

TYPES OF NEWSPAPER PUBLICITY USED BY AMERICAN CITY SCHOOLS

THE majority of city superintendents are making conscious efforts to keep their public informed concerning school developments and activities. Fifteen or twenty years ago it was the exceptional superintendent who considered publicity one of his duties.

The newspaper world has also recognized the possibilities of school news. Fred Charles,¹ a newspaper man, says:

Fifteen years ago the schools were not "covered," not only because the papers saw no news in anything so commonplace as going to school, but also because the school people never went to the trouble of pointing out to the newspaper folk that there really was news in the classroom. Today there is no city of any consequence so far as my knowledge goes in which school affairs are not recognized as news possibilities, but the school headquarters is today the part of some reporter's regular "beat" just as much as the police station and the City Hall.

In the inquiry sent out to the superintendents some time ago,² the question was asked, "What types of publicity do you use?" From the returns it is evident that the newspaper is the largest and best source of publicity for city schools. In the opinions of superintendents the value of newspaper publicity, and the co-operation received from newspapers is indicated by the following quotations from superintendents' letters.

Minnesota.—The local papers co-operate with us in every way, and only once in the seven years I have been here has any paper failed to support a proposition that I was pushing.

New Jersey.—Scarcely a day passes when our local paper does not have something about the schools. We keep in close touch with them, and they are very generous in giving us all the opportunity we desire.

Iowa.—Most of our publicity is gained through local newspapers. They are willing and anxious to print anything about the schools except extended reports.

Missouri.—The columns of local papers are

used as fully as possible in the program of public information concerning school matters.

Iowa.—Our publicity consists largely of articles in the daily newspapers concerning school activities. Reporters call at the superintendent's office daily for this information.

Texas.—The best publicity which the schools obtain is through the medium of the local daily papers. We not only try to see that the news items appear properly written in the papers, but also prepare stories and feature articles as frequently as they seem acceptable.

New York.—We depend almost entirely upon newspaper publicity. A reporter comes to the office practically every day and takes down what facts and information we have to give.

Maine.—We are great believers in school publicity and have splendid co-operation of our daily and Sunday papers. Every day reporters from both papers come to the office of the superintendent of schools and also interview the principals of the junior and senior high schools. Editorials appear from time to time often on subjects suggested by the superintendent. The Sunday paper gives splendid feature articles which are profusely illustrated. Occasionally two entire pages are devoted to the schools. At the beginning of the year the superintendent is asked to give a list of subjects which he would like to have featured in the Sunday papers during the school year.

Illinois.—Monthly summaries of the superintendent's report is published in the newspapers. If anything new is to be inaugurated in the schools, the public is prepared for it by appropriate articles in the daily papers. These articles are generally written by the superintendent.

New Jersey.—Our newspapers publish special articles by the superintendent, principals, and supervisors covering various phases of the school work. Interesting items of work accomplished, projects, etc., taken from the reports of supervisors and principals are prepared in a form acceptable to the press. These include results of state efficiency tests, college-entrance examinations, and local data. Stories and poems written by children of the lower grades are published occasionally.

Connecticut.—We depend almost entirely upon newspaper publicity. The newspapers reprint a large number of articles from our staff paper which does not reach the general public.

California.—We keep in touch with the public through the generous space allotted to us by our three city papers. The most important school news is transmitted to these papers through the English department.

Utah.—Most of our publicity is done through newspapers in interviews and articles prepared by the superintendent of schools. The newspapers always give very full publicity on courses of study, changes of policy, etc., and are fair in their handling of subject-matter.

Oregon.—We make use of the local daily papers and keep in close touch with reporters.

Kentucky.—Our local papers are liberal in giving notices of all kinds of school events, and there is scarcely a day but both papers have something in them concerning the schools.

Indiana.—Practically every day reporters from

¹Charles, Fred. "The Newspaper and the Schools," *Journal of the National Education Association*, 13:83-84, March, 1924.

²Third report on publicity data received from city superintendents throughout the country.

the two papers call at our office and get news concerning the schools. They are glad to publish any type of news that we feel to be of value.

Alabama.—Newspaper items are given to each of our three daily papers. Special articles on different subjects are prepared either by some school authority or by the school-news reporter.

Pennsylvania.—Both city newspapers send their reporters daily to my office and to other members of the school organization. They use a large amount of material which we furnish and generally put it into the published form themselves. We receive generous space from the news columns and also from editorials. Our special reports and addresses are either printed in full or in abstract form.

Wisconsin.—We carry a regular campaign of education through the local press. The news-gatherers are eager to publish things about the schools and to give them almost daily items of interest relative to physical equipment, courses of study, special exercises, personnel of teachers, school costs, etc.

Massachusetts.—Reporters from the local papers and the nearby metropolitan dailies call every day at the superintendent's office for news items. Proceedings of the school committee are always written up in full by the local papers.

Michigan.—We make use of the city daily which publishes all news and write-ups sent it. Probably the newspaper is our best publicity medium. A reporter calls at least once a week, and *we are careful to have good publicity materials ready for him.*

Nebraska.—Most of our publicity from time to time has been obtained through the daily newspapers. Newspapers have been very generous in giving full publicity to everything we have to offer them.

Tennessee.—Our daily newspapers carry considerable publicity as often as three or four times a week. Our Sunday papers generally contain feature stories concerning schools. Each month the report of the superintendent is printed with all that is included in the board of education meetings.

North Dakota.—In the past year the newspapers of our city have published from time to time material which is issued by the Better School League and sent to them through the superintendent's office.

The statements of the superintendents from a large number of states as indicated by the preceding letters show that newspaper publicity is a vital factor throughout the country and that the newspapers are willing and anxious to co-operate with the school authorities in bringing the schools to the attention of the public.

Some of the kinds of materials which appear in the newspapers have been indicated in the foregoing letters. The commonest types of school news are: (1) general and

personal news, (2) feature stories, (3) reports, and (4) editorials. In some papers we find reproductions of photographs showing various school activities. Not a few cartoons are published which tell in a striking way some specific thing about the schools or the teaching staff. It is interesting to remark that few cartoons are published today which depict the school teacher in an undesirable light. This could not have been said five years ago.

There are three types of newspaper publicity which deserve special mention: (1) school pages, (2) columns, and (3) educational supplements or special school editions.

School Pages

One of the most recent innovations in school publicity is the school page, which appears daily, weekly, or at irregular intervals in several newspapers throughout the country. Some suggestions concerning school pages may be obtained from the following quotations from letters written by city superintendents:

Ottumwa, Iowa.—At intervals of two or three years we have taken a page in the local daily papers to be edited by one of the schools, going through the list in turn.

Pine Bluff, Arkansas.—The best newspaper publicity which we are using is the school page; one is published on Saturday afternoon and the other on Sunday morning.

Ottawa, Illinois.—This year one of the local papers has asked each school to fill one side of the paper with school news.

Owensboro, Kentucky.—Our local paper publishes each Sunday what they call "The School Inquirer." It includes news from the public schools.

Erie, Pennsylvania.—One of our daily papers through the principals of our schools is conducting a full-page daily in the interests of schools and school children. The items about school activities are written by the pupils. We find that a great many people read these articles and learn more about the activities in the various buildings than could be found in any other way.

New York City.—Several of the newspapers daily give a page to school news gathered in the main by reporters who make daily visits to the administrative offices of the board of education and to the schools.

Rye, New York.—We have an entire page in our local weekly newspaper known as the "School Page," edited and managed by a staff of students.

To meet local needs, I believe the school page is satisfactory and adequate.

Mason City, Iowa.—A reporter writes up features of the school for the page called "The City Welfare Number." This usually appears on Saturday. The articles are written from the standpoint of a news writer and not from that of the school administrator. Much of it is rather inaccurate, but it serves to keep the schools before the public.

Newton, Massachusetts.—Our weekly paper carries a page of school news each week giving write-ups to different occasions of importance which are occurring in the different schools.

Some of the other cities in which the newspapers publish a school page are: Oconto Falls, Wisconsin; Columbus, Ohio; Racine, Wisconsin; Bloomington, Illinois; and Cleveland, Ohio.

The author's opinion is that the school page stands foremost in importance because of its possibilities of bringing the schools to the attention of the public from day to day or from week to week. This is particularly true if the news contained on the school page is of a diversified nature. In many cases it also offers a splendid outlet for the work of English and journalism classes in the junior and senior high school.

The possibilities of a school page are shown by an issue of the *Columbus Dispatch*. The variety of contents is indicated by the following:

1. One important item is a column of general news sent out by a news syndicate containing general education news. The heading of this column is "What the World is Doing to Advance Learning."
2. Three cartoons drawn by pupils give the page variety and tend to attract attention.
3. Two feature stories illustrated by four photographs appear on the upper part of the page. One of these stories concerns two students who were born in Russia and before coming to Columbus had lived in Palestine and Egypt. The other story deals with stage properties made by junior high school pupils. With this story appear illustrations of the unique stage settings and photographs of the principals in the play.
4. A description of part-time courses for next year is given.
5. A section is devoted to the news of the Boy Scouts.
6. Almost a column is devoted to commencement announcements and graduates' names.
7. An announcement is made of the new metal shops of the junior high school to be opened at the beginning of the new term.
8. A radio address given by a university professor is reproduced.

9. A description of art work and materials written by the art supervisor is included.

10. The other items on the page pertain to student activities, student government, plays to be given, and athletic news.

On such a page it is possible to place before the public each week the present and future needs of the school system, student activities, world news pertaining to education, and local news from the various schools. In other words, it is entirely possible to keep the public informed in respect to their schools by means of a well-balanced school page.

School News Column

A large number of schools obtain publicity through special columns or departments in daily or weekly newspapers. The departments appear under many captions, a few of which are: "What the School Children Are Doing," "High School News," "Doings in the City Schools," and "School Notes." In common practice these columns are entirely devoted to pupil activities; most of them could be improved by items of general school news.

Another type of department carried by a limited number of papers deals with specific phases of school work. For example, Miss Ida Odell Rudy, of the Dayton public schools, conducts a column in the newspaper entitled "Snap-Shots of a Modern Primary School." By means of this column, parents are able to get some idea of what is done in the primary grades. Some of the topics which have appeared are: "Early Impressions," "Arithmetic Experiences in Primary Grades," "Do Children Play Too Much in School Today?" and "Ways to Travel by Land and Sea."

A limited number of quotations from superintendents' letters are given to show the value and use of the columns:

Missouri.—We have kept a careful file of our school notes. The information that it gives us on how things were done five or ten years ago is helpful.

Idaho.—In each Sunday issue of the daily paper we have from one and a half to three columns for school notes. These notes are of general school happenings throughout the whole system and are such as we think might be of interest to the pub-

lic. There are also write-ups for special occasions.

New Jersey.—Students have two columns a week in the local papers for reporting high school and grammar school activities, class events, etc.

California.—One daily paper runs a special column for the best productions of our high school English Department. The teachers select from the best materials those which will be of greatest interest to the reading public.

Massachusetts.—One of our daily newspapers contains a column or more of school notes. The notes are sent from each school to the superintendent's office on Friday where corrections and additions are made. They are then sent to the high school where they are typed and finally delivered to the newspaper office. Certain pupils have definite responsibilities for seeing that this work is done; we feel that this form of publicity is satisfactory.

Educational Supplements

During Education Week it has become a custom in many cities for the newspapers to publish an educational supplement or a special issue of the paper. These supplements generally contain the program of the week's educational activities and a large amount of pictorial and descriptive materials dealing with the history and accomplishments of the local school system. At other times during the year such as commencement and the beginning of school in February, special sections of the paper are devoted to school activities.

On the occasion of the dedication of a new school building, papers frequently publish a supplement dealing with the program of the schools and showing the details concerning the improvement.

An analysis of a special issue of the *Granville Times* (Ohio) will illustrate what materials might well be used when a new building is to be dedicated. Some of the more important and interesting items in this special issue are:

1. Exterior and interior views of the new building including brief description.
2. Interesting news items such as, A Large Collection of Valuable Books Given to the Library, Envious Record Made in Athletics, School Patrons Celebrate Red-Letter Day as New Building Is Officially Dedicated, Period of Progress Open for Schools, Parent-Teacher Association Is a Vital School Aid, A Reminiscence of an Alumna.

3. Photographs of prominent teachers.

4. An editorial entitled "Our Children."

5. A number of articles dealing with the curricula as: Music An Important Training Feature in Public Schools, History Vitalized in High School, A Complete Science Department Is An Aid, Commercial Course Teaches Business Methods to Pupils, Good Home-Keepers Trained at School, and Handwork Teaches Occupations and Art to Pupils of the High School.

Publicity Committees

A limited number of cities have an individual whose special work is to furnish news to the papers. In the majority of cities the burden of collecting the news is placed upon the newspapers themselves.

Publicity committees whose purpose it is to collect and distribute news to the press are being appointed in some cities. The number of such committees is increasing from year to year. An example of such a committee is the one appointed by the Chicago Principals' Club.

Superintendent William McAndrew in a report to his board of education concerning the work of this committee said:

By well-devised publicity interpreting the schools adequately and truthfully without exaggeration or distortion, to the community progress, the effective co-operation of many parents of school children and other interested citizens should be won. Results of such co-operation should be lastingly beneficial to all the city's legitimate interests and should afford inspiration to all its constructive forces Your principals are working out results which deserve your commendation.

Conclusion

To any student of educational trends, it is evident that there is a conscious effort on the part of the schools to keep their public informed and that the press is one of the important means of keeping the schools before its clientéle. From the large amount of school news appearing in American newspapers and from direct information received through school administrators and editors of newspapers, we are justified in concluding that there is a hearty co-operation between the schools and the press.—P. R. STEVENSON, in the *Educational Research Bulletin*.