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SUPPLY AND DEMAND AS APPLIED TO HIGH-SCHOOL TEACHERS

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PREFATORY NOTE

It has been the custom of the Bureau of Educational Research to issue occasional publications prepared by persons who are not members of its staff. This circular is one of this sort. It contains an address given by Mr. Lewis W. Williams, Principal of the University High School, at the Annual Conference of the Faculty of the College of Education with the Superintendents of Illinois, held on November 22nd, 1928. Mr. Williams' experience as Secretary of the Appointments Committee at the University of Illinois for more than ten years, in addition to his other contacts with the situation, has enabled him to obtain first-hand knowledge of the subject treated, such as is possessed by comparatively few persons. He is, therefore, unusually well qualified to deal with it. The part taken by the Bureau of Educational Research in connection with the circular has been very slight, being limited to editorial revision and publication.

CHARLES W. ODELL
Assistant Director

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SUPPLY AND DEMAND AS APPLIED TO HIGH-SCHOOL TEACHERS

What is the law of supply and demand? If we turn to the political economist for an answer, we find it stated essentially as follows: Supply and demand in the market tend always to equality, any tendency to become unequal being immediately made up by an upward or a downward movement. Let us also define the terms supply and demand, remembering that they are market terms. By supply is meant the amount on the market offered for sale, not the total stock or total amount. Similarly, demand is the amount of a thing taken when offered at a certain price, not need or want. These terms may be made more concrete by an illustration from war conditions. On any certain day during that period, perhaps one million bushels of wheat were offered at two dollars per bushel. This offering did not represent the total amount of wheat in the country, for many farmers were holding it in hopes of a higher price. If some new factor had entered in, requiring more wheat at that particular time, the increased demand would have caused the price to rise, and in consequence a larger supply would have been thrown on the market to meet the increased demand.

Do these terms, in this sense, hold as applied to high-school teachers? In general, they probably do, but under a number of limiting conditions. In the first place, adjustment is undoubtedly slower when dealing with teachers than when dealing with the usual product of the market. As an illustration, we may again refer to the war situation. Many men left the teaching profession to serve Uncle Sam. In consequence, conditions became almost acute as far as finding suitable teachers was concerned. The supply was not increased within a reasonably short time, but required a period of several years. Later, supply and demand became practically equal, but the pendulum continued to swing to the other extreme; and after a period of years, we now find the supply considerably larger than the demand. Every indication points to the fact that it will require several years to restore the balance.

In the next place, the demand for teachers is not a constant one, but is, on the other hand, seasonal in nature. As all know, the heavy demand for teachers occurs during the late spring and summer. There is a relatively small demand about holiday time and through the month of January, to take care of a few changes incident to the beginning of the second half of the school year. However, a demand for teachers cannot be at all compared to the demand for shoes or for wheat as
regards constancy. In the next place, the time element is an important factor. It takes time to train a teacher; not three months, not six months, not even a year or two will suffice. Contrast this with the time required to make a pair of shoes or even to grow a crop of wheat. Furthermore, the higher standards demanded of candidates before they are permitted to teach have resulted in cutting off former sources of supply. Formerly, the teaching profession was used as a step stone for many of the professions, especially those requiring rather definite training and preparation of the nature of a college course. Such is not the case to a large extent today, because one must have a definite preparation in order to meet the requirements for certification and for selection as exemplified by many of our schools. For these and other reasons which might be mentioned, it seems safe to say that the law of supply and demand, as applied to high-school teachers, will hold only within reasonable limits.

Is there an oversupply of high-school teachers? There seems to be ample evidence of such an oversupply. A few instances from the writer's experience will be mentioned. Early last spring I had occasion to pass through the city of Indianapolis. While there, I purchased an evening paper in which I found an article from the school authorities of that city, which included the statement that between six and seven thousand applications had been received at that time for teaching positions. It was also stated that the needs for the city for the ensuing school year would probably not be greater than five or six hundred. In a fair-sized city not many miles away, the superintendent told me one year ago that he had received applications from a larger number of people than there were teaching positions in the city, stating also that he probably would not need to fill more than six or seven positions. Our State Department at Springfield reports that the number of people holding certificates to teach in Illinois far exceeds the number of teaching positions within the state.

During the year just past, the Appointments Committee at the University of Illinois received approximately thirteen hundred calls for teachers. In contrast to this, in 1920, that committee received about twenty-five hundred calls. At the latter time, the committee was usually successful in placing from ninety-five to ninety-seven per cent of those registered. Today, usually not more than two-thirds of those registered secure positions. It is true that the number of candidates registering is perhaps one-third greater than it was eight years ago, but this merely validates the point being made.

In the next place, economic conditions have tended to increase the supply of teachers. In spite of the fact that campaign orators have
insisted that the country is enjoying prosperity, it is doubtless true that certain parts of the country and certain lines of work have not shown the evidences of real prosperity. When conditions are unsatisfactory in the industrial world, many people, especially those of college training, have a tendency to turn temporarily to teaching. Men trained in chemical engineering feel that teaching offers a worth-while opportunity until conditions are better. In a similar way, men who have had teaching experience and have gone into other lines of work, such as insurance, frequently turn back to teaching until economic conditions are better. Furthermore, the last three or four years have undoubtedly produced a larger number of graduates who can meet certificating requirements than ever before. Doubtless the movement following the war for our young people to go to college and university in increasing numbers has recently been showing results in this respect. Lastly, the teaching profession offers relatively high beginning salaries for high-school teachers. This is especially true for women. The opportunities are very few for young women to secure a higher salary immediately following graduation from college than in high-school work. One important feature of the situation is the fact that after three or four years of teaching experience, the usual salary offered is low compared to the beginning salary. This, of course, is not true in the larger city systems. From these and other evidences which might be given, we are justified in concluding that there is an oversupply of high-school teachers.

What shall we now say of demand? Is it in any sense responding to the increased supply? About a year ago, a principal of one of our prominent high schools stated that although candidates were more numerous than ever before, it was more difficult to find the type of teacher desired. Indirectly, at least, one is justified in inferring that he had, consciously or unconsciously, raised his standards. This situation probably holds true generally. In the next place, there is a smaller turnover of teachers than prevailed six or seven years ago. One exception to this statement should be made; namely, in schools where tenure has been and still is relatively secure. Another way of stating this same fact is to say that teachers are holding on to their positions more carefully than formerly. A number of years ago, if a teacher was not perfectly satisfied with her position, she would resign in the spring, feeling quite certain she would find something just as satisfactory, perhaps better, before the first of September. Usually she was successful in finding such a place. Today, the individual who resigns runs a big risk of being without a position for the following school year unless such a position has been secured before she tenders her resignation. Doubtless superintendents and principals have this fact impressed upon
their minds through repeated requests on the part of teachers to have the privilege of resigning up to the middle of the summer or even later, providing they can find positions that to them appear as promotions.

A prominent factor influencing the demand for teachers is the matter of high-school enrollment. With the exception of the communities that are growing rapidly in population, it is probably a fact that the high-school enrollment during the last two years has been nearly stationary. Again, school authorities, realizing the situation, are demanding experienced teachers as never before. This is true even in many of our smaller schools that formerly proceeded upon the theory that they could not afford teachers of experience. Another factor causing some reduction in the supply of teachers, and therefore increasing the demand, is a tendency to reduce salaries, especially for beginners, in school districts that are dependent very largely upon rural territory. This has not been at all marked, and probably will not become a factor of any particular consequence. One phase of the situation which has already been mentioned—namely, the salary for teachers of three or four years of experience—is having some effect. The individual who has been successful for three or four years feels entitled to a reasonable increase in salary. If this is not forthcoming, he is apt to be discontented and to seek other lines of work. Finally, there is an increased demand for men teachers in all departments. Just recently the writer received a letter from the school authorities in St. Louis, asking him to recommend high class men in eight or nine different departments, for work both in junior and senior high schools. Undoubtedly, this demand for men will continue and perhaps increase as long as the supply of teachers is large. All in all, we may say that the demand is reacting to the supply. Probably several years will pass before a satisfactory balance is attained.

A number of general comments relative to the situation as a whole will now be made. There are certain fields in which the supply is unduly large. History and social science perhaps lead in this respect. The English field is pretty well crowded, although of course more teachers are needed there than in any other department. Certain languages, particularly Spanish, and to some extent French, have plenty of candidates. The field of mathematics is also well supplied with teachers. On the other hand, there are certain fields in which there is a steady, though not abnormal, demand. University and college graduates qualified to teach commercial subjects, particularly typewriting, shorthand, and bookkeeping, usually have good opportunities for positions. Teachers qualified for science, particularly the following com-
bination: general science and biology, chemistry and physics, or physics and biology, find a satisfactory opportunity at all times. The smaller schools, especially, continually ask for teachers qualified to handle home economics and biology. The combination of English and Latin is always in demand. People trained for music, both instrumental and vocal, have little difficulty in finding satisfactory places. This is especially true for men who are qualified to direct a band and to give lessons upon band instruments.

In the next place, we are justified in using much greater discrimination than we do now in the selection of teachers. To make a more thorough investigation of all candidates, to gain first-hand information if at all possible, and to clear up every reasonable doubt concerning candidates, should be cardinal principles at all times. In my judgment, no principal or superintendent has a more important responsibility than the selection of his teachers. Certainly then, when there is a plentiful supply, he is justified in sparing neither time nor money in fulfilling this obligation. The characteristics most desirable in a teacher should be kept in mind in making the selection. In the first place, the training of the candidate should be thorough. We are not justified in selecting for high-school work anyone who is not a college or university graduate. We should not select specialists in subject-matter, but those who have thorough training in the field or fields in which they are to instruct. In the field of education proper, these candidates should, as a minimum, meet North Central requirements, and, if possible, have had a thorough course in practice teaching. The next thing to be emphasized is character. There are many influences today which, though perhaps not negative, are certainly not in any sense positive or uplifting. Therefore, we are justified in choosing as teachers individuals who can measure up to the very best in this respect, in order that they may offset such influences and really interest our boys and girls in the things most worth while. In the next place, our teachers should be those who appeal to high-school pupils. Certainly this does not mean that we want the popular type. Rather does it mean that our teachers should be able to attract and interest our young people, yet at the same time command their highest respect. In the next place, our teachers should enjoy thoroughly high-school young people. They ought to welcome rather than shun opportunities to be with them, to work with them, and to play with them. No individual who does not have this attitude should be serving as an instructor of our boys and girls. Lastly, although this, of course, does not exhaust the list, we want individuals who are willing and capable of giving individual attention. Only those who believe
thoroughly that teaching is an individual rather than a group problem can qualify in this respect. To put it another way, we want teachers who are willing to go the second mile.

In the third place, the time has undoubtedly arrived when teacher-training institutions can and should eliminate undesirable candidates more effectively. Just how this is to be done is difficult to say. Perhaps the responsibility should rest primarily with the appointments committees connected with such institutions. However, many graduates secure positions without any assistance whatsoever from these committees; in fact, frequently without any assistance from the institution or any of its representatives. There seems to be little relationship existing between the qualifications of candidates who are successful in securing positions and those who are not. It seems that we have about as many well-qualified candidates left as average or mediocre. While there are many perfectly legitimate factors at work in the selection of teachers, nevertheless the teacher-training institutions and school authorities are not functioning properly unless, generally speaking, the best-qualified candidates secure the positions and the less promising do not. Without doubt, we have too many well-qualified candidates today without positions. In the face of this fact, it seems desirable that the process of elimination be effective before graduation.

This leads to the policy of placement agencies. Some institutions, through their committees, send out information and reports from instructors concerning candidates, leaving it to school authorities to interpret the information and the recommendations of instructors, as best they can. We, here at Illinois, have pursued for some time the policy of collecting information, including reports of instructors, and sending out confidential statements based upon these facts as interpreted by the secretary of the committee. This places the responsibility primarily upon the secretary. If his judgment is faulty, he very largely deserves the criticism. We believe this policy has merits, because the average principal in the field does not know intimately the big majority of the instructors at this or other institutions. For that reason, he is unable to evaluate accurately statements concerning candidates. At least, this plan centers the responsibility when a mistake has been made. A study of this general problem now being made by the North Central Association holds much of promise.

Finally, more honesty and frankness are needed in recommendations that are made, particularly from principal to principal. Only recently a principal made the statement that he no longer gives any consideration to statements made concerning candidates by fellow principals.
Certainly this is a sorry comment upon our honor as professional brothers. No principal is justified in recommending a candidate to another school authority if he is unwilling to take the candidate into his system for a similar position or to retain such a candidate, unless he makes perfectly evident the reasons why he would not receive or retain such a candidate. Certainly it is highly unprofessional to recommend wholeheartedly a candidate whom we are anxious to eliminate from our school system. The writer is confident, however, that this practice is not common.

What, then, is the general effect of the situation as regards supply and demand? In the first place, the effect will be wholesome for teachers as a whole. It will spur most of us to a higher degree of efficiency; it will awaken ideals which perhaps have been somewhat dormant. On the other hand, it will undoubtedly be unjust and unfair for some well-qualified individuals, many of whom will become discouraged and turn to other lines of work. Some of these the teaching profession can ill afford to lose. However, teaching as a profession will undoubtedly gain, considering the matter over a period of years. It is our responsibility to be patient and to uphold ideals meanwhile.

To summarize: There is good evidence of an oversupply of high-school teachers, particularly in some lines. The demand is reacting to the situation, though slowly. Undoubtedly there are several possibilities not yet operative which would help quite materially. Teacher-training institutions should seek to select more carefully and to recommend, as far as the supply will warrant, only those best qualified. Lastly, school authorities are justified in exercising greater discrimination than at present in the selection of their teachers, and in dealing more frankly and honestly with each other when recommending candidates.
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