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THE MANAGEMENT OF SMALLER SCHOOLS

BY

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SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS, GRAND ISLAND, NEBRASKA



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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE superintendent of schools occupies a unique position among American public officials. Few public servants exercising his great influence and power are as little hampered by partisan political considerations. As compared with other employees in the service of government whose expert training is no greater, his recompense is favorable. His tenure and opportunity for continuously effective service is usually greater.

This favorable condition surrounding the office of superintendent or supervising principal is an evolution of the last twenty years. It is a direct product of the converging and strengthening of several important traditions in American life. One of these is the growing belief that the success of popular government depends upon the efficacy of widespread education. Another, that the schools should be independent of the passions and changes which accompany the rise and fall of parties and factions in the general government.

These widespread doctrines of a democratic people have been made effective in recent years through the organized coöperation of teachers, parents, and other citizens possessing a deep interest in the train-

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ing of children. Everywhere parent-teachers' associations, mothers' congresses, child-welfare leagues, public school associations, and other similar civic societies constitute a body of protecting opinion which has made the schools, like the courts, a fundamental and unpartisan institution in our American life. They have created a medium between the teachers and the general public which increases the educationalist's capacity for determining the general public policies as well as the specific educational policies under which the schools operate.

Where the superintendent was once compelled to accept such interpretations of the public will with regard to education as the board of education might lay down, intelligently or arbitrarily, he is now in a position to create the very public appreciations and depreciations which the school trustees register. He has added to the powers of teacher, administrator, and executive the additional one of leader of the educational mind of his community.

The office of superintendent has thus become an intricate one, which brings within its range many diverse functions. It calls for more varied powers than most of the professional functions in government. Only the chief executive of the general political government, such as the mayor or governor, finds larger variability in his tasks than the principal officer of the school system, large or small.

The manager of schools must have an organized

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scheme of work and must execute it in a systematic way that leaves little room for avoidable omissions and delays. Time and energy must be disposed in a manner that leads to the economical and effective performance of the thousand definite small tasks and the hundred large and diffuse services which make up his total responsibility. As season follows season, imposing a different emphasis to his ever-present problems, he finds that his alternating attentions to duty take on a definite sequence.

To a considerable degree, the problems and duties of the State superintendent of public instruction have been analyzed and given orderly arrangement. The same is true of the responsibilities of the superintendent of our great city systems of schools, to which students of educational administration have given the major part of their thought. Even rural-school management has had extensive thought and publication given to it. On the contrary, the administration of the smaller systems of schools in towns and villages has been largely overlooked by the scientific students of education, and little has been published on this field for the guidance of those who are charged with their direction.

The need of an intelligent handbook on this field of educational service is the greatest, not merely because the field has been neglected, but for another and more trenchant reason. It is in the supervision of the smaller school systems that the careers of

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school superintendents usually begin. It is their first transfer from the classroom teaching or the direction of a single school to the administration of a system of community schools. The change is a sudden one, a plunge into a new kind of educational work, when guidance from some authoritative source must be the substitute for a personal experience which the beginner does not have.

In the face of this obvious need, the author of the volume here presented has drawn widely and thoughtfully upon his own varied experience in several small school systems and prepared a handbook for the guidance of his less experienced fellows which is unique in its thorough helpfulness. In addition, he has with rare discretion drawn from the literature of school administration in general those applicable informations and techniques which have a direct bearing on his own particular problems. It is such a book as the editor may present to the profession with a sense of great service rendered.

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PREFACE

THERE has been very little professional literature written with the small school system in mind. A large quantity of books, dissertations, reports, surveys, and magazine articles dealing with the city school has appeared within the last few years. Most of this material is not available to the man or the woman employed in a village or small city school, yet, speaking generally, these are the ones who need help most. The writer offers this book as a pioneer attempt to bring to those in the smaller schools some of the results of a rather extensive study of educational literature as well as a considerable experience as teacher, principal, and superintendent in small school systems. No claim for originality is made. The student of education will recognize the sources of many of the ideas set forth herein. It is written in the hope that it may prove helpful to those preparing for administrative and supervisory positions in small school systems as well as to those already at work in this field.

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THE MANAGEMENT OF SMALLER SCHOOLS

I

THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

A new profession

THE administration and supervision of public schools is a new profession. In 1870 but twenty-seven city superintendents of schools were employed in the United States. These early superintendents did a pioneer work and blazed many trails for their successors. They were without special training for their task and were compelled to follow the trial-and-error method, overcoming obstacles as best they could, and paying for their mistakes with their positions. Conditions have changed greatly. The public now expects much more of a modern school executive than was expected of his early predecessors. The new superintendent of schools is a specialist, with the best training afforded by modern colleges of education. The methods of scientific investigation have been taught to him. He knows how to make a careful survey of his school system and community, locate his particular problems, and set to work in an intelligent way to solve them. People expect him to be an

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expert in school supervision, with the ability to train his teachers in service, to use standard tests to promote efficiency of instruction, and to classify children properly with the aid of intelligence tests. The principles underlying a modern course of study are familiar to him, and he is relied on to develop, with the assistance of his teachers, such courses as may be suitable for his own community. In the field of school administration the new superintendent must be an expert. Problems involving the school law of his State confront him every day. When additional school facilities are needed, it is to the superintendent that the board of education and the public look for a definite program. They expect him to know the standards which determine a good school building. If bonds are to be voted, it is the superintendent who must supply facts, arguments, and publicity. The preparation of the budget is turned over to him, and if taxes mount too high, he is the one held responsible. In short, the person who would manage successfully the public schools of a village or city must be a rare combination of student, teacher, lawyer, business man, architect, physician, and a dozen other individuals. By means of his expert knowledge, technical training, executive ability, and good common sense he secures the coöperation of the school children, the teachers, the board of education, the parents, and the community as a whole. No other person in his locality possesses such great power for

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good or ill. All this knowledge and power he uses, not for his own individual glorification, but that the boys and girls under his care may develop into the best men and women possible. To be the superintendent of schools in a modern American city is a real man's job.

General and technical preparation required

It must be evident that such a superintendent of schools needs careful and definite professional preparation. The young doctor formerly learned medicine by studying in the office of a successful practitioner, but to-day he is a graduate of a modern school of medicine. Likewise the young superintendent of schools, who hopes for the largest usefulness and the greatest success, needs the training which can be given only in a modern college of education. The successful school manager of the present day needs a full four-year college course. He should lay a broad foundation and develop permanent interests in literature, history, sociology, economics, music, art, science, and the welfare of humanity in general. His future work will be largely with people of affairs, and for his own peace of mind and self-preservation he must have this broad foundation. He will be expected to associate with leaders of business, of society, of civic affairs of every description. He will be asked to address Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, Women's Clubs, Civic Improvement Societies, church

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organizations, patriotic meetings, and educational gatherings. Opportunities to develop ability in public speaking should be accepted, as should also opportunities to develop skill in writing. The superintendent of schools will have much occasion to use both these arts in the practice of his profession. Without a broad general college education, supplemented by constant study even in the later years of his career, he cannot hope to measure up to the task that will confront him. In addition to this general education there will be need for technical training in educational theory, history, administration, and supervision. There is even now a demand that the superintendent of schools shall have at least one year of graduate study in the field of education at some good teachers' college.

Growth during apprenticeship

It must not be understood, however, that all this preparation will eliminate the need for a period of apprenticeship and practice. Such preparation as described will materially shorten the time which one must serve in a subordinate position, but no young superintendent should get the idea that all this splendid preparation will enable him to step right out of college into a large position. Few men can hope to avoid a period of five or six years of apprenticeship. Just as the young lawyer goes through a "period of starvation" in order to reach the larger rewards of his

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profession, so must a young school man pass through a series of positions as teacher and principal before he can hope to be in line for the larger positions. It is well to set a series of goals each to be definitely reached at a given time; a principalship at twenty-five, a small superintendency at thirty, a large superintendency at forty.

During the years of apprenticeship time must be found for the study and reading of professional literature. No matter how intensive are the demands of outside interests, the young man, who looks forward to an important position in education at forty, must not allow these other affairs, whatever they may be, to monopolize his time. The habit of reserving at least one hour each day for careful reading and study of professional literature is one which should be developed early. Some very successful superintendents have used the plan of making an exhaustive study in some one particular field of education for one year. During this year every effort is directed to master the field. Every address, so far as possible, is built around the central idea. All of the professional reading is concentrated on this one subject. Toward the end of the year the material accumulated is carefully organized, the main ideas developed are assembled, and the results are embodied in a written article of some length, which may be made to serve as the basis for an address on that topic for a number of years to come, provided, of course, one keeps the

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subject-matter up to date as he goes along into other fields. The next year a different field is studied in the same manner. This plan, if followed intelligently over a period of years, will give one a reserve fund upon which he will be able to draw in those years of middle life, when, in a large position, he will find it difficult because of the press of many duties to do regular and systematic reading, and to prepare new addresses for each occasion which arises. In the early years of his professional career a good working professional library should be accumulated. The books which go into this library should be selected with great care, and not one should find a place there which is not helpful. It is better to buy a book or two as needed and as there is time for immediate study, rather than to assemble a large number of books at one time, many of which will not be read, as newer material comes on the market. The practice of reading a few well-selected educational periodicals should be established early. Here again it is better to confine one's attention to two or three journals that give a definite broad treatment of educational topics than it is to scatter one's energies over too wide a field. In these early years school duties which broaden one's experience should be eagerly sought. Too many young men come into a school system and resent every task assigned them which seems to be somewhat out of the line of their regular duties. One does not grow in this way.

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The apprentice should avoid "going to seed" along his own line. He must read general magazines, biography, some fiction, and keep thoroughly informed on all subjects of local and national significance. Time should be found also for mingling with the business and professional men of the community, as by this means much information may be secured which will serve the superintendent in later life. The practice of avoiding "shop talk" in the presence of such men is to be strongly urged. The school man should early develop the art of getting the other man to talk about the activities and problems in which the other man is interested as well as about topics of general and current concern.

Personal qualities needed

Besides the careful preparation and the experience which has already been indicated, the superintendent of schools who makes the greatest success will need to have a number of personal qualities which will work to his advantage. Cubberley¹ summarizes them as follows:

The man who would be a superintendent of schools — the educational leader of a city — must be clean, both in person and mind; he must be temperate, both in speech and act; he must be honest and square, and able to look men straight in the eye; and he must be possessed of a high sense of personal honor. He needs a good time-sense

¹ *Public School Administration*, pp. 137-38.

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to enable him to save time and to transact business with dispatch, and a good sense of proportion to enable him to see things in their proper place and relationship. He must have the manners and courtesy of a gentleman, without being flabby or weak. He must not be affected by a desire to stand in the community limelight, or talk unnecessarily about his own accomplishments. He must avoid oracularism, the solemnity and dignity of an owl, and the not uncommon tendency to lay down the law. A good sense of humor will be found a means of saving grace here, and will many times keep him from taking himself too seriously. He must be alert, and able to get things done. This demands a good understanding of common human nature, some personal force, and some genuine political skill. He must know when and how to speak, but especially when and how to keep silent. He must know when and how to take the public into his confidence, and when not to tell what he desires or intends to do. He must know how to accept success without vain-glory, and defeat without being embittered. He must keep a level head, so as not to be carried away by some new community enthusiasm, by some clever political trick, or by the great discovery of some wild-eyed reformer. He must, by all means, avoid developing a "grouch" over the situation which confronts him, for a man with that attitude of mind never inspires confidence, and is always relatively ineffective.

Nature of the work

The work of a superintendent of schools is threefold in its nature. He is a supervisor, an executive, and an organizer and leader. As supervisor he is brought

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into close relations with teachers and pupils. He leads by reason of his superior knowledge and his ability to coördinate all the forces about him rather than by his authority. As executive, he is brought into close relations with the board of education. He must ever bear in mind that, without the support of his board, he can accomplish little. It becomes necessary, therefore, that he keep them well informed concerning the needs of the schools, that they understand the reasons which lie behind his recommendations. He must never expect to get everything he asks without some opposition, but he can and should avoid considering this opposition as personal. His policy must be always positive, never negative. He must take a firm stand for what he advocates, but never too firm a stand. After all, wisdom does not reside exclusively in the superintendent of schools, and sometimes it may be necessary for him to right-about-face and go in the other direction. In such cases, few though they may be, he is much more likely to hold the confidence and respect of his board if he has not been too positive and overzealous in supporting his own position. This does not mean that the superintendent is to be a weak-kneed, spineless creature. It does imply that he will have sense enough to distinguish between courage and aggressiveness on the one hand, and arbitrary usurpation of power on the other. The policy of "either accept my recommendation or my resignation," which is sometimes