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Education's big problem: Apathy

The apathy of parents is the greatest problem affecting teachers' instruction, according to a National Education Association (NEA) survey. Teachers indicated in the survey their major concern regarding school discipline is "too little support from parents." And they suggested "working for more community and parental support for teachers" as a high priority for education associations. Apathy isn't confined to parents; indifference-related problems listed in the survey.

Eleven parents have apparently observed their own apathy. The annual Gallup Poll of the public's attitude toward public schools, released in September, listed as the main cause for declining test scores "less parent attention, concern and supervision of the child."

Parents, themselves, the poll said, are readily accepting the blame and are not trying to place the burden on the schools, as one might expect them to do. The reason most often mentioned next in the Gallup survey paralleled the NEA findings: Lack of student motivation was cited by Gallup. Too much television and the pervasive society were also mentioned. More than three-fourths of the Gallup respondents thought it would be good for schools to offer courses for parents to help them help their children in school.

IN THE NEA survey the top 10 problems selected by teacher also include in-

order of importance: noninstructional duties for teachers; too many students; physical facilities; ineffective education; financial support of education; diagnosing learning problems; disruptions by students; and maintaining the placement of handicapped children in regular classes.

Three of the problems—undifferentiated students, non-instructional duties, and too many students—have been major ones since 1972 and appear to have worsened, according to the NEA.

Elementary teachers do not see the total group of problems as hindering their teaching quite as much as junior high and high school teachers do. This is especially true of the top seven problems, except for non-instructional duties.

Junior high teachers consider too many students, mainstreaming, and disruption of students as more serious problems than do the other teachers. Senior high teachers are more troubled about chronic student absence. Little support from administrators, evaluation of teaching, and student use of drugs than are the elementary and junior high teachers.

DETAILED STUDY was made of four of the problems—class size, mainstreaming, discipline, and ineffective education. Among the findings:

- Class size: "Just too many students in what they are teaching was the major concern of all respondents, but especially for those with less than 10 years of teaching experience." Heterogeneity of achievement levels and "too many students with emotional problems and learning disabilities" were also big concerns.
- Mainstreaming: About 62 per cent of

the respondents reported handicapped children were being moved from segregated special education classrooms to regular classrooms in their school systems for some or all of their instruction. Those who said it was happening felt "modifications not being made in size of classes" and "lack of preparation of regular classroom teachers to handle all kinds of handicapped children" were the biggest problems. There was also considerable concern about "appropriate materials not being provided for teachers and the handicapped children."

• Discipline: Only a few students cause most discipline problems. Little support is provided by administrators. Parents appear to provide even less support. "A good cause may well be that values of schools and students are in conflict."

• Ineffective education: More than 80 per cent of the respondents said their school system provided ineffective education programs for its teachers. The seven problems related to ineffective education were all rated as having an adverse effect on the programs. Ineffective appears to be too general to have any value for the job teachers are expected to do, probably because teachers do not participate in the planning and, consequently, the programs focus on the system's needs rather than the teachers' needs.

DESPITE THE PROBLEMS teachers encounter in the classrooms, they would like all their students to have the ability to think and evaluate and they want the curriculum to master fundamental skills. Other goals selected as important by a majority

of teachers are self-discipline and respect for human values.

The report notes that "there are some bright spots: student use of drugs, teaching assignments, housing and the lack of freedom to teach are not affecting teachers on any broad scale." However, it is obvious that some teachers do face these problems and when they do the effect can be devastating," the report said.

One way to alleviate problems faced by teachers, the report suggests, is to assure "teacher representation in instructional decision-making," which often has been denied exclusively by principals, superintendents, and school boards.

The 1974 survey covered a random sample of 1,500 NEA members across the nation. It was conducted and analyzed by the research and the instruction and professional development units of the NEA.

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The 1974 budget, recently approved by the Oakland County Road Commission, includes \$2.6 million for operating expenses and \$10 million for road improvements.

With the aid of part of the annual budget, we are for the first time on schedule with recommendations by Citizens Research Council of Michigan, said John Goss, Jr., vice-chairman of the board of road commissioners. We received staff proposals for the 1974 budget and road improvement program at October and held public hearings on it in the same month. Prior to 1974 the road commission didn't have an operating budget, relying instead on private cash flow projections. Getting our budgeting on the recommended timetable is a positive step toward more efficient management.

Goss said there were no significant questions or suggestions about the budget at a public hearing Oct. 16. There were, however, suggestions from residents and local government units for including additional road improvement projects in construction programmed for next year.

The delay since the Oct. 26 hearing until our board approved the budget and road improvement program was to give the road commission staff time to appraise each of the 11 road improvement suggestions and to make recommendations. Goss said.

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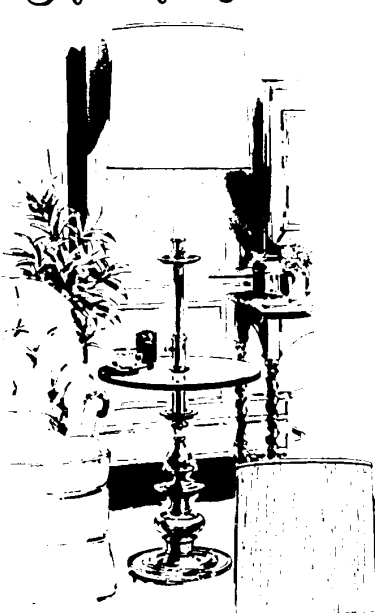


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