A school building program for cities

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A School Building Program For Cities

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Teachers College, Columbia University
Contributions to Education, No. 96

Published by
Teachers College, Columbia University
New York City
1918
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to acknowledge here his indebtedness to the individuals who have assisted in making possible the completion of this study. He wishes to acknowledge with especial gratitude his indebtedness to Dr. George D. Strayer, professor of educational administration in Teachers College. Dr. Strayer's advice, cooperation, and encouragement have been of incalculable value through every stage of the study.

N. L. E.
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INTRODUCTION

That the city planning movement in this country is of comparative recency may be judged from the available literature on this subject. Of six hundred titles relating to city planning and allied subjects appearing in a list compiled in 1913 by the New York Public Library, the large majority were first issued within the present century. Of these six hundred titles, none concerns itself completely or in large part with the problems connected with the outlining of school building programs.

A broader concept of what a city should be has gradually been dawning on the American people. A city is now conceived as a corporation working for the common good in a businesslike way. This implies adapting for city development the methods employed by the successful commercial and industrial corporations of the country. Part of the program followed by such organizations has been the study of the future needs of the people they expect to serve, as well as an attempt to discover the increase in growth of population in the communities in which they are doing business. The business corporation serving a widely scattered public which does not build in terms of the future development of the territory which it serves soon fails to make adequate dividend returns to its stockholders.

The development of the school systems of the majority of American cities has suffered much from a lack of continuity in plan or program. Only recently has the practice been pursued of placing the control and responsibility of management of school systems in the hands of professionally trained executives. Where the responsibility for the progress of school systems or the building of a school plant has been vested in lay boards of education, whose interest in educational matters has been secondary and temporary, one may not expect to find school plants which are wisely planned, adequately housed, and economically maintained. The pernicious policy of appointing superintendents of schools for a term of one year or two years that still prevails in many cities destroys all possibility of a consecutive building program. Such a program involves the
adoption of standards, absolute and comparative measurement, and the recognition of future as well as present needs. Complete analyses of school plants in various cities have demonstrated the universal need for periodic inventories or surveys.

A part of the findings reported in this work is the result of the writer’s personal participation in six extensive school building surveys. The communities surveyed varied from the small New York suburban community of Great Neck, Long Island, to St. Paul, a city of 250,000 people. Omaha, Neb., Paterson, N. J., Framingham, Mass., and Pelham, N. Y., were also included in the list. These surveys have been drawn upon for much of the illustrative material.

The development of a school building program involves three distinct problems in measurement: First, the measurement of population, second, the measurement of the school plant, and third, the measurement of the ability of a community to pay for needed extensions to its school plant.

Under the Measurement of Population have been treated such essentials as the growth in American cities, the relationship between adult and school population, the methods of measuring population growth, and some of the methods that may be employed in measuring school population. With the latter is coupled the consideration of elements essential in the locating of school buildings.

Under the Measurement of the School Plant some of the possibilities of measurement of a school plant with and without the aid of a building score card are presented.

Part III has been devoted to the measurement of the ability of a community to pay for school plant extensions. Financial tabulations have been provided which will assist a superintendent of schools in his presentation of arguments for additional school funds. Discussions on types of bond issues, the prevailing rates of interest on school bonds, and the present indebtedness of communities incurred in the extension of school plants, are also embodied in this section.

Throughout this study it has been the aim of the writer to suggest and perfect ways and means of measurement which may be utilized by superintendents of school systems in the development of their school building programs. For the elevation of the profession of school superintendent much in the way of standardization
and scientific procedure remains to be done. Past failures in accepting standards and adopting businesslike methods have proven disastrous financially as well as educationally. With constantly mounting costs in school maintenance, as well as in school building construction, the need for economy in planning and for systematic rather than haphazard development of a school building program is for the first time becoming apparent to many local educational authorities. If this study assists in the solution of important problems connected with this development, the aims of the writer will have been achieved.