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## A Study to Determine the Sources of Friction Between Parents and the Yakima Public Schools

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A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE SOURCES OF FRICTION BETWEEN  
PARENTS AND THE YAKIMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

Clifford Albert Erickson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Education, in the Graduate School  
of the Central Washington College of Education

August, 1952

This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in the Graduate School of Central Washington College of Education.

Approved:

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Educators are agreed that the manner in which criticisms of the public schools have been handled by school personnel has not been totally effective. This general opinion was reached because educators have spent a disproportionately large amount of research effort in listing and answering the more general rather than the specific barbs and criticisms leveled at public education. Reams of material have been published in the educational periodicals answering attacks made on the public schools. Unfortunately these replies have not reached the persons for whom they were written. A splendid job has been done by professional educators convincing other professional educators that these criticisms are unjustified, ill-founded and untrue.

Occasionally a very fine article or book written for the general reading public does appear. The entire issue of Life Magazine<sup>1</sup> for October, 1950 was devoted exclusively to a consideration of education. These efforts are necessary and sometimes timely. It is equally important, however, that educators and supporters of public education consider

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<sup>1</sup>"What U.S. Thinks About Its Schools," Editorial in Life Magazine, XXIX, (October 16, 1950), pp. 11-18.

individual and personal criticisms as well as general attacks.

Statement of the problem. The need for an objective study of this kind has been obvious to educators for some time. A better understanding between laymen and educators, as well as among peoples of every tongue, is foremost on the long list of needed research projects. The more objective, the more primary rather than secondary sources are studied, the more specific the research can be, the more effective will be the steps administrators may take to correct the causes of these misunderstandings.

One may raise the question, "Why should schools be receiving such criticisms at every turn?" There are reasons for this. One must realize that the whole financial structure of our public school system is based on a common understanding of, respect for, and need of a tax-supported free system of public education. We, the practitioners in the educational profession, have long considered the parents of school children and the public in general as partners in the business of educating children.

The American public school is not only a natural target for all sorts of individuals and groups but also for professional educators as well. The very nature of the profession of education makes it subject to criticism by its own membership. Persons attracted to education are, by nature, more inclined to analyze and criticize than the



layman. It is part of the learning process itself for educators to seek to improve their own knowledge and competence. The training they receive at institutions of higher learning, and especially in teacher training institutions, aids and abets this natural desire. Because self-improvement results at least in part from having an open, searching, and critical mind, it is natural that some of the most searching criticisms of the public schools come from within the ranks. This is not to say that such criticism is destructive, although the end result sometimes would justify such a conclusion. It is probably true that most educators reserve the right to criticize as a part of the educational process. Such criticism is generally directed at better teaching methods, better administrative practices, curriculum improvement, and other aims designed to give better and more effective implementation to the whole field of public education.

Other lay groups and individuals attack the American public schools for a variety of reasons. It is not the purpose of this study to consider these general criticisms and causes for them, but a brief listing of why such criticism may be expected might be helpful for general background purposes.

1. It is the inalienable right and privilege of every individual under the American Constitution and way of life to

criticize any of his institutions.

2. The fact that the administration of the public school is probably closer to the people than any other agency of the government makes it subject to more first hand criticism than other agencies of government farther removed from individual areas of interest. An administrative body such as local school board has its interests deeply rooted, as a rule, in the grass-roots sentiments of its constituents --the people.

3. The public schools deal with the most precious heritage of society--children. Our schools are "our own" because "our own" are the schools. It naturally follows that people will register emotional complaints with the agency that has so much control and influence over its children. Criticism will therefore be more likely to be directed at that agency, and the criticism will not always be objective or reasonable. One may expect this condition to continue.

4. Being a public agency supported by tax monies, with operational functions on a close local level automatically makes the public school target for the pent-up hostilities of all manners and kinds of maladjusted people. It is the agency used for the relief of hostility and tension by people who have many and diverse unsolved personal problems. A psychological acceptance of this fact, if it

serves to make educators feel better, would carry with it an acceptance of the truth that in this way the public school also serves.

5. Many individuals and groups are vicious in their attacks on the public schools for ulterior motives. It would not seem too illogical to assume that a great amount of criticism of our schools has been inspired by both individuals and groups to promote selfish interests.

If the vulnerability of the public schools to criticism in the above named areas can be recognized, perhaps the reactions and responses to them can be professional and objective. Effort must be concentrated on those areas of criticism which are possible to eliminate or correct. This is the immediate job of educators.

Lastly, the ability to develop a curriculum which will meet the individual needs of children, and give them the opportunity to learn to the optimum of their capacities, depends on public support and cooperation. Without such support the right kind of education cannot be supplied for our children. Without a meaningful developmental progress in the curriculum, the institution of the public school becomes static and quite worthless. While the professional educator is a leader, he is also a part of the great body of the American public.

The administrators of our public schools need

information about current activities to help them formulate sound educational policies. Many operational practices would probably be modified, and in some cases eliminated, if research in the areas of relationships between home and school were intensified. It is scientific research which has brought about realistic and effective methods of teaching. It is scientific research which has achieved a new awareness of and skill in, handling problems of relationships between home and school. Very little is known about the real feelings, positive as well as negative, which parents have toward the public schools.

A lack of such knowledge and the continuance of sources of irritation robs valuable time from school personnel. Minor irritations have a habit of recurring and growing in intensity until they reach time-consuming proportions.

Well defined methods of dealing with specific complaints have been slow in arriving. The problem for the most part has been neglected. Undoubtedly, after turning the spotlight of inquiry on each particular criticism or complaint there will be unearthed both justifiable and unjustifiable criticisms, and an analysis of these individual complaints will point the way to more effective means of erasing the causes of these criticisms. It is not facetious to add that general criticisms, right or wrong, have a basis of fact in an individual misunderstanding.

Purpose of the study. The purposes of this study are threefold:

1. To study recorded individual complaints directed at a Class A public school system during the period of one full year.

2. To identify the source of these misunderstandings and possibly the reasons for their occurrence.

3. To suggest some common methods of dealing with parents and the public at large in an effort to eliminate the criticisms.

Limitations of the study. The limitations of this study are threefold:

1. The study comprises all of the specific complaints registered against the Yakima Public School District, Yakima, Washington, during the school year 1951-1952.

2. It included grades from kindergarten through grade twelve but excluded the Yakima Junior College.

3. It did not attempt to evaluate these complaints or to analyze them in terms of being legitimate or unjustifiable.

This study did not concern itself with what parents thought about the public schools. It did not concern itself with the opinions of school personnel about the sources or causes of misunderstandings existing between parents and the public schools. Except for the advisability of having such

information for use as background material, and for supporting the hypothesis that there was need for a study of this kind, it was not concerned with studies already made that were germane to the field of general criticism.

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A study of the major criticisms of the public schools was made by a group of graduate students at the Ohio State University in 1951. The study revealed that the ten major criticisms made by individuals, organized groups of laymen, and professional educators were:

1. Schools are not effectively teaching children the fundamental skills.

2. Schools are not developing obedience, respect for authority, a sense of responsibility or a sense of the importance of hard work.

3. Schools fail to stimulate competition among students and to reveal to parents the comparative standing of their children.

4. Schools are trying to educate many young people who cannot profit sufficiently from such education.

5. Schools have not been effective in interpreting their programs to the public.

6. Schools fail to develop a wholehearted allegiance to the American way of life.

7. Schools are taking over the functions and responsibilities of the home and other institutions.

8. Schools are not teaching boys and girls to make a living.

9. Schools have not kept pace with social change.

10. School personnel are incompetent to deal with the complex problems the modern school faces.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Let's Look at the Attacks on the Schools," Booklet of the College of Education (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, 1951), p. 12.

Goodykoontz,<sup>2</sup> writing in a recent periodical, reviews two such studies which are often referred to.

The first concerned the San Francisco Unified School District. There the Board of Education in 1944 sent a questionnaire to more than 42,000 parents concerning their attitudes toward the schools of San Francisco. The summary of that study was as follows:

Eighty per cent thought their children were making satisfactory progress in reading, seventy per cent in writing, seventy five per cent in language. Only about 300 parents took the opportunity provided by the inquiry to tell the parts of the school program they did not like. About 1,000 had no specific criticism; 367 felt there was insufficient emphasis upon the fundamentals; 366 specifically disliked the system of teaching reading; 229 thought that there was not sufficient discipline.<sup>3</sup>

Reviewed also was a study conducted in Florida in 1946 by a state-wide Florida Citizens' Committee on Education. A poll was conducted to sample citizen' opinions about Florida's school program. The following summarizes the results of almost six thousand replies:

More than ninety per cent of those responding considered these things very important for schools to do: (1) Teach pupils the tools of learning; (2) Train for good citizenship; (3) Help to develop good character and sound moral principles; (4) Create good health habits; (5) Help develop a higher standard of living and more effective use of resources. . . . Greatest dissatisfaction was expressed regarding the attention given to

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<sup>2</sup>Bess Goodykoontz, "Parents Know What They Want for Their Children," Educational Leadership, VII (February, 1950), 286-92.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 288.



the skills and attitudes needed for success in some vocation, for improved family life, and the use of leisure time. Citizens generally would be glad to see more emphasis on sex education, music, and the arts, and extracurricular activities.<sup>4</sup>

Goodykoontz concludes that parents do know what they want from their schools and are sensitive to the school's responsibilities to their children.

Another study of parental opinion was conducted in 1947 by the Peoria city school system, Peoria, Illinois. Specific questions were directed to parents in the form of a questionnaire and the results are tabulated as follows:

IN GENERAL, ARE YOU SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED  
YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL?

Very well satisfied . . . . .	23%
Satisfied . . . . .	44%
About half and half . . . . .	22%
Dissatisfied. . . . .	5%
Very much dissatisfied. . . . .	1%
Other . . . . .	5%

IN GENERAL, ARE YOU SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED  
WITH THE WAY YOUR CHILD IS TREATED BY THE  
TEACHERS AND OTHER OFFICIALS IN HIS SCHOOL?

Very well satisfied . . . . .	21%
Satisfied . . . . .	50%
About half and half . . . . .	20%
Dissatisfied. . . . .	5%
Very much dissatisfied. . . . .	1%
Other . . . . .	3%

IN GENERAL, IS THE DISCIPLINE IN YOUR CHILD'S  
SCHOOL TOO STRICT OR NOT STRICT ENOUGH?

Much too strict . . . . .	1%
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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 290.

IN GENERAL, IS THE DISCIPLINE IN YOUR CHILD'S  
SCHOOL TOO STRICT OR NOT STRICT ENOUGH?  
(continued)

Too strict. . . . .	3%
About right . . . . .	66%
Too lax . . . . .	17%
Much too lax. . . . .	1%
No opinion. . . . .	12% <sup>5</sup>

The author suggests more cooperative relationships between home and school in stating that this poll proves that parents do know what they want and expect from their schools.

Probably the most significant of the polls of lay opinion in America in recent years was that carried on by Elmo Roper in 1950. Roper conducted a nation-wide survey for Life Magazine<sup>6</sup> to determine what Americans think about their schools, as part of an entire issue devoted to an overview of America's schools. The results of this survey are important because of the nation-wide sampling, and because the survey was finished less than two years ago. The data show that a majority (67 per cent) of people believed that children today are being taught more worthwhile things than children were twenty years ago. A majority of citizens (67 per cent) also felt that the teachers of today are more competent than the teachers of 1930.

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<sup>5</sup>"What the Parents of Peoria Think About the Public Schools," Bulletin of the College of Education (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois, 1951), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>"What U.S. Thinks About Its Schools," Editorial in Life Magazine, XXIX, (October 16, 1950), pp. 11-18.

Almost all parents think that the school should play as important a role as the home in bringing up children. Today's teachers are esteemed more for their ability to handle children than for their education and experience. Almost half of our citizens consider our teachers underpaid, and teachers, as a group, are regarded as of greater importance to American life than clergymen, public officials, business men, or lawyers.

Although the Roper survey revealed general satisfaction with our schools, several findings justified the conclusion that, "in general our schools are doing a good job, but nowhere near good enough."<sup>7</sup> One third of the people polled indicated regret that they did not learn more of the fundamental skills. When asked if they were satisfied with the public school system in their community, 33.4 per cent said they were very satisfied, 38 per cent were only fairly satisfied, and 16.8 per cent were not satisfied.

It is noted with respect to all of these studies that parents generally are very friendly toward their schools. One wonders, however, why 20 per cent of the parents polled in the Peoria survey were only half and half satisfied with their child's school.

All of these studies and polls revealed a substantial

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

percentage of parents who were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The conclusions arrived at through the medium of survey polling are general in nature. They indicate the general climate of people's feelings toward their schools. In this sense polls are valuable tools for school personnel whose function it is to do a job of public relations on a broad front.

Such polls, or surveys of public opinion attack this problem from a general, overall point of view. However, it is also important to attack the problem from the standpoint of specific complaints and criticisms.

This study was an attempt to get such specificity, and to determine whether such specificity in a study of a small sampling would point the way toward the need for further research in the area.

It was disappointing to find almost a complete absence of background material and related studies which concerned themselves with an analyses of specific charges and complaints made to school administrators. This study attempts to analyze these specific and direct complaints. In this it is unique.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS OF APPROACH

This study, in an effort to be specific and meaningful, used the case study approach to the problem. In determining the general sources of criticism and misunderstanding existing between parents and a given school district, it would have been easier to have used a personal opinion poll, or questionnaire. Professional staff, including all those who had actual contact with parents, could have been asked to record information from school records and personal experience. Parents also could have been asked to record their opinions of the public schools. This would have been entirely too general, however, because each problem needed an analysis. This method then would have been unsound.

The purpose of this study was to attempt to find the sources of misunderstandings between parents and school through factual recording of specific complaints registered by identifiable complainants. The recording was done by completing a questionnaire,<sup>1</sup> in the form of a schedule, in conjunction with an interview.

No attempt was made to pre-classify the schedule items by kind, intensity, or predetermined category. No

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<sup>1</sup>A copy of the questionnaire is in the Appendix of this paper.

effort was made to decide whether the complaint was directed to the right person, or whether the complaint was major or minor, violent or passive.

The study attempted to determine whether any central tendencies, or norms, existed in the cases studied. For example: Did criticism directed toward the public school by parents fall into distinct categories with respect to the race, religion, age, or economic status of the complainant? Was the school district studied susceptible to criticism by reason of certain administrative policies, curriculum content in classes, teaching methods, or personnel?

It appeared advisable and necessary to record facts in four major areas: (1) information concerning the child; (2) identifying information about the parents; (3) facts concerning the home and neighborhood; (4) information concerning the school.

Space was provided on the schedule for recording the actual complaint in as near the actual words of the complainant as possible. The sampling was relatively small, but it was the total number registered during the 1951-1952 school year. It should also be pointed out that each complaint received the undivided attention of the writer for a period ranging from three to eight hours. Care was taken to protect the identity of each complainant. Each schedule was numbered and the cross reference was filed by the author

without personal reference.

No difficulty was experienced in working out personal interviews in the forty cases recorded. As Consultant in Attendance and Guidance in the public school system with which the study concerned itself, it was the author's official responsibility to represent the Superintendent on all cases where parental complaints were registered. Working in this capacity facilitated the interviews.

## CHAPTER IV

### INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

In considering the problem of presentation of the findings several serious limitations arose. A statistical analysis was impossible because of the limited sampling available. The material best lends itself to analysis by presenting only the number and percentage of computation by categories in table form.

On this basis, then, it was found possible to group the complaints into seven general classifications as is shown in Table I.

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TABLE I

CATALOGUE OF 42 COMPLAINTS MADE BY  
PARENTS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL CHILDREN  
IN YAKIMA, WASHINGTON

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Description	Number	Per cent
Against the teacher	13	31
Against the school administrator including personal prejudice and methods of school operation	9	20
For lack of physical protection for children	5	12
Against curriculum phases	5	12
Against policies of a city-wide nature	5	12
For discrimination	3	8



TABLE I (continued)  
 CATALOGUE OF 42 COMPLAINTS MADE BY  
 PARENTS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL CHILDREN  
 IN YAKIMA, WASHINGTON

Description	Number	Per cent
Against policies set up by individual schools within a city-wide system	2	5
Total	<u>42</u>	<u>100</u>

From Table I we find that almost a third (31 per cent) of the complaints were directed against teachers. At first glance this might appear to be a disproportionately large percentage. When one considers, however, that nearly all of the contacts children have in our public schools are with the teacher directly, it is not surprising that a large number of specific complaints about a school system should be directed at the teacher. The teacher has the direct contact with the parent through length of daily contact with the child; through reports of progress or non-progress going to the home via the child; through explanation of school policies and administrative directives; through home work assignments and other means.

A further analysis of the complaints directed against teachers revealed the following; seven parents out of thirteen criticized the teacher quite objectively. Statements

were given such as "She's not explaining the assignments good enough", "She's giving the children too much work in her class", and "He doesn't make the subject interesting enough".

Six of the complaints which were directed at teachers were for reasons of a personal or non-professional nature. Two remarks are presented here to illustrate: "The teacher made rash and smart remarks about my son in front of the other children." "If John sasses the teacher it serves him (the teacher) right. He sasses my child all of the time."

The next largest group of complaints were directed against the school administrator. Whereas 46 per cent of the complaints directed at teachers were for personal reasons, 21 per cent of these complaints were directed at school administrators for the same reason. Typical complaints were recorded as: "He's prejudiced against John because John's older brother had trouble at this school", or "He never did like Tom and he blames John for everything that happens".

The remaining seven of the complaints directed at school administrators were the result of office policies, such as time scheduling for extracurricular activities and for various disciplinary measures taken.

Three groups of complaints were equal in number and accounted for 36 per cent of the total. Table I shows that five of the 42 parents objected to such city-wide policies

demanding parents to come to the school for a conference with the administrator because of persistent truancy of their child, or for the school's policy of refusing to allow parents to take children out of school without a valid excuse. In one case, the irate father demanded to know why he couldn't take his son, a seventh grader, to a carnival in an adjoining city. Who was the legal guardian of his boy, the school board or himself, the father wanted to know?

Five parents complained about matters pertaining to curriculum content. One felt that physical education should be extended in the curriculum, and one complained that her daughter was getting "too darned much play".

Two felt that their children should be doing current academic work different from that being given. One felt that the public school should give more work in remedial reading.

Five parents criticized the school for not furnishing better physical protection for their children. One seventh grade girl was jostled with unnecessary roughness in the hall between classes. Two complained that their children were hurt on the playground or gymnasium because there was inadequate adult supervision to protect them from too rough play. One parent complained to the general administration office about the lack of school control over children on their way home from school, saying that his son came home beaten up

every night. One mother made a formal complaint that her daughter's illness was a result of unhealthful food served in the lunch room.

Only three (7 per cent) of the total of forty-two parents considered in the study made complaints related to discrimination. Two of these focused on the family's lack of social and economic status as the reason for their difficulty, and one claimed racial discrimination by everyone connected with the particular school involved.

The smallest group, two (5 per cent) of the total of forty-two criticized a particular school policy not in effect by administrative ruling in other schools of the city system. One of these had to do with physical punishment of a child. The other objected to a regulation adopted by a certain school making it necessary for her child (along with all others in that school) to remove her shoes at the school door in muddy weather.

It should be noted here for the reader's information that the latter complaint was directed at a new school, where outside work had not been finished and where mud during bad weather came to the very door of the school.

Why these two complaints were catalogued under a separate heading and not included in the complaints directed at administrators should also be noted here. In both of these situations the action taken was a result of recommen-

dations made by a majority of the school staff and was not a decision by the administrator alone.

Information concerning the economic status of the complainants is given in Table II.

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TABLE II  
ECONOMIC STATUS OF THE COMPLAINANTS

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Yearly Income	Number	Per cent
Under \$3,600	18	43
\$3,600 - \$4,999	14	33
\$5,000 - \$9,999	5	12
\$10,000 and over	5	12

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It was found that whereas 18 (43 per cent) of the complainants had an income of less than \$3,600 a year, five in 42 (12 per cent) had annual incomes in excess of \$10,000. Income for five of the families was between \$5,000 and \$10,000 annually, and for fourteen of the 42 the yearly income was between \$3,600 and \$5,000. Summarized in more general terms, Table II reveals that of 42 complaints registered, 24 per cent came from families with annual incomes of more than \$5,000. Incomes of less than \$5,000 a year were found in 32 (76 per cent) of the families.

Table III shows that one in four of the complainants

was in professional work. Twenty-four (58 per cent) were classed as semi-skilled or unskilled. Eight of the 42 (18 per cent) were skilled workers.

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TABLE III  
CLASSIFICATION AS TO TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT OF FAMILY HEAD

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Type of employment	Number	Per cent
Unskilled	12	29
Semi-skilled	12	29
Professional	10	24
Skilled	8	18
Total	<u>42</u>	<u>100</u>

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Table IV indicates that one-half of the complainants had continuous employment. One of four reported fairly steady work. One in five was unemployed generally or else was receiving some kind of public welfare assistance. Three of the 42 (7 per cent), a minor number, stated that they worked only sporadically.

TABLE IV  
REGULARITY OF EMPLOYMENT OF FAMILY HEAD

Classification	Number	Per cent
Continuous	21	50
Fairly steady	10	24
Unemployed or receiving welfare	8	19
Sporadic	<u>3</u>	<u>7</u>
Total	42	100

Table V indicates that approximately one third of the fathers (38 per cent) and mothers (33 per cent), representing a total of 37 parents who made complaints, had completed the eighth grade. The next largest number of complaints came from parents who had completed high school, or 24 per cent of the fathers and 29 per cent of the mothers. A significant grouping is shown of parents who had completed college, and two had taken graduate work, representing 16 per cent of the entire group. Three of the mothers (8 per cent) had been graduated from college, but none had done any graduate work. It would be said, then, that the complaints came from homes in which 78 per cent of the fathers and 70 per cent of the mothers had completed at least a high school education. Refined further, the fact stands out that the complaints represent homes where 16 per cent of the fathers and 8 per

cent of the mothers hold college degrees or better.

Statistics showing the number of years of formal education of all adult members of the district studied were not available, and therefore a comparison could not be made with the findings in the study.

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TABLE V

NUMBER OF YEARS OF FORMAL EDUCATION COMPLETED BY  
FATHERS AND MOTHERS OF COMPLAINANT FAMILIES

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Years of formal education completed	Number of fathers	Number of mothers
4	1	1
5	0	1
6	2	1
7	1	12
8	14	1
9	2	3
10	1	4
11	0	11
12	9	1
13	0	0
14	1	0
15	0	0
College graduate	4	3
Post graduate work	2	0

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Table VI shows that of a total of 39 complainants, 33 were from people designating themselves as Protestants, four from Roman Catholic, and two from people of other religions.



TABLE VI  
CHURCH AFFILIATION OF 39 COMPLAINANTS

Church	Number	Per cent
Protestant	33	85
Roman Catholic	4	10
Other	2	5
Total	<u>39</u>	<u>100</u>

In considering the findings shown in Table VI, the following should be taken into account. A recent estimate by the Yakima City Council of Churches places the percentage of members of the Roman Catholic church at 18 per cent of the total population. It is unknown what percentage of children from Roman Catholic homes attend full time church schools. It is difficult with such a small sampling of cases to read into the figures given in Table XIII any positive trend. However, the fact that only four (10 per cent) of the complainants were members of the Roman Catholic church while 18 per cent of the population as a whole belonged to that church group, would indicate that any religious issue in the school district studied could not be considered a source or cause of complaint.

The average junior high school principal looking at

Table VII would not be surprised to find that exactly one-half of all complaints directed at this large city school system, in a given year, had as their target the junior high school. This proportion (50 per cent) bears out the findings of the author in his experience as "trouble shooter" with difficulties involving parents.

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TABLE VII  
DISTRIBUTION OF COMPLAINTS BY TYPES OF SCHOOLS

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Description	Number	Per cent
Junior High schools	21	50
Elementary schools	12	28
Senior High schools (3 years)	9	22
	<u>42</u>	<u>100</u>

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Table VII shows that of a total of 42 complaints, nine (22 per cent) came from parents whose children were in the last three years of secondary school. Twelve (28 per cent) came from parents of children in the elementary schools.

The study revealed, as shown in Table VIII, that almost three out of four of the complainants owned their homes, and one in four rented either a house or an apartment.

TABLE VIII

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF COMPLAINANTS WHO WERE HOMEOWNERS,  
HOUSE OR APARTMENT RENTERS

Description	Number	Per cent
Owned own houses	31	74
House renters	10	24
Apartment renters	1	2

Table IX reveals the condition of the homes and the dwellings in which the complainants lived. It may be noted that four (10 per cent) of the complainants' homes were classed as excellent, eighteen (43 per cent) as fair, and eight (18 per cent) as poor. Substantially more than one-half (61 per cent) were rated below a good home standard.

TABLE IX

CONDITION OF HOMES (INCLUDING FURNISHINGS) OF COMPLAINANTS

Description	Number	Per cent
Excellent	4	10
Good	12	29
Fair	18	43
Poor	8	18
	<u>42</u>	<u>100</u>

Table X indicates a positive relationship between the types of homes lived in by the complainants (Table IX) and the recreational facilities of the areas. This follows the pattern of most cities. Whether public recreation facilities precede better housing or follows it is not the question with which this study is concerned. The facts are, as shown in Table X, that twenty-seven (64 per cent) of the complaints came from neighborhoods where public recreation facilities were determined to be below adequate.

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TABLE X

GENERAL CONDITIONS OF PUBLIC RECREATION FACILITIES  
IN AREA IN WHICH COMPLAINANTS LIVED  
(INCLUDING SCHOOL PLAYGROUND FACILITIES)

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Description	Number	Per cent
Excellent	5	12
Good	10	24
Fair	14	33
Poor	13	31
Total	<u>42</u>	<u>100</u>

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It will be seen from Table XI that the majority of complaints directed at the school system studied involved boys. Less than three out of ten of the complaints concerned girls and more than seven in ten concerned boys. This would indicate that school relationships to boys are more important,

from the standpoint of avoiding complaints from parents, than are relationships to girls.

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TABLE XI  
DISTRIBUTION OF COMPLAINTS BY SEX OF SCHOOL CHILD

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Sex	Number	Per cent
Male	30	71
Female	12	29

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From Table I, page 18, it was learned that a large number of complaints were directed at the administrator of the school which the complainants' children attended. Some of those complaints had to do with such things as failure to notify parents of school regulations and objections to certain school policies. One could assume with a reasonable amount of justification from Tables I and XI that boys are less prone to bring home to their parents a full story of school activities and changed policies than are girls. Table XI indicates that incipient difficulties with boys should sound a warning bell to all school personnel to be extremely careful that the problem concerning the boy should be brought to the parents' attention as quickly and fully as possible, if there is an interest in keeping complaints from parents to a minimum.

One of the major areas of interest in this study was to determine whether there was any significant relationship between the complaints and the intelligence quotients of the children whose parents brought the complaints.

Before reviewing the material presented in Table XII, a word of explanation of the tests used in determining the intelligence quotients of the children is necessary.

The school system with which the study is concerned gives group intelligence tests each year. The results of these tests in 41 of the 42 cases were readily available and all of these tests had been given within the preceding seventeen months. In the one case in which the material was not available it was found that the child was a recent transfer from another city and the school counsellor had not found it possible to administer a test up to the time of the complaint.

In 15 of the 42 cases recorded in Table XII, an individual test was given. In the remaining 27 cases recorded, the results of the group tests are given. Group tests used were the California Mental Maturity and the Kuhlman-Anderson. Individual tests used were the Stanford Binet in eight cases; the Wechsler-Bellevue scale for children in five, and the Grace Arthur in two.

The fact that more than one-third of the test results shown in Table XII were individual tests and were given

within a very short period following the complaint, should give even more specificity and validity to the conclusion drawn from the contents of Table XII.

TABLE XII  
INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENTS OF 42 CHILDREN  
CONCERNED IN THE COMPLAINTS

Intelligence quotient*		Number	Per cent
Above average	128-132	2	5
	123-127	0	0
	118-122	3	7
	113-117	7	17
Above average			29%
Average	108-112	0	0
	103-107	2	5
	98-102	8	18
	93-97	5	12
Average			35%
Below average	88-92	0	0
	82-87	7	17
	78-81	3	7
	73-77	3	7
	68-72	2	5
Below average			36%
Total		42	100

\*The mean is 100.

It may be seen from Table XII that significant groupings of intelligence quotients of the children with whom the study was concerned occur in three steps: those from 82 to

87, 98 to 102, and 113 to 117. A further analysis shows that 14 (33 per cent) of the children had intelligence quotients above the mean and 20 (48 per cent) had intelligence quotients below the mean. Nine (19 per cent) fell between 82 and 87, 9 (19 per cent) between 98 and 102, and 5 (12 per cent) between 93 and 97. The rest were fairly evenly distributed.

The Table shows that the tendency is for complaints against the school district to emanate from homes where, as measurable by standard testing devices, 35 per cent of the children had average intelligence, 29 per cent were above average, and 36 per cent were below average. The indication is that many of the complaints against the school district involved children with better than average intelligence and more than one-third concerned children having below average intelligence.

It will be seen from Table XIII that the subjects which were least liked by the children of the complainants fall into three major categories; mathematics, English, and social studies. Together these three subjects account for 69 per cent of the total. No other subject (with the possible exception of science, which accounted for eight per cent of the total) was disliked enough to make comparison meaningful.



TABLE XIII  
SUBJECT LIKES AND DISLIKES OF 42 CHILDREN CONCERNED IN  
THE COMPLAINTS

Least liked subjects	Number	Per cent	Most liked subjects	Number	Per cent
Mathematics	17	28	Shop work	10	20
English	16	26	Physical education	10	20
Social studies	9	15	Social studies	6	11
Science	5	8	English	6	11
Music	3	5	Art	6	11
Physical education	3	5	Music	4	7
Foreign language	2	3	Science	3	6
Art	2	3	Mathematics	3	6
Home economics	2	3	Domestic science	3	6
Shop work	2	3	Geography	1	1
Total	<u>61</u>	<u>100</u>	History	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
				<u>53</u>	<u>100</u>

When it was determined which subjects were most liked by the children, we find, referring to Table XIII that two stand out; shop and physical education. Here the tendency is not as marked as was the case of subjects which were least liked. Five subjects, shop, physical education, social studies, English, and art, account together for a total of 73 per cent of the total.

It is obvious that three subjects in the curriculum give more trouble to children who become involved in complaints directed against the school by their parents than any others--mathematics, English, and social studies, in

that order.

It is interesting to note that two of the least liked subjects rank fairly high among the best liked subjects, English and social studies. Mathematics, the least liked of all subjects, also ranks in the lowest percentage group of the most liked subjects.

Because of the relatively small sampling, it is not possible to say with certainty that children whose parents made the complaints like any subjects, except shop work and physical education, better than any others of the group. Table XIII does clearly show, however, that the same children definitely dislike mathematics, English, and social studies in that order. The fairly high number (nine) of times social studies was listed might indicate that parents who complain in specific areas about our school have children who have a tendency to dislike subject matter which is social in character. Care should be taken not to attach too much weight to this conclusion, however, as the sampling is small and the tendency not too pronounced.

From Table XII, page 33, it was found that 29 per cent of the children whose parents made a complaint to the school had intelligence quotients above average, 35 per cent were scored as average and 36 per cent were below average.

Table XIV shows that there is an almost exact correlation between intelligence quotients and the cumulative

grades earned in school by these children. Twelve (30 per cent) had grades above average. Fifteen (35 per cent) had average grades and fifteen (35 per cent) had earned below average grades.

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TABLE XIV  
CUMULATIVE SCHOLASTIC ATTAINMENT OF CHILDREN CONCERNED  
IN COMPLAINTS

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Average grades	Number	Per cent
A - superior	4	10
B - above average	8	20
C - fair	15	35
D - poor	10	23
E - failure	5	12
Total	<u>42</u>	<u>100</u>

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Another major area of interest in the study was concerned with the question, "Do children of parents who complained tend to centralize in certain grades?" Table XV gives us a positive answer. They do. Thirty of the 42 children were in grades seven, eight, nine and ten. Together these four grades accounted for 73 per cent of the total.

TABLE XV  
 GRADE DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN  
 CONCERNED IN COMPLAINTS

Grade	Number	Per cent
Ungraded	3	7
First	1	2
Second	0	0
Third	2	5
Fourth	1	2
Fifth	0	0
Sixth	1	2
Seventh	8	20
Eighth	9	21
Ninth	8	20
Tenth	5	12
Eleventh	3	7
Twelfth	1	2
Total	<u>42</u>	<u>100</u>

Grades seven, eight, and nine, or the junior high school group, accounted for a total of twenty-five (61 per cent) of the 42 cases tabulated.

It would seem to indicate then that parents of junior high school children complain more than parents of children in all other grade groups combined.

Two other grades rank high in the grades around which complaints cluster. Three parents of children in ungraded rooms made complaints during the year. This would seem to be a natural tendency because of the nature of the grade classification. There are a great many more adjustments

for a child in an ungraded or special room to make than there would be for a child in a regular room in both scholastic and social areas. There is also more necessary contact by the school with the parents of children in ungraded rooms.

Parents of children in the tenth grade accounted for the only other grade group showing any significance. Five (12 per cent) of the complaints originated with parents whose children were in the tenth grade--the first year of high school. There would seem to be a natural carry-over here from the junior high school group.

The conclusion would seem to be justified that some of the sophomores in high school had still not resolved some of their difficulties by the time they were well into their first year of senior high school. Here again, because of the size of the sampling, it is difficult to come to too definite a conclusion.

The age distribution as seen in Table XVI is closely correlated with the grade distribution as shown in Table XV, page 38. More parents (55 per cent) who complained to the school district had children in the age range of thirteen through fifteen than the total (45 per cent) of all the other parents. Whereas the total of complaints centered around children in the eighth grade, (see Table XV) Table XVI shows complaints to center around children fourteen years of age.

TABLE XVI  
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN CONCERNED IN COMPLAINTS

Ages	Number	Per cent
6	2	5
7	2	5
8	1	2
9	2	5
10	0	0
11	2	5
12	3	7
13	6	14
14	11	27
15	6	14
16	4	9
17	2	5
18	1	2
Total	<u>42</u>	<u>100</u>

Table XVII shows that parental complaints to the school district involved children who, in the majority of cases, had good rapport with their classmates. The evaluation revealed that eighteen (40 per cent) of the 42 children had established good relationships with school mates. Twelve (30 per cent) had fair and twelve (30 per cent) had poor relationships with their classmates.

TABLE XVII

RELATIONSHIP TO CLASSMATES OF CHILDREN CONCERNED IN COMPLAINTS AS DETERMINED BY PERSONAL INTERVIEW OR BY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL OR COUNSELLOR

Description	Number	Per cent
Good	18	40
Fair	12	30
Poor	<u>12</u>	<u>30</u>
	42	100

Another area of interest in the study revolved around the question, "When parents complain to the school, how often is it a case of the child involved having a poor relationship with the teacher?" Table XVIII gives the answer. It was found that a poor relationship existed in twenty (47 per cent) of the cases, and only a fair relationship existed in twelve (30 per cent) of the cases. Thirty-two (77 per cent) of the children whose parents brought a complaint had only a fair or a poor teacher relationship. The study actually concerned itself with the question, "Was there a good relationship?" If there was not, then an attempt was made to show whether it was very poor or only not good.

TABLE XVIII  
CHILD'S RELATIONSHIP TO PRESENT TEACHER

Description	Number	Per cent
Good	10	23
Fair	12	30
Poor	20	47
Total	<u>42</u>	<u>100</u>

The grading device used here can be criticized because it does not show that distinction. This device was used because the case study method allowed individual rating to apply and the author was interested not in the grade of relationship, but only in whether it was good, and if not, whether it was bad enough to justify further inquiry.

Two other considerations are important in determining whether one can locate the sources of misunderstanding between parents and schools through a review, case by case, of specific complaints. Were the children's cumulative records complete and adequate, and was there evidence of exchange of information between the home and the school prior to the complaint being registered? The results of this study were disappointing in both particulars, again probably because of the small sampling.

In more than three-fourths of the cases (76 per cent) the school records were adequate. They gave a complete enough



picture of the child's ability, achievements, interests, and problems to furnish a basis upon which school personnel could analyze needs and work with the child. Ten of the 42 cases did not have adequate records.

It should be noted that the year before this study was instigated, the school district concerned had made a major project of enlarging, revising, and bringing up to date all school records. The project was not completed at the time this study was made. Where adequate records prevailed, there had been a mutual interchange of information between the home and the school.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The field of educational literature is singularly devoid of any studies of the kind attempted in this research paper. There are many studies that approach the problem of criticism of the public schools from the standpoint of polling the attitudes and opinions of the public about the schools.

The study just completed was an attempt to find the sources and causes of misunderstandings between parents and schools by bringing specificity to the field of complaints. This was done by a case study of all the complaints brought against the Yakima School District in the school year 1951-1952. The findings were presented in detail in the preceding chapter.

In summarizing it is well to keep in mind that the purposes of the study were threefold:

1. To study recorded individual complaints directed at a Class A public school system during the period of one school year.
2. To identify the source of these misunderstandings and if possible the reasons for their occurrence.
3. To suggest some common methods of dealing with parents and the public at large in an effort to eliminate

the criticisms.

No final conclusions can be drawn from the information gathered. For one reason, the sampling of actual cases was too small to justify statistical analysis which would stand the test of validity. It should be pointed out that there was no way of forecasting how many actual complaints would be recorded during one school year. As happened, only 42 actual cases of recorded complaints occurred, and therefore the study was limited to this sampling.

The use of the case method approach necessitated spending considerable time on each case studied. In this study it is estimated from three to eight hours were spent on each case involved.

Because of this limitation in the quantity of the cases available for review, final conclusions can not be made. Some trends, however, did appear which justify attention and further exploration.

An overview of the findings reveals the following factors as pertinent in determining the sources of friction existing between parents and school in considering 42 specific recorded complaints.

Complaints were centered in seven major areas, namely:

1. Against the teacher.
2. Against the school administrator including personal prejudice and methods of school operation.

3. Against the administrative practice of providing meager physical protection for children.
4. Against curriculum phases.
5. Against policies of a city-wide nature, zoning, etc.
6. For discrimination.
7. Against policies set up by individual schools within a city-wide system.

The majority of complaints, 13 of the 42, were directed at the teachers. While this was to be expected, the tendency was for the majority of these criticisms to have a bias for personal causes. Not as much complaint was registered against the teacher for what was done as for how it was done. Too many of the complaints referred to unprofessional and unethical conduct on the part of the teacher.

It may be well to consider new and more numerous approaches to developing teacher-parent understanding as well as teacher-pupil understanding. Some specific suggestions to promote these desired relationships are:

1. Parent-conference report card system.
2. Individual rooms having mother and father days.
3. Group meetings on grade levels to study individual cases.
4. Close working relationship between teacher and the home visitation teacher.
5. Stunt nights using student and parent participants.

6. Complete and accurate cumulative records on each child.
7. Encouraging teachers to construct and utilize anecdotal records.
8. Close teacher-school nurse effort.
9. Continuous use of referral agencies.
10. Good parent-teacher association workshops on child study.
11. Enlarging the testing program to include diagnostic and personality tests.
12. Reassignment of students to other rooms where teacher-pupil personality conflicts are apparent.
13. Report of conflict by teacher to principal as soon as first teacher-pupil misunderstandings develop rather than waiting until the situation becomes critical.
14. Notes and reports to parents must be carefully written and worded so proper thought is conveyed and no misunderstanding develops.

A surprising tendency for parents with upper social and economic status to complain was noted. It might be contended that people who have better than average social and financial standing in a community feel more privileged and freer to make complaints than people less securely situated. The contention also might be held that this class of citizens does not readily conform to regulations and standards without registering objections. A better program of public

relations should be undoubtedly considered.

The children around whom the complaints revolved were found to have a mean intelligence quotient of 100. It was found, however, that 12 children were in the group having above average intelligence. This would indicate that any generalization to the effect that all of our troubles are with children having limited ability is untrue.

It was found that the children had definite dislike for, and poor success in, mathematics and English. At the same time the subjects in which these children achieved success, and which were well liked, were industrial arts and physical education. Because the majority of complaints centered around the junior high school age youngster, two fairly definite conclusions are possible:

1. Psychologists have found that early adolescence is a time when youngsters find a need and liking for activities involving manual manipulation. We might therefore conclude that, to eliminate a large number of complaints, schools would need to increase the number of courses, on the junior high level, in art, shop, and industrial arts of all kinds, and physical education activities.

2. There is a need to re-evaluate both curriculum content and the method of teaching with respect to English and mathematics in the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades.

Finally, the study indicates that there is definite

need for an extension of this study and for other studies of similar emphasis. A study involving three times the number of complaints analyzed here would give a large enough sampling to have statistical significance. It is the contention of the author that studies focusing attention on specificity in the area of criticisms of the schools would contribute much to better parent-home relationships.

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## APPENDIX

APPENDIX  
QUESTIONNAIRE SCHEDULE

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CASE NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_  
REFERRAL: Administrative request\_\_ Teacher\_\_ Principal\_\_ Parental request\_\_  
Other\_\_

SCHOOL: Elementary\_\_\_\_\_ Junior High\_\_\_\_\_ High\_\_\_\_\_

CHILD: Age\_\_ Grade\_\_ I.Q.\_\_ Test\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of last test\_\_\_\_\_ Health: Good\_\_ Fair\_\_ Poor\_\_\_\_\_  
Average grade (cumulative) A\_\_ B\_\_ C\_\_ D\_\_ Failure\_\_\_\_\_  
Appearance\_\_\_\_\_ Physical defects\_\_ If yes, specify\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to teacher: Good\_\_ Fair\_\_  
Poor\_\_ To classmates: Good\_\_ Fair\_\_ Poor\_\_ Poorest subjects\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ Best subjects\_\_\_\_\_

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION ON PARENTS: Education: Grade completed, Father\_\_\_\_\_ Mother\_\_\_\_\_  
Economic status: \$10,000 or over\_\_ 5-10,000\_\_\_\_\_  
\$3,600-5,000\_\_ Under \$3,600\_\_ Church affiliation: Protestant\_\_\_\_\_  
Catholic\_\_ Other\_\_ Active\_\_\_\_\_ Inactive\_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX (continued)  
QUESTIONNAIRE SCHEDULE

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Other siblings: Girls\_\_\_ Boys\_\_\_ Employment of breadwinner:  
Continuous\_\_\_ Fairly steady\_\_\_ Sporadic\_\_\_ Mostly unemployed\_\_\_  
Type of employment: Professional\_\_\_ Skilled\_\_\_ Semi-skilled\_\_\_  
Unskilled\_\_\_

NEIGHBORHOOD: Area of: Home owners\_\_\_ Rental houses\_\_\_ Apartments\_\_\_  
General condition of buildings: Good\_\_\_ Fair\_\_\_ Poor\_\_\_  
Area recreational facilities: Excellent\_\_\_ Good\_\_\_ Fair\_\_\_ Poor\_\_\_  
School buildings and school playground facilities: Excellent\_\_\_  
Good\_\_\_ Fair\_\_\_ Poor\_\_\_

HOME: Own\_\_\_ Rent\_\_\_ Adequate space: Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_ General condition:  
Excellent\_\_\_ Good\_\_\_ Fair\_\_\_ Poor\_\_\_ Furnishings: Excellent\_\_\_  
Good\_\_\_ Fair\_\_\_ Poor\_\_\_

COMPLAINT: \_\_\_\_\_  
Difficulty with family previously? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_ Same child? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_  
Yes No  
If same child, number of previous difficulties \_\_\_  
One Two Three or more

