



12-1-1974

A New Era: Community Education Goes Nation-wide

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Recommended Citation

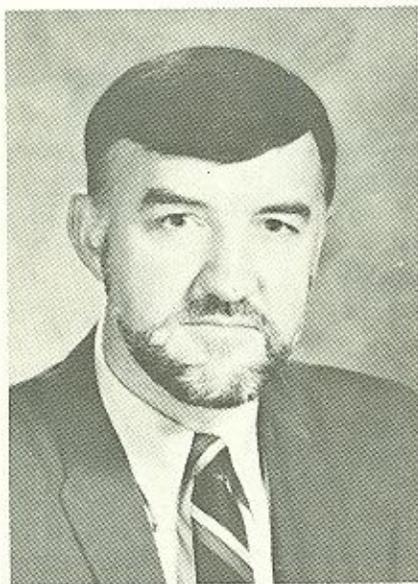
Watt, Leroy R. (1974) "A New Era: Community Education Goes Nation-wide," *Educational Considerations*: Vol. 2: No. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.2121>

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Federal funding is on the horizon for community education and this means more training centers and more staff to meet the demands of this exploding program.

a new era: community education goes nation-wide

by Leroy R. Watt



Leroy R. Watt is the Executive Secretary of the National Community School Education Association whose headquarters are in Flint, Mich. In addition to college teaching, his experience includes positions as school superintendent, high school principal, and high school teacher in Michigan, Ohio, and West Virginia. His Ed.D. is in educational administration and labor management from Akron University. His master's is from Wayne State in Detroit and his bachelor's is from Central Michigan.

On August 21, 1974, President Ford signed into law legislation permitting the Federal implementation of *community education* nation-wide.

President Ford's signature, which was preceded by a favorable vote in the U.S. Senate of 81 to 15 and a similar vote in the U.S. House of Representatives of 323 to 83, emphatically suggests that the Federal Government has endorsed the concept of "community education" and has taken a giant step towards making public education in the United States a life-long experience.

This action must provide a great deal of satisfaction to the family members of Charles Stewart Mott and the Board of Directors and the staff of the Mott Foundation. The Mott family and the Mott Foundation staff have labored for nearly forty years providing leadership and funds, believing always, that the educational experiment which began in Flint, Michigan, and became known as "community education" would succeed. Life-long education as practiced by the Community Education Concept model can have merit throughout the entire nation.

With such a small beginning in one city, support for community education development has grown to the point where today six states (Florida, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Utah and Washington) support the movement and fund community education programs on a shared basis. State legislation supporting community education is being considered in seven other states (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana and Massachusetts) and in the last few months the state boards of education and state superintendents of public instruction in Nevada and Hawaii have begun implementing community education programs in their states.

Today, across the United States, there are 500 school districts and more than 5,000 individual school communities involved in the implementation of the community education concept. The attendance areas of these 500 school districts encompass 20 million people.

It must be pointed out that this record of participation has been and is being accomplished without federal funds. If the recorded growth and development by private funding and local initiative is an indication of the interest and need for community education, federal funds could bring undreamed-of growth.

A major attraction surrounding community education, and obviously not overlooked by the U.S. Congressmen, is the

EDUCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS, Vol. 2, No. 2, Winter, 1974

return of **every dollar invested**. On the average, community schools' programs cost 2%-8% of the net cost of the regular K-12 program. Yet, with the community school program, the buildings and facilities are used approximately three times as many hours as before and by the entire community, thus providing needed services and programs to many, many times the total K-12 school age population.

Today across the nation, there are community education training centers operating without federal funding. At last count there were some 65 regional and cooperating centers for community education development sponsored by the Mott Foundation and individual colleges and universities. The new federal legislation provides additional funding for college and university training centers. This nation-wide training complex coupled with the pending federal training funds suggest a basic foundation of trained community school directors to support local school district development.

The present local school district development and the university training centers are backed by a national association known as the National Community Education Association located at 1017 Avon Street in Flint, Michigan. This association with members throughout the entire nation provides an information link with all segments of the community education movement. The association provides a

Community Education Journal, newsletters, national meetings and seminars, a yearly national convention, and an information clearinghouse and data bank as support activities.

In practice, community education is a way to provide, through the community school, educational, recreational, cultural, social services, and other activities requested by residents to meet needs identified by themselves.

The community education movement has the basic ingredient of community members participating in the process of meeting personal and community needs. Such experiences suggest that individuals want and will help develop a "new sense of community." The community education concept with its experience and new national emphasis is one way that a sense of community with renewed individual effort can provide better use of human and physical resources.

Community educators are a dedicated and energetic bunch—who accept the NEW ERA with some trepidation fearing that communities and school districts may jump on a new bandwagon without sufficient preparation or without a qualified community educator to guide the local development. Be that as it may—if enthusiasm, energy, dedication and hard work are ingredients for success—the development of community education nation-wide is assured.

"Logical systems tend to be a bit simple. A substantial proportion of bureaucratic rule-making, for example, consists of efforts to prevent a single unfortunate event from recurring by the crude device of eliminating some category to which it belongs. A public scandal or threatened lawsuit will almost guarantee the promulgation of new regulations (each of which erodes the vitality of the organization) to ensure against an event whose probability of recurring is infinitesimal. If a scandal occurs in a particular room, that room will be declared off limits henceforward; if it occurs after hours, doors will be locked and time checks instituted. If an embezzler uses green ink, green ink will be banned. Security is sedulously pursued by the futile device of using bigger and bigger conceptual nets to catch smaller and smaller particularized fish."

Philip Slater, **Earthwalk**
Anchor Press-Doubleday, Garden City,
New York, 1974, p. 54.