



New Jersey Council of Education

THE COUNCIL EMERGES: ISSUES AND REPORTS

With its small size, its original *raison d'être*, and the geographically distributed influence of its members, the Council has proved itself to be an effective force in the rapidly changing face of New Jersey education. In its early years, its impact tended to be corporate in nature, through the publicized results of its resolutions, its studies and reports, and its printed documents. As its membership grew, and as other groups effectively organized themselves to accept a wider array of educational functions, the Council increasingly became an information enlightening agency for its carefully selected membership. The expectation being that the members themselves, adequately furnished with facts and dates, would become the stimuli of both change and stability, with evolutionary progress and a continuous nature the desired goal.

The Council has, throughout its history, after wide discussion designed to guide various educational issues, adopted many resolutions. In the 1890's, these resolutions covered such diverse matters as teacher certification, the method of selecting school board members, the establishment of additional Normal Schools, and the encouragement of County Teachers' Institutes.

At its December 1892 meeting, the Council squarely urged the adoption of a "school consolidation" plan. In that era, every school was a separate "district" with its own school board. The Council advocated a "Township" system, with all the schools within a single municipality under a single board control. The Council argued that this would favorably affect educating children, greater economy, and greater uniformity of teacher salaries and teacher quality.

At the turn of the century the Council found itself urging the abandonment of County Boards of Examiners, the appointment of a State Supervisor of High Schools, the "junior high school" concept as a substitute for the "8-4" type of organization, the acceptance of the morning session as a full-day's attendance on rainy days, and in 1907, a minimum salary of \$500 for teachers.

In 1908, a tenure of office bill was vigorously endorsed; secret fraternities and sororities were condemned in 1909; a contemplated law requiring an examination for public high-school admission was called "wrong" in 1913; and, in 1914, the Council demanded that state and county farms be designed to reduce the time needed by teachers and others "to do such work."

In 1916, with America's involvement in World War I fast approaching, the Council strongly opposed military instruction in the public schools, stating that it was neither democratic nor a suitable instructional subject. Not to be completely negative, the Council endorsed improved physical education programs as a means of advancing physical fitness in students.

In more recent years, reports, addresses, and discussions of timely topics seem to have replaced the passage of resolutions - although in the depression years of the 1930's strong stands were taken on the financing of public education. The so-called "Mort Plan" was vigorously but futilely supported; with equal vigor the Council opposed effort to limit "capital expenditures" for 1935-36 and thereafter to 75 per cent of the sum which school boards had budgeted in 1930-31.

The reports and addresses presented at Council meetings make interesting reading and could constitute the materials for a notable course in New Jersey school history. For many years it was mandatory to have all presentations “reduced to writing” and carefully preserved by the several secretaries.

In fact, from 1888 to 1894 all reports had to be printed, and distributed as a “post-meeting service” to members. In 1895, the practice was inaugurated of printing all documents prior to the meeting, so that the texts could be used as later bases for discussion. A subsequent practice, adopted in 1903, was to distribute outlines of reports, prior to the meeting date, with authority left to members whether to print the full substance after presentations had been made. In 1937, another procedure was inaugurated: addresses and reports were duplicated prior to the meeting and distributed at the meeting to help members to obtain precise understandings.

At various times, the Council has sold its publications to help defray their cost. Sometimes individuals underwrote the costs, as did ex-Council President J.M. Green with a publication called “A Suggestive Course of Study for Primary, Grammar, and High School Grades.” It sold for thirty cents per copy and bore the imprimatur of the Council.

Never did the price of Council publications exceed fifty cents. The prices varied greatly. The 1940 report on “Research in Grammar” sold for fifty cents, while the same year the monograph “What to Read This Summer” went for five cents.

The publications largely reflected the proceedings of the meetings. The titles indicate the breadth and depth of the interests of these schoolmen. Periodically, from the earliest days, standards of preparation for teachers and their licensing appeared on the agenda. Frequently discussion revolved around courses of study at all levels, including such “frills” as manual training and vocational training.

1930 seemed to be a transition year, perhaps because of the Depression. After that date, often members found themselves discussing the financing and organization of schools, rather than the content of courses. How much and what kind of state aid should be granted? How much and what kinds of taxes should be levied? In October 1931, the establishment of regional high schools became a heated subject of controversy, with one speaker foreseeing three great evils of regionalization: promiscuous social contact; prevalence of rowdyism, especially on long bus rides; and an abridged school day.

If one looks at the kinds of topics discussed and examined in recent years as representative, one sees clearly that many issues seem permanently to remain with us. Typically, they appear in new clothing and with different controversial accessories. Other issues, of course, are new, born perhaps out of such factors as rising birth rates, war-time measures, court decisions, affluence, new life-styles, rising expectations, higher costs, pluralistic pressures, and group and organizational power struggles.

As of this point in time, there is no expectation that the number of educational concerns and crises in New Jersey and in the nation will diminish. The New Jersey Council of Education, with all of its strength, stamina, experience, and dedication, is perhaps needed today more than ever before, for attacks more virulent than ever previously encountered are now buffeting heavily the very foundations of public education.