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EDUCATION IN A RURAL MINNESOTA HIGH SCHOOL

by

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Hayfield, Minnesota

Scholarship, spirit, and service are passwords in public education, whether the school be small or large, rural or urban. Snap courses are not a general part of our high schools, and especially not a part of our rural Minnesota schools. We, in rural areas, have kept to the middle-of-the-road that has produced the outstanding students of the arts, and the independent, and I do mean independent, pupils of the atomic age. Our schools have accepted change through a gradual process of need, brought about by community expectations. The communities have expected and accepted the changes. The changes have been progressive, but not extreme, and have not been intended to transform a community over-night. Nor have the changes been intended to pull out all stops, let pupils run the school, pick their courses of study altogether, sleep during the middle of the day, or tap-dance their way to the buses that transport them home. Rather, these changes and adjustments have helped our schools treat students like undeveloped individuals, with experiences of life yet short. Pupils are still pupils, and should be treated as such. They should be told what to do, what courses to take and when to take them.

Progress is a relative term. In many respects the rural high schools have installed a progressive education. Progressive from the standpoint of service—service to man where service matters,

and where the end products are justifiable through a proper understanding of the means.

Whom do we serve and why? What are the methods we use in a rural area high school? And what are the means?

The answer to the first question, quite simply, is the student. For that reason alone there stands a school building in our town, and to that purpose, the student and his quest for knowledge, shall we continue to operate. Age is no part of the definition of a student, and we operate for students of all ages.

Why do we serve? Need!!

We don't pretend to be able to give a complete course of vocational subjects. We don't have all the psychiatric and other services in counseling and health, but there are a great many services we do provide. We are quite proud of these services. Our small size limits the health services we could provide if we were large, but on the other hand, our size and location make some services unnecessary.

Our courses in English and social studies follow the recommendations of the State Department of Education, and are required in grades 7-12. We offer courses in science and mathematics in all high school grades, and require both through the tenth grade. Mathematics, basic science and biology are prerequisites to other Senior High School

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courses. Because they are general basic information they are required of our 420 students.

Our school recognizes a major need of our rural community by employing two agriculture instructors, using one primarily for high school students, and the other for adults. A goodly number of our boys continue on the farm or in other agricultural pursuits and need proper preliminary training. We give that training, and with it goes our blessing. These boys like farming, and will do well in agriculture. Why should we try to teach or cram them with something like solid geometry or atomic physics?

Our commercial department provides the last formal training many of our graduating girls will get. They get four years of training in the commercial field, and many acquire excellent jobs in business and industry when they graduate. We hope their educational needs are quite well supplied.

Industrial arts, home economics, speech, physical education, and music (general music, band, chorus) are all a part of the curriculum. All go to develop the individual, and all rate credits toward graduation. We feel that all subjects are valuable, or they wouldn't be in the curriculum, so we give credit. America not only needs scientists, but farmers, musicians, teachers and most of all it needs well-rounded individuals with needs satisfied.

Counseling programs along with a thorough study of various vocations is a necessary part of a high school program. Our school, with no counselor as such, uses the high school principal and the classroom teachers to carry the program through. A concentrated study of vocations is undertaken during the ninth grade, where a one-month unit is coordinated with the class in civics. Another concentration of study is placed in the early part of the senior year. Throughout the high school career, various interest tests and tests of achievement, along with careful counseling, help the individual student to find himself, and help the teachers to line up a program of studies for the high school years. Greatest emphasis is placed where student interest and curiosity lies, along with the philosophy that an intense interest in an area of work is equally as important as aptitude. Students respond well to this philosophy and consequently take a great amount of interest in the vocations study program.

Adequate record systems, health and sport programs, dramatics, student councils and a variety of activities are all integral parts of a complete high school. Each is valuable in its place and each adds to the individual student's development.

Adult programs have come to mean a great deal in many rural schools. Along with the established programs in agriculture, classes in a variety of interest fields have been added to care for the adult needs. Schools feel that maximum use of existing facilities is also important. We have added to our adult program courses in industrial arts, home economics and commercial subjects. The response has been gratifying, and future plans include courses of instruction in other areas as community interest increases.

No school, small or large, rural or urban, elementary, high school or college, is adequate without good teachers.

The teacher is the most important specific in a school system, and determines whether a school is good, bad, or indifferent. Changing curricula and adding buildings make little difference unless teachers are elevated to a position of higher social standing and respect. Even though our school is relatively small and must compete with larger communities for the services of good teachers, our policy remains the same.

It is important to keep good teachers and pay what their education and position deserve. A good salary schedule along with proper tenure and sick leave benefits have established a degree of stability, and the Board of Education is alert for more ideas for stability and less turnover. Teachers are looked upon as leaders in the community. They are expected to take part in community activities, be a part of the community by word and deed, and are invited to own homes and make the community their permanent residence.

Proper physical facilities, although not as basic as good teachers, are nevertheless necessary as a means to education and service in rural communities. Our school, after consolidation of 30 districts, voted bonds of \$950,000 to finance the building of a new junior-senior high school. The school is quite adequate for our community without being "frilly." It was built in cooperation with various committees of teachers, lay people and the architect, and is the building we "need." It is not an architect's dream or designer's blueprints, but from footings to flight-deck was conceived by a variety of persons in a variety of positions for a variety of situations. The twenty-five acre site has five acres of agricultural research plots, ample athletic fields and proper parking facilities.

Our students are required to take five subjects each year, and twenty credits are required for graduation. A broad program of studies lends itself to broad interests on the part of the students.

Students are required to file a program of work that includes and plans for a tentative high school course of study and vocational interests. The programs are revised each year.

Future plans to serve the students and the community include library service for community use. Our new library will have a separate entrance for use by the public. Agriculture shop classes for high school students and adults, a language department for high school students and art classes for members of the junior high school are among the additional changes to be made. A maximum class size of 25 will be the goal.

Students are required to meet quite rigid standards of scholarship, both in the academic and the so-called vocational courses. The old-fashioned marking system is still employed, and "75" is still needed for passing. We feel that the difference between "S" and "U" is too great for differentiation, and that the old marking system is as good an indication of a student's ability as any. The same diplomas are given to all graduates, but the transcript of grades on file in the office shows what differences exist between students. Future plans call for parent-teacher conferences throughout the high school as we now have in agriculture and the elementary school. In the past, large classes have made this almost impossible, but the new building and smaller classes will help solve this problem. Teachers and parents must work together if the students are to receive maximum benefit.

Stiff eligibility requirements are part and parcel of the sports and certain music programs. Participants are required to file eligibility slips each week, and in addition must have passing grades of 75 or higher each nine-week period in all subjects.

Attitudes of students, teachers and parents are hard to measure, yet easy

to distinguish. In what spirit Johnny trots off to school each morning will determine what kind of a day he and his teacher will have. His parents' attitudes toward teachers, toward regular attendance, toward support of school activities and policies, and toward the importance of high school and college education determine in large measure the educational program of the community. The spirit with which new techniques, new courses and changes are accepted is important. The attitudes of parents on these phases of education are reflected in the student's attitude.

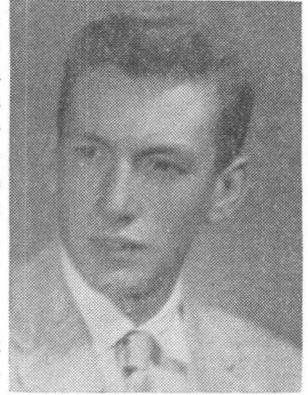
Our community is developing a more positive attitude toward public education. Parent-teacher meetings are growing in size, the importance of college training is being recognized, and attendance at school is at a maximal figure. No one can ask more of a community than support such as our school is presently enjoying.

The attitudes of students, though greatly influenced by parents, are dependent upon teacher attitudes also. Happy, healthy faculty members are a veritable boon to society. Emotionally incompetent teachers create roadblocks to student progress. The difference between emotionally adjusted youth and the maladjusted is often in the hands of the teacher. Good school spirit, positive attitude toward education, good manners, dress and all-round general feeling is in the hands of the teacher once a child gets to school.

Our teacher turnover in high school last year was two out of twenty. We have a good staff, and we intend to keep it. With a staff of good, veteran teachers, a new high school building close at hand, an education-minded community and a group of seven understanding and active school board members, there is only one place to go—up, out, ahead.

FFA FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP WINNER

James Burton Moe of Hayfield, Minnesota, is the first recipient of the Minnesota FFA Foundation Scholarships in Agricultural Education. James was selected from among a large number of applicants on the basis of his scholarship, leadership potential, character, and interest in Agricultural Education. He will receive \$250 a year during the four years of his college career. The scholarship is subject to review at the end of each year. It is renewed if progress is satisfactory.



James Moe is 18 years old, 6'3" tall, and weighs 150 lbs. He is a two year letter-man in track and basketball and an honor student in his class. James was President of the Junior Class of Hayfield High School and has served as Sentinel, Secretary, and President of the Hayfield FFA Chapter. His work experience program in farming consists of Duroc Jersey hogs and Holstein cows. He was a member of the Hayfield General Livestock judging team in 1956-57 and a member of the Soils team in 1957-58. James has also been active in his church.

James is the youngest of three sons of Mr. James Moe, Sr., who operates a farm in the Hayfield community. One son works in Northfield, Minnesota, the second farms with Mr. Moe.

The VISITOR extends its congratulations to James Moe and welcomes him to the University of Minnesota as he prepares for a career in Agricultural Education.