The following are some sample questions taken from the questionnaire sent to Montclair, New Jersey:

Is Mr. Frank G. Pickell City Superintendent of Schools?

Does Montclair receive any money from the state to help pay the cost of public schools?

Does Montclair have enough elementary schools so that there is no overcrowding of classrooms?

Does every girl have to study home economics one or more years in the Senior High School to graduate?

Is the tax rate for school purposes in Montclair greater than \$1.50 per \$100 of assessed valuation?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>William Hall Todd, What Citizens Know About Their Schools, New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1927, p. 7.



The questionnaire, changed appropriately to each city, was sent out to seventeen city school systems scattered over the country. He found that the average citizen knows about 50 per cent of what is desirable for laymen to know about the schools, though he admits:

There is no agreement in any sense as to what may be pertinent for people to know about their schools.<sup>6</sup>

There is no mention made in the study as to what people think about the schools, or what effect thinking may have upon action. However he ties up knowledge of facts with public attitudes in the following statement:

It is assumed that if the facts of public education be laid before the people, the school will receive the support warranted by these facts. In short, desirable interests and wholesome attitudes are conditioned by correct information.<sup>7</sup>

In 1928 Farley had over five thousand patrons of the public schools rank thirteen items about the public schools in the order of their interest to the patrons. These items and the order of their interest for those to whom the questionnaire was sent were as follows:

1. Pupil progress and achievement
2. Methods of instruction
3. Health of pupils
4. Courses of study
5. Value of education
6. Discipline and behavior of pupils
7. Teachers and school officers

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

8. Attendance
9. School buildings and building programs
10. Business management and finance
11. Board of education and finance
12. Parent teachers association
13. Extra-curricular activities<sup>8</sup>

Beside his interest study, Farley classified many hundreds of items from newspapers which referred to the schools to find what newspaper editors thought was interesting to their readers, and compared this with the opinions of parents as to their interests. The conclusions were that the patrons and editors are decidedly not in agreement as to what is interesting to the public about the schools.

In 1939 Mort and Cornell<sup>9</sup> sent a questionnaire to five thousand citizens, both teachers and laymen, asking for opinions about the school. The opinions of laymen were separated from those of teachers. In general they found that the opinions of the parents were very close to those of the teachers. Questions on educational philosophy, athletics, sex instruction, the learning process, marking, and discipline were asked on the questionnaire. Reference will be made later to some of the conclusions that the authors drew from their study.

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<sup>8</sup>Belmont Mercer Farley, What to Tell the People About the Public Schools, New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1929, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup>Paul R. Mort and F. G. Cornell, A Poll of Parent Opinion, National-Parent Teacher, 34:719-24, October 1939.

The latest study of parent opinion was made by Seyfert<sup>10</sup> using a "yes-no" questionnaire which he sent to three communities. A sample representative of the entire population was selected from community organizations and balanced by house-to-house canvassing. The questionnaire included twenty questions with subdivisions on preparation of students, ease of school work, discipline, promotion, educational and vocational guidance, and other vital school questions. This complete questionnaire with the percentage of returns is included in the appendix. This study finds out many of the opinions and attitudes of the general public, and it will be interesting to compare it with the present study.

### Procedure

Before describing the procedure followed there are several words that must be defined. In general any psychological terms used follow Warren's<sup>11</sup> definition, but some terms which may have several meanings are used frequently. The word "attitude" is taken to mean a stabilized set or disposition to act, while "opinion" is the individual's own

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<sup>10</sup>Warren C. Seyfert, What the Public Thinks of Its Schools, School Review, 48:416-20, June 1940.

<sup>11</sup>Howard C. Warren, Dictionary of Psychology. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1934.

statement of his attitude. "Belief" is distinguished from attitude and opinion in that it is based upon evidence assumed to be adequate and therefore is less liable to change. "Parent" and "patron" are used synonymously to indicate the father or the mother of a public school child. "Layman" or "citizen" is used for people who are not connected in a professional way with education, while "community" denotes a group of people who are served directly by a school or by a school system.

In this study five hundred questionnaires were sent out and three hundred thirty returned. This is a much higher rate of return than would normally be found in such studies. The high percentage of return is accounted for by the fact that the questionnaires were sent through the children directly to the parents and, wherever possible, direct contact was made in asking for the return of the questionnaire. The parents evinced much interest in the filling out of the blank as was shown by their oral and written comments. Most of these were constructive in nature, although some were facetious or derogatory. A comment that occurred often was to the effect that the questionnaire had caused the parent to think about the schools and what they were doing for the first time in his life. Some parents thought the questionnaire was part of

the census; and a few others sent the reply that they did not believe in writing down what they thought about things. One parent came to the writer considerably upset because he thought it was homework for his fourth grade daughter, and another father sent the reply that no one could answer questions which could be answered truthfully either way. In general the parents were extremely cooperative and seemed to take a genuine interest in the questionnaire and its contents.

The questions used in the questionnaire were tried out in interviews and in two trial questionnaires before they were finally selected. Some questions were not used because there was little reaction to them, or because they were subject to double interpretation. An effort was made to have all the questions general rather than specific. In the final form the questionnaire was divided into two sections; the first section consisting of seven multiple choice statements with five possible alternatives, and the second section of thirty statements which were to be checked true, false or question. Parents were asked to check two of the five answers in the first section in order that there might be a wider possible selection. In the second section the question was inserted to allow for possible doubt and to reinforce the weight of the opinion of those who checked either true or the false. The same type of information was

requested in two different ways so that the consistency of the opinions could be checked.

The questionnaires were sent out in three communities, two in Virginia and one in Florida. The returns represent a larger cross section than the three communities would indicate, if the fact is taken into account that thirty-six states and foreign countries are represented. Table 11<sup>12</sup> shows that 48.5 per cent of the parents had birthplaces other than Virginia or Florida. This would show a cosmopolitan origin of parents, and a probable wide spread of background and culture. In order to be sure that the birthplace was some index of where the parents had received their early training, they were asked how long they had lived in the state. The average length of residence of those who gave an out-of-the-state birthplace was 15.5 years, which would indicate that they had probably reached maturity in another state and under different conditions from those in which they were then living.

The diversity of occupations is shown in Table 11,<sup>13</sup> with the largest group, housewife, being 51.5 per cent of the total, and farmer next with 13.3 per cent. The parents who answered the questionnaire were well distributed among the general population as is shown by the thirty-five separate occupations listed.

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<sup>12</sup>See Appendix

<sup>13</sup>See Appendix

The purpose of this study is to show some of the attitudes of parents in the three communities studied, as expressed by their opinions on the questionnaire, as gleaned from their uncollected comments on the questionnaire, and as gotten from their oral statements to the writer in interviews.

The application of these attitudes to other communities would depend upon so many factors that their usefulness would be limited to only the broadest generalizations. Parent attitudes may be useful to the school man for comparison purposes, and as an aid to collecting data on his own community. The data which follow should give some conception of what are the points upon which to place the most emphasis, and which points to "soft pedal" until the school program has the confidence of the community. Bowden and Kolbe aptly state:

In going into a new community, a school administrator should observe the traditional practices and follow those precedents which are socially profitable. Moreover, he should be equally slow to violate a good precedent or to start another precedent which has any apparent antisocial tendencies.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>A. O. Bowden and I. R. Kolbe, The Social Psychology of Education, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1927, p. 161.

## CHAPTER II

## PARENTAL ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CURRICULUM

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the attitude of the parent toward the curriculum of the school. The attitudes of any group are largely influenced by their interests, for if interest is lacking there is an attitude of indifference which is almost as difficult to change as an attitude of extreme opposition. Parents take a greater interest in the school curriculum than in the other phases of school life, and so they probably have more attitudes and opinions about the "hows" and the "whats" than about other problems connected with the schools. Farley says:

....Patrons wish to know what their children are being taught, how they are being taught, what results are being achieved, and how the public schools affect the physical welfare of their children. They are more interested in these things than they are in the behavior of the children at school, the qualifications of their teachers, the regularity of attendance, the kind of buildings in which they are housed, how much money is spent, how the schools are administered, what the parents are doing for the school, or the activities carried on at the school which they consider extra-curricular.<sup>1</sup>

The curriculum of the school is of fundamental importance to the educator in the changing of the school to fit the needs

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<sup>1</sup>Belmont Mercer Farley, What to Tell the People About the Public Schools, New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1929.



of today, and the attitudes and expressed opinions of the parents on the subject matter, the learning process, the school purpose, and extra-curricular activities should be known before change is attempted. In this chapter an attempt will be made to examine these attitudes as expressed in answer to the writer's questionnaire and in interviews with individual parents, and the agreement of these results with other studies in the same field.

### The Subject Matter

Most parents are well agreed that there is a type of mental training which may be gotten from subjects which are, for many people, difficult. Eighty-two per cent of the parents agreed with the statement on the writer's questionnaire: "Mathematics is fine mental training, and therefore should have a prominent place in the high school, whether the child will have any use for it or not." Only a small proportion either doubted the statement or marked it false. In a similar manner, 83 per cent marked false the statement: "Mathematics and science should not be required subjects in the high school because they are too hard." Parents have been well inculcated with the doctrine of "mental discipline" when it comes to the broader aspects of mathematics, but when some of the applications of these principles are brought out they are not so sure of themselves. The statement, "At least

three units of mathematics should be required by every school for graduation", elicited a reply of only 66 per cent in the affirmative, while the statement, "Only those portions of mathematics should be taught that the child is fairly certain to use in later life", was marked false by 41 per cent, true by 38 per cent, with 11 per cent being doubtful. The implication here would be that parents have been taught in the older psychological school the broad effects of "transfer of training" and the "cultural effects" of a general education.

Parents agree very well with Harris who, as United States Commissioner of Education in 1898, makes the following statement in regard to the elementary school child:

Reading, writing, arithmetic--the so-called 'three R's'--grammar, geography, and United States history, furnish him the necessary disciplines that enable him to take up the rudiments of human experience; they give him the mastery over the technical elements which enter the practical theories of human life.<sup>2</sup>

In the same connection there may be an alternative explanation. It may be that the parent who wishes his child to learn mathematics, is thinking of his own status, because he believes the learning of mathematics shows higher mental

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<sup>2</sup>William T. Harris, Psychologic Foundations of Education, p. 321, New York: C. Appleton and Company, 1898.

processes in his children. Harris again writes:

The reason why it requires a higher activity of thought to think quantity and understand mathematics than it does to perceive quality (or things and environments) lies right in this point. The thought of quantity is a double thought. It first thinks quality and then negates it or thinks it away. In other words, it abstracts from quality. It first thinks thing and environment (quality), and then thinks both as the same in kind or as repetitions of the same. A thing becomes a unit when it is repeated so that it is within the environment of duplicates of itself.<sup>3</sup>

Mort and Cornell, in their poll of parent opinion, reach virtually the same conclusion. They say:

Strangely enough, most parents....justify mathematics instruction because it is thought to serve as a means of training the mind; yet half of our parents definitely feel that children are required to learn too many things that are of no value to them.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time Bowden and Melbo feel that educators are just as liable to be at fault as the parents. Their statement is:

Many of our college professors and educators also exhibit unscientific attitudes as, for example, in requiring two years or more of mathematics, foreign language, or similar study as a necessary prerequisite for general college work. This is really a sort of magical belief in the traditional value of the good "mental Discipline" presumably obtained from such subjects.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 343.

<sup>4</sup> Paul R. Mort and P. C. Cornell, A Poll of Parent Opinion, National Parent-Teacher, 34:27-28, October 1939.

<sup>5</sup> A. O. Bowden and I. R. Melbo, Social Psychology of Education, p. 87, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1937.

As regards Latin there is less unanimity of opinion. Sixty per cent of the parents disagree with the statement, "Latin is a dead language and, as the child will never use it, should not be taught in the public schools." Yet, 22 per cent of the parents did agree with the statement and the remainder were doubtful. The stand of the majority of the parents as regards Latin bears out the effect that the "formal discipline" doctrine continues to have upon the parents of today. Latin is included with mathematics as a subject that will train the mind.

Though parents are very conservative in regard to the fundamental subjects of the curriculum, at the same time they wish to see the vocational subjects encouraged. Although only 4 per cent of the parents wish their children to get a high degree of skill in such things as typewriting or wood-working, 77 per cent of the parents believe that the school should fit the child to earn a living. This is in line with a study conducted by Eells<sup>6</sup> for the Regional Associations of Secondary Schools and Colleges on the judgments of parents with regard to the secondary schools. He finds that parents are more dissatisfied with vocational training and guidance than with any other phase of school life. In a study by

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<sup>6</sup>W. C. Eells, Judgments of Parents Concerning American Secondary Schools, School and Society, 46:409-16, September 25, 1937.

Seyfert<sup>7</sup> 90 per cent of the parents answer yes to the question: "Should school give vocational training?", but only 43 per cent think the school should help its graduates to find jobs. In the same study 81 per cent of the parents believe that foreign languages are less important than practical studies. The majority of the parents wish their children to be able to earn a living when they finish the secondary schools, yet they are not willing to sacrifice any of the so called "cultural" or "mental discipline" subjects in order for this to be accomplished.

#### The Learning Process

Parents are generally agreed that the learning process is difficult and should take much effort. Twenty-nine per cent say they would be likely to blame a teacher for making things easy for their child. On the other hand only 18 per cent of the parents say they would be likely to praise a teacher for making it easy for their child to learn and pass a subject. One parent explains her attitude toward learning in this manner: "All things that are worth while in this world are difficult to get, and therefore if you make education too easy it cannot be worth while." Mott and Cornell<sup>8</sup> find: "About three-fourths of our people do not want

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<sup>7</sup>Warren C. Seyfert, What the Public Thinks of Its Schools, School Review, 48:417-27, June 1940.

<sup>8</sup>Paul E. Mott and F. G. Cornell, op. cit.

education made too easy," but Seyfert<sup>9</sup> concludes that only 29 per cent of the parents think that school work is too easy. In the mind of the parent the learning process is pretty well tied up with discipline as Grinnell says:

One does not have to listen long where citizens congregate to hear progressive methods in teaching scoffed at. The man in the street still believes firmly in 'no lickin', no larnin'' and the other tenets of his unhappy school days.<sup>10</sup>

It may be that parents are still influenced by the Puritanical belief that all that is pleasant is of the devil.

The widespread belief in mathematics and ancient languages as major factors in education would give the impression that parents believe in a "general factor" in learning. Seventy-six per cent of the parents think that the child's learning to do his own thinking is of more importance than facts or learning to do things. Just what constitutes this process of thinking which the parent thinks is so important is another matter. When a number of parents were asked by the writer to explain what they meant by thinking, most of them said that it was a matter of arriving at independent conclusions, or a matter of problem solving without aid. However parents are more concerned over the results of learning than in the process itself. Sixty-eight per cent of the parents marked false

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<sup>9</sup>Warren C. Seyfert, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup>J. Earl Grinnell, Interpreting the Public Schools, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1937, p. 5.

the statement, "It is how a child learns that counts. What he learns makes little or no difference." Kert and Cornell conclude from their study:

Over two-thirds of parents and teachers believe that textbook learning should give way to increased learning through experience and that reading instruction in all grades should consist of more reading for research, appreciation, and recreation, and less reading by recitation from the textbook.<sup>11</sup>

There is some evidence that parents still take rather seriously the old adage, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." Thirty-five per cent think the parent should take a greater interest in the child while he is in elementary school than after he reaches high school. A comment that occurred frequently was, "If a child makes a bad start in the elementary grades, he is badly handicapped." Many parents think that if character education is not begun very early in the home that the school can do very little about it.

#### School Purpose

Parents are much more interested in the character and morality outcomes of the school than in the textbook learning. This is borne out in the present study by the fact that 93 per cent of the parents agreed that traits of character such as honesty, cooperation, diligence, and politeness should be

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<sup>11</sup>Paul R. Kert and P. C. Cornell, op. cit.

developed in the school. It may be contended that the parent would naturally rate character building as the primary purpose in answering a questionnaire on the schools, but that his actual opinion is otherwise. However, the comments of the parents seem to bear out the contention that they are primarily interested in character building as a purpose of the school. Some typical comments are the following:

Schools don't get jobs for a person. Only character and personality can enable a boy to get and to keep a job.

No one can tell for certain just what subjects are needed in later life, but we all know that character is the foundation of any worth while life.

Teachers should know more of homes from which children come so that they will know how much help they will have in the moulding of the child's character.

Teachers should be careful to teach by example as well as by word.

If the schools build character they don't need to worry much about the other things.

Character and personality are the things I worry about most in my child.

Ivins,<sup>12</sup> in a study made in 1924 and again in 1938, asked the question, "What are the most desirable lessons to be taught?" The answers of the parents in the order of preference are as follows:

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<sup>12</sup>Lester S. Ivins, What Parents Expect of the School, Journal of the National Education Association, 26:194, October, 1939.



1. Lessons that will impress the value of good character.
2. Lessons that will prevent selfishness.
3. Lessons that will improve or produce good manners.
4. Lessons that will teach the value of honesty and truthfulness.
5. Lessons that will aid in good sportsmanship.
6. Lessons of respect for church, other pupils and authority.
7. Lessons that will teach cooperation with others.
8. Worth while lessons from textbooks.
9. Facts from magazines and library books that contain a lesson of importance.
10. Lessons to show why great men did succeed.

Not until the eighth place on the list is reached is there any mention of the factual material of the schools. In corroboration of the fact that parents place character building high in their list of school purposes, Carter sent out a questionnaire to citizens in which he asked, "In what ways, in your opinion, are the schools failing to do what you think they should?" The following are some of his conclusions:

Some citizens feel that the schools are not doing enough in the way of character education. Some parents want more sex education taught in the schools. Some parents say they want more teaching of religion in the schools.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever may be the parents' reasons for wishing to put so much stress on the character building in schools, or what things in the school contribute to this end, in the parents' estimation, there is little room left to doubt that in the mind of the parent school character building ranks high.

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<sup>18</sup>7. E. Carter, Citizens Evaluate Their Schools, School and Society, 47:719-23, June 4, 1938.

Seventy-seven per cent of the parents think that one of the purposes of the school should be to fit their child to earn a living, and 62 per cent say that another purpose is to enable their children to use better judgment in life. It may be that the broad aspects of the word "judgment" appealed to the parents, but there is a seriousness of parental purpose shown here in that the parent wishes his child to become self-sufficient. The earning of a living and the use of good judgment may not be so very far apart in the thinking of the parent. Good judgment may be the foundation of the making of a good business man or any one of other innumerable occupations whose basis is sound judgment. It may be that the parent is thinking as Bristow does in the following:

Schools should mean an opportunity to make choices, to enjoy the benefits of wise choices and to profit from the experiences of choices which are less wise.<sup>14</sup>

Or if the average parent could find words for what he wants out of life for his child, he would probably accept Webner's idea of education:

Education means much more than being able to 'read, write, and cypher'. It means more than knowing some history and geography and being informed about what is going on around us. It means being able to gather all available evidence, weigh it carefully, and without emotion arrive at a determination and course of action. It means that when a decision has been thus reached it is retained and put to use. It also means that when new evidence is found which proves valid a new stand is unhesitatingly taken.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>William H. Bristow, What School Should Mean to Children, National Parent-Teacher, 32:36, January 1938.

<sup>15</sup>John T. Webner, Do We Really Want Our Children to Think, National Parent-Teacher, 29:35, April 1935.

### Extra-Curricular Activities

Parents are very much in sympathy with the extra-curricular activities. Eighty per cent of the parents think that athletics should play a prominent part in the school life of every child, and 83 per cent agree that school plays furnish a valuable way to train the child to express himself before the public. Seventy-three per cent mark false the statement that school is a place for class work and is not a place for such things as plays, games, and outside activities. They want these things, but they do not want them to excess. Only 4 per cent of the parents think that the ability to excel in games or athletics will be useful to the child in later life. Parents commented very frequently that outside activities were fine if they were not allowed to dominate the school program to the detriment of other things.

Mort and Cornell find:

Parents and teachers do not, as a whole, believe that a winning football team is more beneficial to a community than a good curriculum.<sup>16</sup>

We would probably have to interpret a winning football team as carrying athletics to an extreme, especially in this day of high pressure interscholastic competition. Seyfert<sup>17</sup> asks the question: "Are extra-curricular activities worth

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<sup>16</sup>Paul R. Mort and F. G. Cornell, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup>Warren C. Seyfert, op. cit.

while?" and gets the answer of 94 per cent of the parents in the affirmative. In the same questionnaire only 9 per cent of the parents agree that interscholastic athletics should be abolished.

On the other hand Farley<sup>18</sup> finds that parents rank extra-curricular activities last, in a list of thirteen items relating to school functions, which he had the parents rank according to their professed interest in them. This low ranking may be due to the fact that parents are satiated with the amount of publicity that outside activities get from the newspapers and from the students. However, it may be that parents are satisfied with the trend of extra-curricular activities in the schools. Ellis,<sup>19</sup> in a study of the satisfaction of parents with certain aspects of the school, found that all-round development and general experience in the school placed fifth in a list of twelve items ranked by the parents.

#### Summary

The present study has found the following:

Eighty-two per cent of the parents agreed that, "Mathematics is fine mental training, and therefore should have a prominent place in the high school, whether the student will have any use for it or not."

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<sup>18</sup>Belmont Horcer Farley, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>19</sup>A. C. Ellis, op. cit., p. 416.

Eighty-three per cent of the parents marked false the statement, "Mathematics and science should not be required subjects in the high school because they are too hard."

Sixty-six per cent of the parents agreed that, "At least three units of mathematics should be required by every school for graduation."

Thirty-eight per cent of the parents marked true the statement, "Only those portions of mathematics should be taught that the child is fairly certain to use in later life."

Sixty per cent disagree with the statement, "Latin is a dead language and, as the child will never use it, should not be taught in the public schools."

Seventy-seven per cent of the parents think that the school should fit their child to earn a living.

Twenty-nine per cent of the parents say they would be likely to blame a teacher for making things easy for their child.

Eighteen per cent of the parents say that they would be likely to go out of their way to praise a teacher for making it easy for their child to learn and pass a subject.

Seventy-six per cent of the parents think that the child's learning to do his own thinking is of more importance than facts or learning to do things.

Sixty-eight per cent of the parents do not agree with, "It is how a child learns that counts. What he learns makes little or no difference."

Thirty-five per cent of the parents think they should take more interest in their child when he is in the elementary school than after he reaches the high school.

Ninety-three per cent of the parents think that traits of character such as honesty, cooperation, diligence, and politeness should be developed in the school.

Eighty-two per cent of the parents think that one of the purposes of the school is to enable their child to use better judgment in life.

Eighty per cent of the parents think that athletics should play a prominent part in the school life of every child.

Ninety-three per cent agree that school plays furnish a valuable way to train the child to express himself before the public.

Seventy-three per cent mark false the statement that school is a place for class work and is not a place for such things as plays, games, and outside activities.

Four per cent think that the ability to excel in games and athletics will be useful to the child in later life.

The attitude of parents toward the curriculum is probably better than most school people would believe. Though they want mathematics and Latin, they also wish to see vocational subjects in the schools. With the average parent the outcomes of education are well tied up with the obsolescent theory of mental discipline and faculties of the mind. Parents think that education should be rather a difficult process, and that too much ease of learning indicates a lack of value in the process. However, parents are heartily in favor of using all the means at hand for learning, rather than the single test-book method.

## CHAPTER III

## PARENTAL ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

The administration of the school oftentimes gets a distorted picture of the public it serves because its contact with that public only occurs under unpleasant circumstances. Patrons often come to the school only for the purpose of faultfinding or complaining and so give the impression to the teachers that they are completely ignorant of everything that constitutes the best in education. Thus a vicious circle begins to develop with the patron antagonizing the teacher and the teacher in turn developing a defensive "chip on the shoulder" attitude toward the public. The result is that teachers begin a course of action which they know is not in the best interest of the child, but which gets for them the minimum of criticism from the parents of their children. This attitude is summed up by Seyfert:

For many years school workers have been inclined to believe that opinions expressed by the community with regard to the schools were malicious intent, or at least a manifestation of a human desire to interfere with other people's business. Action on such prejudicial premises, educators have shown slight disposition to ascertain the true nature of existing opinions and the facts and fancies from which these opinions arise.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Warren C. Seyfert, What the Public Thinks of Its Schools, School Review, 46:426, June 1940

Or again in speaking of the three communities in which he sent out a questionnaire in regard to the opinion of the parents Soyfort says:

Opinion in the three communities strongly supports the schools in certain matters where it is frequently thought that lay opinion differs from the thought of the teaching profession.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the attitude of the parents toward the administrative problems of the school. These problems group themselves about the teachers, discipline, grades and passing, and the relationship of the school to the community. The public attitude toward these problems does and should have a weighty effect upon the conduct of the school. As Mehlman says:

The theory of democratic institutional authority definitely limits both purpose and method of interpretation and considers the enlargement of contraction of institutional activity to be a function of the people. The interests of all the people are superior to the interests of the teaching profession.<sup>3</sup>

The educator who forgets the function that the public plays in the conduct of the school, or fails to realize that the school is essentially a public institution, usually finds himself at cross purposes with his patrons, and as a consequence, the school suffers. The partnership idea is thus stated by Mehlman:

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 422

<sup>3</sup>Arthur D. Mehlman, Social Interpretation. New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1930, p. 107



The partnership concept of public education in the United States requires the active interest and intelligent participation of parents in the educational program.<sup>4</sup>

In order to have a complete partnership each partner must have a good idea of the thinking and opinions of the other and it is these opinions that school people often fail to consider.

### The Teacher

The functioning unit around which every school system is built is the classroom teacher. The administration, the supervision, the curriculum, and the plant are only necessary as they provide means whereby the teacher may better perform her duties in the classroom. Parents are in complete agreement that "the teacher is the greatest factor in the success of the school."<sup>5</sup> Ivins made a study as to the characteristics that the parents expect from a good teacher and found the following:

1. One who commands the respect of the pupils and the community by the life he leads.
2. One who teaches the value of good character, good health, and good citizenship.
3. One who stands for honest and thoro work by the pupils.
4. One who shows respect for the less fortunate.
5. One who teaches respect for authority.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 108

<sup>5</sup>Lester S. Ivins, What Parents Expect of the School, Journal of the National Education Association, 28:194, October 1939

6. One who is a good American citizen and believes in democracy.
7. One who teaches his pupils the proper respect for the church and the reasons for the regular attendance upon the services of some church.
8. One who shows patience toward retarded pupils.
9. One who possesses a thorough college training as well as common sense.
10. One who is industrious and eager to advance in his profession.<sup>6</sup>

This might be a list such as any school official might suggest as criteria for a good teacher. The parents are still "old-fashioned" in regard to the teacher as an example for the pupils. Bowlin<sup>7</sup> in his study of the reasons for the discharge of teachers found that immorality (real or implied), dishonesty, poor work, and disobedience were the leading reasons for the discharge of teachers. All of these reasons involve factors that might be bad examples to the children in the school. The writer found that 56 per cent of the parents believe that the child's progress in the school depends more upon the teacher than upon the subject or type of school system, and 59 per cent believe that what the teacher thinks of the child is the best indication of what the child is doing in the school. Thus, with all the poor pay of teachers, and the fact that the teaching profession (in the secondary and elementary field)

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 194

<sup>7</sup>Jos. A. Bowlin, Attitudes Toward Reasons for Discharge of Teachers, School Review, 46:215, September 1938

has lower standards than other professions, the public still has a great deal of confidence in its teachers.

The personality of the teacher plays an important part in the thinking of parents as well as like and dislike on the part of the teacher and pupil. Fifty-six per cent of the parents think that many of the child's failures in the school are due to the child's dislike of the teacher, but 46 per cent believe that much of what their children learn in the school depends upon whether the teacher likes or dislikes the child. Fairness and lack of favoritism is a quality of teachers that parents think very important. The personality factor in the teacher's success is shown indirectly by the fact that 77 per cent of the parents would be likely to go out of their way to praise a teacher for giving to the child a liking for the subject and the school. Parents frequently make the statement that "if the child likes the teacher he will do well in school."

In general the public is fairly well satisfied with the public school teachers and their work. In his study of the public satisfaction with the schools Ellis<sup>6</sup> found that the parents ranked the general quality of teaching as third in order of satisfaction.

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<sup>6</sup>W. C. Ellis, Judgments of Parents Concerning American Secondary Schools, *School and Society*, 46:413, September 29, 1937

## Discipline

The motivation of the school child to perform the tasks of the school and to conform to the necessary regulations is a problem in which parents are vitally interested. Farley<sup>9</sup> found that discipline and behavior of pupils ranked sixth in interest for parents out of thirteen items. A common comment by the parents is to the effect that discipline is getting too lax in the schools, and that children should learn more respect for authority.

Seyfert says: "They (the parents) are, however, somewhat disposed to favor the use of stricter disciplinary procedures."<sup>10</sup> He bases this statement on the fact that 50 per cent of the parents answer yes to the question, "Should school enforce stricter discipline?" Ninety-three per cent of the parents in answering the writer's questionnaire agree that habits of discipline and obedience to authority should be well learned in the school.

Parents contacted in this investigation are agreed that disciplinary procedures are necessary but as to the methods and amount there is less agreement. Only 44 per cent of the patrons agree with the statement that a teacher should never

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<sup>9</sup>Delmont Mercer Farley, What to Tell the People About the Public Schools, New York; Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1929, p. 16

<sup>10</sup>Curran C. Seyfert, op. cit., p. 422

fail to punish a child for any infraction of discipline, while 30 per cent disagreed, and 26 per cent were doubtful. Twenty-seven per cent agree that they would go out of their way to praise a teacher for keeping a child under strict discipline, yet 23 per cent would be likely to blame a teacher for physically punishing their child. One parent adds to the questionnaire the statement:

So far as punishing a child physically is concerned, I think the parents of the child should be given a chance to state what they think is right, as some parents do not at all physically punish their children, and it may make the child a problem for the teacher and parent.

This same sentiment is expressed in a different way by other parents which in general agrees with Mort and Cornell:

Parents are about equally divided on the question of whether or not under any circumstances physical punishment or scolding is a satisfactory corrective for pupil misbehavior.<sup>11</sup>

Physical punishment in the school is definitely becoming unpopular with the parent and yet, "Quite a number of citizens expressed their belief that the schools should discipline more." This belief was expressed by the leading citizens in certain Michigan communities in a survey conducted by Carter.<sup>12</sup> What do the parents wish to see as disciplinary measures? That is a point on which there is no unanimity of opinion either among the parents or educators. Parents suggest flattery, persuasion, rewards, and praise as possible alternatives

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<sup>11</sup>Paul R. Mort and P. G. Cornell, A Poll of Parent Opinion, National Parent-Teacher, 34:27-30, October 1939

<sup>12</sup>T. M. Carter, Citizens Evaluate Their Schools, School and Society, 47:719-23

especially if they are also used in the home. Several parents say that as disciplinary problems begin in the home, they should go back to the home for their final solution.

### Grades and Passing

Much of the talk of people connected with the public school as students or teachers centers round grades and passing. In the schools used in this investigation the student is still marked in terms of percentage grades and these grades are supposed to be uniform enough to be used on transcripts from one school to the other. It might even be said that grades are the only medium of exchange between schools, for seldom is a school asked to send a record that it sends anything other than grades. To add to the confusion no two school people agree as to the exact meaning of grades, nor do any two schools, or even any two teachers in the same school, have the same system of awarding grades. It is little wonder then that the average parent is somewhat confused as what grades mean or how much dependance can be put upon them. Nevertheless parents feel that grades are the most reliable means of judging their child's accomplishment in the school. Eighty-two per cent think that the grades that the child makes in the school is the best indication of what he is doing. As a source of information about the child parents are well agreed as to the worth of grades, but other factors make them somewhat doubtful.

Only 35 per cent of the patrons believe that the ability to make high grades is one of the most useful things to the child in later life, and 14 per cent believe that high grades in his classes is one of the things that the child should get in school. Parents are particularly opposed to passing a child when it is undeserved and resent very much the idea of everyone passing. Only 4 per cent of the parents feel they would be likely to blame a teacher for failing their child, and 14 per cent would be likely to go out of their way to praise a teacher for giving their child a failing grade if he deserved it. On the other hand 75 per cent feel like they would blame a teacher for giving their child a passing grade if it were undeserved. Ninety-four per cent of the parents disagree with the statement that the child should be passed each year regardless of what he has done in the school, yet only 52 per cent mark false the statement, "Failing to pass a child in school or not allowing him to graduate may do him untold damage in later life." Seventy-eight per cent feel that grades make more difference in the long run than graduation, in answer to the statement, "Grades make little difference in the long run. The main thing is whether the child manages to graduate.", yet 26 per cent mark true and 24 per cent are undecided about the statement, "Graduation should take place in high school when a student has earned sixteen credits, regardless of the subjects he takes or the grades he makes in the courses."

Seventy-three per cent of the parents believe that grades should never indicate a comparison between the pupils and the other members of his class, but should only indicate to the parent as to whether the child's progress is satisfactory in his work. Fifty-five per cent say they would be glad for their child to take a course in the school in which he was interested but for which he received no credit. Both of these indicate that the parent is not so far from the best educational theory as is popularly supposed.

Mort and Cornell find:

In the matter of marking and promoting children, neither parents nor teachers feel ready to do away completely with uniform standards of attainment. Most parents and teachers believe that children should repeat work when tests reveal that they have not attained mastery of minimum essentials in their work.<sup>13</sup>

However Seyfert<sup>14</sup> finds that 72 per cent of his parents believe that pupils should be promoted if they work conscientiously, which disagrees with the writer's findings. The explanation probably lies in the fact that in the previous question Seyfert had asked, "Is ability grouping desirable?" and over 75 per cent of the parents answered, "Yes." Naturally with ability grouping the conscientious pupils could be promoted with little regard to their actual accomplishment in terms of the average of the whole group.

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<sup>13</sup>Paul R. Mort and F. G. Cornell, op. cit., p. 30

<sup>14</sup>Warren C. Seyfert, op. cit., p. 421



In general parents are rather conservative with regard to grades and passing because they feel that these are their best methods of evaluating the outcomes of the effect of the school upon their child. The whole picture seems to be one of confusion in the mind of the parent with the school people doing very little to clear away the fog which surrounds the question of grades and passing. Grades are to the parent what the straw is to the drowning man and the parents would accept just as gratefully some form of life preserver in the way of better types of evaluation.

#### School-Community Relationships

Ideally the school should be such an integral part of the community that it would be difficult to draw a sharp dividing line between the two. However, educators too often do not take the community into their confidence when working out a school program. The school people should be the leaders but they should carry the public along with them. As Todd says:

To the end that school men and women assume the leadership in public education, it behooves every individual in every position in every locality so to study the education problems under his charge that he can render active leadership. Having done so, it is within his prerogative, and it is his duty, to advise the community of the true situation as it is, as it should be, and as to what may be necessary to realize that which is desirable.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>William Hall Todd, What Citizens Knew About Their Schools, New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1927, p. 6

It is not enough to merely "advise" the community as to what it should do, but the community must be given an actual part in the doing or it will lose interest in the whole undertaking.

Butler sums up this idea in these words:

In other words, we must be careful of the ill effects of the tendency which has manifested itself so strongly now for a generation to treat the school, its organization, and its work as so remote and so highly organized and so specific as to be beyond the reach and understanding and cooperation of . . . . the lay element of the community--parents and others.<sup>16</sup>

The community is interested in the school and would like to take an active part in its planning and organization but teachers and administrators go blithely on their way, insulated from the public by their trick phraseology and pet slogans which are almost as meaningless to them as to the general public. Ivins makes the discovery that:

Parents say, "A part of our difficulty is the result of teacher made courses of study." Parents think the school administration should receive more suggestions from parents when revising courses of study.<sup>17</sup>

Some educators see in the public an insidious force which is seeking to control the schools for various reasons. Beale, writing in Harpers a few years ago, says:

The creation of a better social order requires critical analysis, great faith, intense labor and trained intelligence. Our schools are indispensable in the cultivation of these qualities. The creation of such an order also involves change. This would necessarily disturb powerful elements which benefit from the old order. It is these elements that control the schools, and they have always

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<sup>16</sup>Nicholas Murray Butler, *The Schools and the Community*, Teachers College Record, 37:579, April 1936

<sup>17</sup>Lester S. Ivins, op. cit., p. 194

opposed change. They seek to use the schools to "develop character", to instill "respect for law and order", to make "good citizens", and to teach "Patriotism", but, when analyzed, these terms all mean to the interested groups unquestioned acceptance of things as they are. Men who control the schools object to teachers who stimulate thought and create critical attitudes.<sup>18</sup>

In defining the "forces that control the schools" the same writer again says:

The forces that control the schools and seek to prevent their participation in attempts to solve vital current problems are partly outside pressure groups, partly elements of the school system, and partly subjective forces within the educators themselves.<sup>19</sup>

Such attitudes as the above express would have the effect of making school people suspicious of every attempt on the part of the public at cooperation with the schools, but fortunately neither parents nor teachers agree with this attitude. Mort and Cornell<sup>20</sup> found that 86 per cent of the parents and 98 per cent of the teachers believe that our educational system should seek to improve society, and Bagley and Kyte in their California Curriculum Study found:

There is strong evidence that some of the subjects that have been legislated into the curriculum through the pressure of minority organizations would have met a different fate had they been submitted to a popular referendum. There is clear evidence that the people as a whole are not in sympathy with having the public school used for propagandist purposes.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>H. E. Deale, Forces That Control the Schools, Harpers Magazine, 169:603-15

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 604

<sup>20</sup>Paul R. Mort and F. G. Cornell, op. cit., p. 28

<sup>21</sup>William C. Bagley and George C. Kyte, The California Curriculum Study, Berkeley, California: University of California Printing Office, 1926, p.23

In the present study the writer found that 82 per cent of the parents believe that the parent should never think of the school from the standpoint of his particular child, but from the standpoint of the good of the community as a whole. Seventy-eight per cent believe that everyone should be required to contribute equally, according to his ability, to the upkeep of the school, regardless of how many children he has in the school. Both of these indicate that the parents' attitude toward the school is that the school exists for the improvement of the whole community and not for the selfish purposes of a few. Forty-four per cent of the parents believe that "a large proportion of the school's time should be taken up with things which lead to community betterment." This would not seem to be a majority unless the fact is taken into account that about 25 per cent were doubtful, and 33 per cent thought the statement false. In a democracy it is probable that more parents should believe in an education as a means for improvement of the whole community.

#### Summary

Parents believe that the teacher is the most important part of the school system, and that she should set the example for the children in the school. The personality of the teacher plays a very important part in the thinking of the parents. Parents want more discipline in the schools, but they are not

in favor of physical punishment as a form of discipline. Grades are looked upon by parents as the best indication of what their child is doing in the school, yet they are confused by the grading and passing systems that exist in the schools today. The parents are vitally interested in the school and might play a very important and helpful part in the schools if they were given more part in the various phases of school life.

## CHAPTER IV

## Parental Attitudes Toward The School

The material on which the discussion in this chapter is based consists of notes on over fifty systematic interviews with parents; many individual discussions over a period of three years; comments, both oral and written, of parents on the questionnaire; and further interpretation of some of the answers to the questionnaire which were not discussed in the previous chapters. Opinions from the literature are included whenever they shed further light on the general attitudes of parents, or substantiate or disagree with the writer's impressions. The topics to be discussed are the sources of the parents' opinions, the parents' attitudes toward tolerance, attitudes toward esthetic values of the school, and attitudes toward the cost of education.

With many kinds of data, there are always as many conclusions drawn from the data, as there are people making the interpretation. The preceding two chapters have analyzed the results of a questionnaire designed to bring out some of the opinions of parents on the curriculum and the administration of the public schools. In the collection of these data the writer talked to members of parents about matters relating to the material in the questionnaire, and about many other phases of school life which were not covered by the parents.

### Source of Parents' Opinions

No one can be very certain as to exactly how he arrives at any given opinion. The nature of an opinion precludes any certainty as to exactly how the holder arrived at his state of mind. An opinion is not fact but it is nevertheless very important as a motivating force in a social world. According to Lowell:

Although an opinion is a view that can be rationally held, all opinions are not acquired by a process of reasoning. Everyone accepts many of his ideas, not on grounds of their rational probability but because he received them from others, perhaps in early infancy. Probably everyone holds in this way the vast majority of what he takes to be his opinions.<sup>1</sup>

Some of the factors that enter into the making of an opinion are fairly well known. These factors are attention, emotion, bias, prejudice, and interest; but the various possibilities of the combination of these factors to make or change any particular opinion are almost unlimited. Thus it is impossible to predict opinions from a given group even under the same conditions.

The sources of parent opinions about the school are difficult to trace. Their interest in their own child focuses their attention on the school and so they form many opinions

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<sup>1</sup>Abbott Lawrence Lowell, Public Opinion in War and Peace, Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1926, p. 14.

on all school matters, but exactly what elements in any given school situation give most weight to their formation of opinion are difficult to separate. In all probability the success of the child in the school has much to do with the formation of parent opinion. Fifty-six per cent of the parents say that a parent should learn from his own child about what is going on in the school. Yet only 26 per cent of the parents think that what their child tells them about his work in the school is the best indication of what that child is doing in the school. The discrepancy probably lies in the parents' knowledge that children only tell the things that create a favorable impression upon the fathers and mothers. There is also a wide difference in the amount of confidence that parents place in their children.

Teachers often have the attitude that parents are antagonistic to the school because they believe the things that their children tell them about the school. No normal child sees things in the same light as an adult and he colors what he sees and hears with his own imagination. Naturally what he takes to the parent is oftentimes distorted but not always consciously so. Most parents are essentially fair in their interpretation of what the child tells them and this antagonism has its foundation often in the earlier experiences both of the parent and of the teacher. The book, "Parents' Questions", has this to say:



There is, to begin with the difficulty of overcoming the aloofness, even suspicion, with which each (the school and the home) has traditionally regarded the other. To some extent this is colored by the parents' own childhood experiences with teachers--remote or friendly, feared or loved, suspected or trusted. Parents are, indeed, conscious of the need for overcoming their own early prejudices in this respect, and so universal is the change in their attitudes that today even the traditional joke about teachers as children's natural enemies are almost obsolete.<sup>2</sup>

The normal parent's life is centered around the children in the home and even though they attempt to be fair in their attitudes toward the school, this becomes at times very difficult. The parents' fairness of mind is evidenced by the fact that 82 per cent think that the parent should never think of the school from the standpoint of his particular child, but from the standpoint of the good of the community as a whole. The continuous conflict in the minds of the parents between that which they think they should do for the good of the social order, and the needs of the present moment for their own child, creates a confusion of opinion that is often misunderstood. Gruenberg states the situation thus:

Although parents generally have come to accept the school as a matter of course, they have not come to think of it in terms of common or community objectives. Just as the teacher is often concerned with the pupils only in relation to their day-by-day work and conduct, or to the accomplishments planned for the present term, the parent is frequently concerned with the school's immediate contribution to his own child. That is to say, parents in

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<sup>2</sup>Sidonie Matsner Gruenberg, and others, Parents' Questions, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936, p. 216.

general are not yet sufficiently clear as to what they-- as members of the community, as taxpayers, as citizens-- want of the school. Not many parents perhaps, look upon the school as merely a convenient parking-place for the children. But amazing numbers still do look upon the school as a convenient and inexpensive device for bringing their children advantages for their prospective struggles in life. There is still to be found a wide, if not deep, undercurrent of feeling from the days when schooling was a privilege for the few, to be avidly grasped.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore the effect of any school policy upon the thinking and attitudes of parents cannot be forecast, nor is it possible to tell why or how parent opinions are formed. The only available data points to the fact that the pupils themselves are a major factor in the building up of parent opinions.

✓ Farley, in a study of parents' acquaintances with school affairs, made the following statement:

This evidence points to the effectiveness of pupils as publicity agents. The longer pupils are in attendance at school the more thoroughly are their parents acquainted with school affairs. The data suggest more emphasis on the interpretation of education to pupils with the use of the mediums employed for that purpose . . . . It is likely that the high-school principal who is building a program of publicity can place more confidence in the efforts made through pupils as intermediaries and through direct contacts with the public than in those made through the press.<sup>4</sup>

The sources of parent opinions are somewhat obscure, but this very obscurity should make the school people realize that every detail of public school life should be carefully

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>4</sup> Belmont Farley, Interpreting the Secondary School to the Public, United States Bureau of Education, Bulletin, 1932, No. 17, Monograph No. 16, p. 101.

watched as to its possible reception by the general public.

### Tolerance

There is probably no one who is completely tolerant of beliefs and opinions which differ from his own, and on the other hand no one is completely intolerant. Parents are just like other people in their prejudices except that they have such an interest in their children that one or two unpleasant experiences with the teachers or with the school are likely to be generalized to include many other things. The writer interviewed a mother who thought that the school was mistreating a whole neighborhood of maybe a dozen homes. When asked for particulars the mother finally admitted that the only case that she knew of mistreatment was that of her son. Such a broad generalization from a special case and the consequent prejudice may be exceptional, however, in over fifty interviews with parents, the writer found numerous cases of unfounded prejudice which arose in much the same manner. One mother bitterly denounced a teacher's morality because she had failed a daughter for a single semester. A school board member continued for several years to vote against the reelection of a teacher because that teacher had given his son, who usually got high grades, a failing grade for one month. In few cases is the real reason for intolerance evident even to the parent. The unpleasantness attendant upon the child's

failure has been transferred to the teacher or to the school. It is not a matter of reasoning but of emotion, and may happen to the best educated as well as to the ignorant.

Only 26 per cent of the parents think that a child should get a tolerant attitude in school toward other nationalities, religions, parties, or ideas which differ from his own. This indicates that parents do not in general consider tolerance much of a virtue. The same impression is gleaned from talks with the parents. The writer always brought into his interviews the negro question in the South, Catholicism, the Republican Party, and the theory of biological evolution. In almost every case the parent showed distinct prejudice with regard to at least three out of the four. Parents do not want their children to be tolerant enough to disagree with any of the tenets which are family traditions. As to the relative rank of the various prejudices religion ranks first, with race, political party, and ideas in that order. Extreme parental intolerance makes it dangerous for religion to be taught in the schools, and the scientists have been discouraged in the teaching of many biological theories for several decades. Tuttle says:

The schools have increasingly dealt with the findings of scientific research. The conflict between education of religious beliefs has, therefore, tended to increase in area even though not in intensity. One with the attitude of tolerance which is supposed to accompany culture is that of respect for the religious views of every group.

How far shall education disseminate facts or offer interpretations which are in conflict with the beliefs of these groups?<sup>5</sup>

Racial or religious intolerance among the parents is not an insuperable difficulty, but it should be recognized and allowance made where conflicts in the school are likely to occur. The child is usually more tolerant of different ideas and peoples than his parents. It is the school's job to work through the child to the parent.

### Esthetic Attitudes

The attitude of parents toward beauty in the physical aspects of the school is seldom considered of importance, yet as Grinnell says:

In every community the school buildings themselves are expressions of educational ideals and program. In their physical aspects they may be taken to represent the attitude of a community toward education. . . . Mean school buildings breed mean attitudes toward the school and the virtues it represents; beautiful and adequate buildings breed loyalties and wholesome pride in achievement.<sup>6</sup>

The looks of the physical plant must play an important part in the formation of attitudes by the patrons of the school. It reflects also those attitudes that have been already built up. Parents think a great deal about the beauty of the school<sup>7</sup> and frequently identify the school with themselves. Anything

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<sup>5</sup>Harold S. Tuttle, A Social Basis of Education, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1934, p. 532.

<sup>6</sup>J. Erle Grinnell, Interpreting the Public Schools, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1937, p. 319.

that is done to beautify the school usually meets with the wholehearted approval of the parents. In the writer's interviews it was rather cheering to find parents who lived in squalid surroundings talking about what they would like to see in the way of school equipment. The question was asked, "What changes would you like to see made in the school buildings and grounds?" Almost invariably the answer was that they would like to see them made better looking. Suggestions as to painting, cleaning, and landscaping were uppermost in many parent minds. Several parents said that even if their children could not find beauty at home they would like to see them have it at school. Patrons of the school are more concerned about the external looks of the buildings, but those parents who had visited the school always commented upon the looks of the individual classrooms. Parents have a tendency to identify the appearance of the school with their own status and with that of the community.

Parents want beauty in the school both for themselves and for their children and are willing to help the school officials get it. Parent organisations spend much of their time and energy beautifying the school even though they sometimes get little encouragement from the teachers and principals.

#### School Cost

In answer to the question, "Are schools worth what they cost?", parents gave the answer that they are usually worth

more. Only two parents out of more than fifty interviewed, thought the teachers were getting paid enough. Parents have the feeling that money spent on the schools is well spent. Seyfert asks the question, "Are school costs excessive?"<sup>7</sup> and found that only 19 per cent answered in the affirmative. Boards of education sometimes seem to be penurious but it is doubtful if the majority of parents resent the cost of education. One parent made the statement, "I am a poor man and this is not a wealthy community, but we can afford to pay more for the schools than we do. It is only by giving a better education to our children that we will improve the wealth of our community."m Seventy-eight per cent of the parents think that everyone should be required to contribute equally, according to his ability, to the upkeep of the school, regardless of how many children he has in the school. This shows that most parents believe that the school is worth much to the community at large as well as to the individual child.

The parents want the school to show something concrete for the money spent. From the questionnaire most parents believe that the school should fit the child to earn a living in some manner, but the old, rather intangible, argument of the actual cash value of an elementary, high school, or college education, based upon the earning power of those who

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<sup>7</sup>Warren C. Seyfert, What the Public Thinks of Its Schools, School Review, 48:421, June 1940.

have finished is still uppermost in the minds of many parents. This argument, based on the average earnings, is fallacious because it fails to take into account all the causes, yet it seems to have been well impressed upon most of the parents.

### Summary

Parent opinions are, like other opinions, tenuous things, but they are vitally important to the schools. It is impossible to tell what are the causes of opinions, but one of the contributing factors is how the child gets along in school. The parent gets many of his school impressions from his child, therefore schools should watch carefully the attitudes and opinions of the children. Intolerance in the parent may be modified by the school's influence on the child. Parents want beauty in the school and are willing to help the school authorities make the school a more attractive place in which to live. Parents are willing to spend money for the schools, but they would like to see some tangible returns.



## CHAPTER V

## SUMMARY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to get the attitudes toward the schools of parents in certain sections of the country as expressed by the opinions in answer to a questionnaire. Personal interviews were used to cover points not specifically covered in the questionnaire and to supplement it. These expressed opinions were interpreted by the writer and compared with opinions found in other studies. The attitudes of the parents have been discussed toward the following: the subject matter, the learning process, school purpose, extra-curricular activities, the teacher, discipline, grades and passing, school-community relationships, sources of opinions, tolerance, esthetics, and school cost.

The Subject Matter

Parents are strong believers in mathematics and Latin as "mental training" and as disciplinary subjects, yet they wish to see more vocational subjects in the schools. Most parents would like to see their child able to earn a living when he finishes high school, and at the same time have acquired a strong cultural background.

### The Learning Process

Parents believe that learning should require much effort, and that the child should learn to do his own thinking. To many parents the learning process is a type of disciplinary measure, yet the parent believes that the content of what the child learns is what counts. Most parents believe that younger children can be taught better than older ones.

### School Purpose

Parents think that one of the major functions of the school is the building of character and "moral fiber". Another purpose is the fitting of the child to earn a living or to be prepared to live in the adult world.

### Extra-Curricular Activities

Parents are very well agreed that almost all types of activities which go on in the school outside of the regular class period are worth while. They are not particularly interested in the results of interscholastic competition, but are very much interested in athletics in general. Dramatics appeal to most of the parents as a means of teaching the child to express himself.

### The Teacher

Parents believe that the teacher should possess all of

these virtues that they would like for their child to have when that child is grown. Parents expect the teacher to be an example for the children she teaches. The majority of parents have a great deal of faith in the teacher, and are very well satisfied with the public school personnel.

### Discipline

Parents believe that schools should be rather strict in matters of discipline, but as to the methods of enforcing this discipline they are considerably at variance. Few parents believe in corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure, but suggest various alternatives.

### Marks and Passing

Parents think that marks are the best criterion for determining what their child is doing in the school. High marks or failure are not nearly as important to the parent as the reasons therefor. Undeserved passing is an anathema to almost all parents, but failures seem to worry them but little. Parents are in favor of discarding the idea of comparing pupils achievement with one another, and replacing it with a statement of the child's progress.

### School-Community Relationships

Most parents believe the school should play a very

vital part in the community life, but less than half of the parents think that community affairs should take a very large part of the pupil's time. The majority of the parents agree that everyone should help pay for the schools, and that the parent should think of the school in its relationship to the community.

### Source of Opinions

Sources of parent opinions are very difficult to trace. The majority of parents form the bulk of their opinions from their children's reaction to the school, but there is a continuous conflict in the mind of the parent between what he thinks he should do for his particular child and between what he thinks he ought to do for the good of the community.

### Tolerance

Parents relive their own lives in those of their children. They frequently wish their children to be their prototypes in every way even to their prejudices. So these prejudices which should be outmoded are handed down from father to son. Thus prejudice with regard to religion, race, political party, or ideas may make trouble between the teacher and the parent.

### Esthetics

Parents appreciate the inclusion in the school system of an atmosphere that is esthetically pleasing. Some want

more in the school than the child finds at home, while those that have a pleasing home environment wish that environment continued in the school. Beauty of physical plant, dress, cultural subjects, and pleasing personalities are welcomed by the parent.

### School Cost

Parents are willing to pay the costs of education if they can see that it is necessary. Very few patrons object to the costs that are attendant upon the construction or operation of the school plant, and most parents think that teachers should be paid more. Most parents are believers in the cash value of an education for their children.

### Implications of the Study

If it is possible to take such tenuous things as attitudes and opinions and draw therefrom certain implications, the following are suggested:

1. If the principal, superintendent, or teacher going into a school community for the first time, is to gain the full confidence of that community, he must know what the parents think. In order to know what the parents think he must have some knowledge of the general ways in which parent thinking differs from that of educators. Such has been the general purpose of this study. Then the educator must find out from his particular community the attitudes and opinions on which to base future conduct. He may know all the best facts and theories of education, but if those facts and theories are not incorporated into the thinking of the school patrons, little that is permanently constructive will be accomplished. Opinions are not very real to others, but they are extremely real to the holder. Therefore, a questionnaire

of a type suited to a particular community, and asking for opinions from as representative a group as is possible, should give the beginning school man an idea of how his community feels about the problems of the school.

2. If the school is thinking of making some rather radical changes it would be sensible to find out what the opinion of the community is in regard to the changes. This would be helpful both from getting the community to cooperate, and also for finding out if the changes are going to be accepted by the community after being made.
3. An examination of community opinion is vitally necessary in order that the schools may be interpreted to the community. Interpretation presupposes knowledge of what the community already thinks, and in order to be successful must not run counter to long standing mores.
4. The children in the school are a vital link in the connections between the school and the parent. More attention should be paid to the opinions of the children. In this scientific age the stress is upon facts, and opinions are heavily discounted, but in dealing with the public, opinions probably count more heavily than facts. School child opinions should be carefully watched as an index of what parents are thinking.
5. Parents are much more sympathetic toward the changing school program than they are usually given credit for being. There are always a few people in any community who make it a point to let the school people know what they think, but this small group does not always reflect the attitude of the majority of the people. In testing sentiment the educator should be rather careful to get the consensus of the opinions of all. The questionnaire method of sampling opinions gives a clearer picture of community thinking than a few isolated cases.
6. State legislatures and state departments of education would do well to have a better general idea of parent opinions on what they want in the

way of education for their children. Progress in education, whether financial or academic, finally rests with the parents. If legislatures knew what the parents wanted for their children, they would be more sympathetic toward school expenditures. Not knowing, they play safe and appropriate as little money as possible for schools. State departments attempt to educate the parents toward what they think they should believe, with too little regard for the already established parental attitudes. As a consequence they wonder why they encounter so much resistance.

7. Educators do well to pay little attention to gossip, and should consider themselves the leaders of the community in matters relating to education. However, the true leader always should know what those who follow want, and have an ability to judge the desirability of those wants. If the wants are desirable, the leader should find means of attaining them, while if they are undesirable from the standpoint of the long time good of society, he should be able to substitute for them those that are more desirable. Leadership consists in planning a means of attaining a goal, as well as judging the desirability of that goal. The leader listens to the voice of the group, interprets what he hears into coherent form, judges its desirability, then translates voice into action. If educators are leaders they should know what the community wants before getting out to putting their ideas into concrete form. Any other course is dictatorship.

### Conclusion

If, as Dewey says:

A society is a number of people held together because they are working along common lines, in a common spirit, and with reference to common aims.<sup>1</sup>

the parents play a very important part in the society of today. In order to have common aims the parents and the

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<sup>1</sup>John Dewey, The School and Society, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1915, p. 11

educators must each know what the others think. The school people are making tremendous strides in interpreting the schools to the public, but little progress is being made in interpreting the public to the educators. If this study has contributed its small part to a better understanding of the public by the schools it will have accomplished its purpose. It is only by the parents and the school working together, with a common understanding and a common purpose, that education will rise to be a commanding force in a troubled world.



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TABLE I  
DISTRIBUTION OF PARENTS BY BIRTH STATES

STATE	NUMBER	PER CENT	STATE	NUMBER	PER CENT
Alabama	10	3.1	New Jersey	8	.6
California	1	.3	New York	17	5.1
Denmark	1	.3	North Carolina	9	2.8
District of Columbia	1	.3	North Dakota	1	.3
Florida	47	14.3	Norway	1	.3
Georgia	17	5.2	Ohio	2	.6
Germany	2	.6	Oklahoma	1	.3
Great Britain	1	.3	Ontario	1	.3
Illinois	6	1.8	Pennsylvania	8	2.4
Indiana	8	2.4	Rhode Island	1	.3
Iowa	2	.6	South Carolina	5	1.5
Kansas	3	.9	South Dakota	1	.3
Kentucky	15	4.7	Tennessee	3	.9
Maine	2	.6	Texas	1	.3
Maryland	4	1.2	Virginia	140	42.4
Massachusetts	1	.3	Wisconsin	2	.6
Michigan	4	1.2			
Minnesota	6	1.8			
Missouri	2	.6			
Nebraska	2	.6			

TABLE II  
DISTRIBUTION OF OCCUPATIONS OF PARENTS

OCCUPATION	NUMBER	PER CENT	OCCUPATION	NUMBER	PER CENT
Barber	2	1.2	Manual Labor	5	3.1
Beautician	1	.6	Meat Cutter	2	1.2
Bookkeeper	1	.6	Mechanic	5	3.1
Carotaker	2	1.2	Merchant	5	3.1
Carpenter	9	5.6	None	6	3.7
Citrus			Nursing	4	2.5
Inspector	4	2.5	Painter	2	1.2
Contractor	2	1.2	Plant Operator	2	1.2
Electrician	1	.6	Postal Clerk	4	2.5
Farmer	44	27.5	Printer	2	1.2
Fireman	1	.6	Professional	10	10.0
Fish Dealer	3	1.8	Salesman	8	5.0
Fishing	4	2.5	Shoe Repair	1	.6
Fruit Packer	1	.6	Secretary	2	1.2
Hauling	1	.6	State Road		
Hotel Worker	1	.6	Department	8	5.0
Lumberman	2	1.2	Store Manager	2	1.2
Machine			Ticket Agent	1	.6
Operator	5	3.1	Trapper	1	.6

The following questions and statements are to find out from the patrons of the school their thought in relation to the school. Father and mother will please fill out separate blanks. Please express your opinion freely as there will be no means of knowing who filled out a blank. If you have any further comments to make about the public schools please make them on the back of this blank or on a separate sheet of paper.

How many school children are in your home?      boys      girls.

- Which of the following do you think would be the best indication of what your child is doing in school? Check the two best.

Which of the following should be the purpose of the school?  
Check the two best.

- 0
1. To fit your child to earn a living
  2. To enable your child to find a higher place in society
  3. To enable your child to make better use of leisure time
  4. To make your child a happier individual
  5. To enable your child to use better judgment in life

For which of the following would you be more likely to blame a teacher? Check two.

- D
1. Giving your child a passing grade if it were undeserved
  2. Creating in the child a disrespect for your judgment
  3. Giving your child a failing grade
  4. Physically punishing your child
  5. Making things easy for your child

For which of the following would you be more likely to go out of your way to praise a teacher? Check two.

- E
1. Giving your child a failing grade if he deserved it
  2. Teaching the child to care for his health and safety.
  3. Making it easy for your child to learn and pass a subject
  4. Keeping the child under strict discipline
  5. Giving to the child a liking for the subject and the school

Which of the following should a child get in school? Check two.

- F
1. High grades in his classes
  2. A habit of sticking to a thing until he has finished it
  3. An attitude of being able to see both sides of a question
  4. A high degree of skill in such things as typewriting or woodworking
  5. A tolerant attitude toward other nationalities, religions, parties, or ideas which differ from his own

If you had your choice, which of the following would you rather see your child become when he is grown? Check two.

- G
1. A moneyed person in his community
  2. A highly efficient person in his line of work
  3. A person so absorbed in his line of work that he would have no time for other things

- 4. A person who had developed such a mature ability to use sound judgment that he would be at home in any situation
- 5. A social leader in his community \* \*

Which of the following statements do you think are true and which are false? If you agree with the statement put a ring around the T before it. If you disagree put a ring around the F. If you are doubtful put a ring around the ?.

1. T ? F A teacher should never fail to punish a child for any infraction of discipline.
2. T ? F School is a place for class work and is not a place for such things as plays, games and outside activities.
3. T ? F A parent should learn from his own child about what is going on in the school.
4. T ? F It is how the child learns that counts. What he learns makes little or no difference.
5. T ? F Habits of discipline and obedience to authority should be well learned in the school.
6. T ? F Many of the child's failures in school are due to the child's dislike of the teacher.
7. T ? F The child should be passed each year, regardless of the amount of work he has done or what he has learned.
8. T ? F The child learning to do his own thinking is of greater importance than facts or learning to do things.
9. T ? F Traits of character such as honesty, cooperation, diligence and politeness should be developed in the school.
10. T ? F If the child has a good time in the school it shows that he is not doing anything worth while.
11. T ? F Failing to pass a child in school or not allowing him to graduate may do him untold damage in later life.
12. T ? F If a child cannot get a job when he finishes school, he probably should never have attended school.
13. T ? F Grades make little difference in the long run. The main thing is whether the child manages to graduate.

14. T ? F Much of what my child learns in the school depends upon whether the teacher likes or dislikes my child.
15. T ? F The parent should never think of the school from the standpoint of his particular child, but from the standpoint of the good of the community as a whole.
16. T ? F Everyone should be required to contribute equally according to his ability, to the upkeep of the school regardless of how many children he has in the school.
17. T ? F A large proportion of the school's time should be taken up with things which lead to community betterment.
18. T ? F Parents should take a greater interest in their children in the elementary school than in high school.
19. T ? F I would be glad for my child to take a course in the school in which he was interested, but for which he received no credit.
20. T ? F Graduation should take place in high school when a student has earned sixteen credits regardless of the subjects or grades he makes in the courses.
21. T ? F Mathematics and science should not be required subjects in high school because they are too hard.
22. T ? F At least three units of mathematics should be required by every high school for graduation.
23. T ? F Only those portions of mathematics should be taught that the child is fairly certain to use in later life.
24. T ? F Mathematics is fine mental training and therefore should have a prominent place in the high school whether the child will have any use for it or not.
25. T ? F Latin is a dead language and should not be taught in the public schools as the child will never use it.
26. T ? F Athletics should play a prominent part in the school life of every child.
27. T ? F School plays furnish a valuable way to train the child to express himself before the public.
28. T ? F Grades should never indicate a comparison between the pupil and the other members of his class but should only indicate to the parent as to whether the child's progress is satisfactory in his work.



29. T ? F My child's progress in the school depends upon the teacher more than the subject or type of school system.
30. T ? F Teachers should always stick closely to the subject that they are teaching and should never discuss anything else.
31. T ? F A teacher should feel perfectly free to teach my child anything that he needs to know regardless of the subject that that teacher happens to have.

We hope that your consideration of these questions may have led you to think more about the problems of education in trying to make of your child a more useful and happier citizen of our country. Please add any comments that may have occurred to you while going over these pages.

We thank you.

## VITA

John Gibson Reveley, Jr. was born August 29, 1904 at Monterey, Virginia. He received his Bachelor of Science degree from Hampden-Sydney College in 1926. For the next four years he taught French and science at the Augusta Military Academy, Fort Defiance, Virginia. He attended the University of Virginia during the session of 1930-31, taking graduate work in chemistry. From 1931 to 1935 he was coach and science teacher in the De Soto County High School at Arcadia, Florida. He moved from Arcadia to Cocoa, Florida in 1934 to act as principal of the Cocoa High School. From 1939 he has been principal of Toano High School, Toano, Virginia.