Suburban School Libraries

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School libraries of all types, and in all settings, have been suffering from the growing pains of rapid school enrollment increases, but the library in the suburban school finds its problems brought into sharp focus when the implications of demographic changes are charted for future planning. The migration to the suburbs that has taken place in the past twenty years has placed unusual stresses upon the suburban school system and has posed problems unique among school libraries.

It is not the uniqueness of the suburban school library facilities or program that sets it apart but, rather, the character of the school, which is determined by the suburban community; and the character of the community determines the goals of the school program, the backgrounds that students bring to their formal schooling, and the quantity and quality of materials and services needed. The pattern of living in the community determines the curriculum, the organization of the school day and year, even the routines of library management. Therefore, to discuss the suburban school library one must discuss the suburban school, since the library is an integral part of the school system.

Suburban is used to describe a district, especially a residential district on the outskirts of a city, usually incorporated as a separate village, city, or town; in this paper it refers to those communities that are part of a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area but not the central cities of such an area.

Twenty years ago suburban living was a term connoting comfortable homes on wide streets, spacious lawns, upper level incomes that provided superior schools with well-equipped gymnasiums, auditoriums, libraries, and laboratories; schools that attracted competent faculties and provided many educational models for the entire

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country. Such suburbs have developed in an outer ring around the large metropolitan centers and have served as bedroom communities for executives and professional men in upper income brackets. The communities are of particular importance to the development of schools because they have been the scene for some of the outstanding school programs, notably the North Shore communities of the Chicago area and the Westchester and Long Island towns.

The image of the privileged life of the suburb has not been erased by changes of the past decade, but new aspects of the picture have become apparent. The percentage of the population of a metropolitan area living in the suburbs has greatly increased. During the first two decades of this century approximately one-third of the people living in a metropolitan area lived outside of the central city in a suburb, but by 1960 this percentage had increased to just under one-half, as an accelerated migration from the city cores continued. A population of 58 million has been projected as the increase in population of the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas, of which 45 million will be in the suburbs.

Within the Chicago Metropolitan Statistical Area there have developed suburbs that represent the full range of historical, economic, cultural, and social patterns. The suburban areas in this Metropolitan Area increased from 2,500 in 1920 to 20,000 in 1960, with a density today that ranges from 200 to 20,000 persons per square mile. Some of the unincorporated interstices, or fringe areas, are almost as densely settled as the towns, and these are rapidly becoming fully occupied. Selecting representative samples of different types of communities, one finds:

(1) the long-established, stable and relatively homogeneous suburbs that are largely high-income communities, e.g., Oak Park and Evanston;
(2) the communities of comparative size, also long-established and homogeneous, but less stable because the average income level is lower and the dominant function is industrial rather than dormitory, e.g., Cicero.

Until 1940 these two types of communities included the majority of suburbs. It was in the following decades that the next types emerged:

(3) the newly-developed suburbs—scenes of the tremendous building boom of the past decade—most of them with modest homes owned
by residents with only moderate-to-low incomes; communities too new to have much identity and whose economic function is mixed dormitory and industrial, e.g., Oak Lawn.

(4) one community that is unique in the Chicago area and fairly unusual in the country as a whole—Park Forest. This is a planned community that was founded in 1949 and has grown in eleven years to 30,000, with a strong community identity, moderate income level, with a majority of wage-earners being professional, executive, and business men, commuting into the Chicago Loop. All of the families living here have high aspirations in education for their children and the problems and achievements of Park Forest in realizing their goals provide an interesting pattern for understanding suburban development.

What has happened in the Chicago Metropolitan Area has been repeated to a greater or lesser degree in every such area in the country. The face of suburban living has come to have many aspects with the rapid exit from crowded cities to suburbs.

What has happened to change the aspects of life of the suburbs is apparent from a comparison of public school populations and level of support of the educational programs.

A comparison of gain in enrollments in representative high school districts of the four types of suburban communities in the five years between 1954 and 1959 reveals the pattern of growth. Evanston Township High School—the high school district in the first type of long-established, high economic level suburb—had a gain of 38 per cent enrollment; J. Sterling Morton High School (Cicero)—school district serving an industrial suburb of the second type—also had an enrollment gain of 38 per cent; Bremen Community High School—in an area of recently accelerated growth—had a gain of 93 per cent; and Rich Township High School (Park Forest) gained 146 per cent.

Projections for growth in the next six years, 1959-65, are 13 per cent for Evanston Township High School (Type 1), 16 per cent for J. Sterling Morton High School in Cicero (Type 2), 56 per cent for Bremen Community High School (Type 3), and 100 per cent for Rich Township in Park Forest (Type 4). Looking at this small, representative sample of pupil populations and degree of change against the per-pupil assessed valuation of each high school district provides an estimate of the magnitude of the financial problems involved in the school of the suburbs.
Per-Pupil Assessed Valuation

(Combined)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Tax Rate</th>
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<tr>
<td>Evanston Township</td>
<td>$95,360</td>
<td>$.98</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. Sterling Morton (Cicero)</td>
<td>$93,177</td>
<td>.93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bremen</td>
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<td>Rich</td>
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The wide range of per-pupil expenditures for schools in suburban communities is the result of a built-in inequality that is due to the nature of development of such communities. Sociologists are concerned with the stratification that results in communities homogeneous to the extent of representing one age group, one economic level, one cultural level. Lack of area planning finds a school district of small homes in a crowded residential area, with only a little more than $8,000 per child in property against which to levy a tax, while in the same county is an industrial district with almost a quarter of a million dollars behind each elementary child. These inequalities are increased as towns in fortunate location with respect to dormitory transportation and geographical attractiveness develop high-priced homes able to support the best schools, and the schools, in turn, enhance the property values and help to characterize the community as a deluxe suburb.

The out-city migration to the suburbs has been facilitated by higher average income levels, by shorter working hours, increased transportation (not by rail but by highway), broader credit financing of new homes, and decay of the central cores of cities. The recent migration has brought more young families and more families of medium and lower incomes to build and buy homes in the new suburbs. The aspirations motivating migration have been the same as those that brought families out of the growing central cities thirty and forty years ago—desire for open space, stable homogeneous neighborhoods, safe play areas, and good schools.

The importance of the aspiration for quality school experience for children has been dramatically illustrated by the resistance of the parents living in the newly-developed section of a wealthy Chicago suburb. There has been one high school in this suburb, and it has had one of the outstanding programs in the country, superior facilities, an excellent faculty, and an outstanding library. A proposal to build a new high school in the township to accommodate the increased
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enrollment has been turned down by the voters. Residents in the area that would be included in the new school’s territory were unwilling to accept the location of their children in any other than the nationally-famous New Trier High School. Many of them pointed out that this was the prime reason for their move into this particular suburb.

During the past decade the growth in the school population has been at its peak in the years covered by the elementary school that has just passed along the largest swell of the wartime and postwar “baby boom.” This increase in elementary school pupils was a gain of 50 per cent in the 1950’s and is expected to level off to approximately 29 per cent in the next 20 years. The early part of the next decade, however, will see an enrollment bulge at the high school level, and within 4-5 years at the colleges. The increase at the high school level may be less dramatic than at the elementary because there has already been a marked rise in the percentage of students who finish high school. This number will continue to rise to a predicted 60 per cent of the population who will be high school graduates in 1980, while the college graduates are projected to reach 10 per cent of the population in the same span of years.

The general effect of this rapid expansion of population in suburban communities has meant great pressures upon the existing school facilities, and the immediate need for many more schools, most of which were outgrown before they were completed. The immediate need in most communities has been for elementary schools, since the past ten years found the wartime and postwar babies at this level. If the prediction is correct that the rise in elementary population will be at a decreased rate for the next two decades, there are communities that have built enough classrooms for their elementary school enrollment and who may look for temporary respite from the overwhelming pressure to provide more elementary classrooms. It is conceivable that some classroom space may be available to provide elementary libraries, but the growing trend toward the education of four-year-olds will add to the elementary school load and absorb any available space.

The pressure will continue to be heavy upon the secondary school, however. Not only is an increase of 45 per cent projected for the 14 to 17 year old group, but the percentage of young people finishing high school is likely to continue to increase with the decline in unskilled labor force needed and the growing needs of industry and
business for skilled workers who can be trained to high degrees of competence on jobs requiring a minimum of twelve years schooling. The accelerated pace at which schools have been built in the past decade has all too often meant that, in the case of elementary schools, no library was provided, or, in the case of high schools, that the libraries provided minimum facilities in space, materials, and staff. Again at the range of suburbs in Cook County (Illinois), the Evanston Township High School on the north shore of Chicago is reaching for the 10 books per child figure recommended by the Standards for School Library Programs, with good elementary libraries in the area, but in the high schools in the newly-developed suburbs south of the city of Chicago, there is no high school that meets the national standard for printed materials, and there are no elementary school libraries, with the exception of the Park Forest district, where an elementary supervisor has been appointed to develop and to coordinate a library program in the schools of the village.

A community-wide scrutiny of the accessibility of materials for study and research by elementary and secondary school students underscores the serious shortcomings of resources for education in new suburban areas. In these communities public library facilities are likely to be far less adequate than those of school libraries. Wherever there have been developed systems of libraries, or cooperative arrangements of libraries, in these areas the materials and services are planned and organized on a sound tax basis able to provide for the needs of the citizens, young and old. But in the majority of our large metropolitan areas, such cooperative planning is only beginning. By far the most common pattern is for each village to organize a public library with book donations, to arrange for a minimum of service with volunteer help, and as soon as possible to seek a bond issue for a building. Only after this is achieved is a serious look given to the resources and the provision of a professionally trained librarian. Requests for state library books are usually the first answer to the empty shelves; the lack of a librarian is much more difficult to overcome.

In a suburban area of approximately 475 square miles, south of Chicago, there are 34 communities, of which 12 have libraries with some level of tax support. In addition there are 9 libraries operated on a voluntary basis, with no public money taxed or appropriated. Of the tax-supported libraries, only 4 are open as many as 50 hours a week. They report book budgets for 1959-1960 that range from $550 to $17,870, with a median of only $2,903. Obviously such public li-
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Libraries are too weak to supplement the school libraries in meeting the many needs of young people and children, and yet the majority of them are called upon to supply classroom libraries for the elementary schools.

The solution for many residents of the suburbs where there is inadequate provision of materials for personal interests and curriculum-centered research is to travel to the public libraries in the metropolitan area where materials can be found. Most of the large central-city libraries, as well as the well-established libraries in other communities of metropolitan areas, report a heavy increase in nonresident cards. Many libraries, as a result, have been forced to raise the fee asked for such nonresident service. College, university, and special libraries are concerned about the amount of service which they are asked to give to high school students.

This, then is the problem of the suburban school library at this time: a community-wide lack of adequate facilities, materials, and staff, both professional and clerical.

Factors to be discerned that will shape the suburban school library of the future must be gathered from several sources. They are to be found in the projected development of the populations of metropolitan areas, the emerging goals of the school, the new dimensions being evolved for school library programs, and the new solutions forecast for metropolitan community problems.

These implications will need to be studied in a continuing examination of the effectiveness of the library in every school setting. The need for a much broader collection of materials is obvious. Equally imperative is the planning to accommodate flexible scheduling and grouping of students, decentralization of some materials while maintaining strong advantages of a centralization of materials, making accessible to teachers and students all kinds of learning materials and the equipment to use them, and planning for participation in team teaching in whatever way is most appropriate and meaningful.

Several new secondary schools have received nationwide publicity because they have been designed by close collaboration of architects and educators and to a greater or lesser degree provide for the kinds of staff and facilities utilization envisioned in "Images of the Future." Most of these schools are located in a suburb of a large metropolitan area: Wayland, Massachusetts; San Bruno, California; Norridge, Illinois; Metairie Park, Louisiana. Such imaginative planning to accommodate new approaches to education will continue to multi-
ply; they will be expensive, but they will put the suburban school in the forefront of experimental education.

There is evidence of a strong trend to plan new schools with consideration for their relationship to the entire community. This is being done from both points of view: the needs of the community at large that can be served by the school facilities, and the need of the school population—pupils and teachers—to experience more fully the activities of community life.

As an aspect of the planning for better utilization of school facilities, the opening of school libraries in suburban schools, for evening hours, Saturday hours, and during vacation periods, is being tried in some communities. Such extended hours would provide the opportunities for use of school library resources for school-related assignments and relieve some of the pressure on public library reference collections. It has been evident in studies of accessibility of materials within schools that one of the major deterrents to the use of the school library by students is the lack of time in the school schedule for needed library research and study. The extension of opening hours would seem to be one of the first means of providing for the study needs of students. Not all schools that have reported experiments with increased hours of service have found this solution to be successful, but in many cases the experiment has probably been of too short duration.

Newly-identified school and community needs for extended service will help to characterize future suburban school library service. Summer school programs of enriched educational experience are being planned in most metropolitan areas today, and these depend heavily upon full library service in the school. The trend toward increased use of school facilities for adult education and community projects will create needs for extended hours of service. Because public library service is not available or adequate in so many of the new communities, school libraries are recognizing their responsibility to provide library service in vacation periods and during the summer. Essential to the instituting of extended hours is the provision of adequate personnel. Location of the library within the school is another important factor and should be a consideration in designing new buildings. If the library is on an upper floor, or at some distance from the main entrance to the building, keeping the library open in hours that are outside of the regular schedule of the school may present very difficult problems of access and maintenance.
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The needs of the total community are increasing in focus as more frequent proposals appear urging that consideration be given to providing library service to the whole community through the school library. In a school district located in the outer ring of the Detroit metropolitan area a plan was formulated to open the central library of the school to all the residents of the township. Financial arrangements would include a payment of $10,000 by the township for the first year's operation. In a newly-developed Chicago suburb the original bond issue for the construction of a secondary school was promoted with the promise that the school library in the new building would be a public library facility to serve the entire community.

Over the past twenty-five years, the profession has become well aware that the best school library program does not result from administration as a part of a public library organization. The location of public library branches in schools has provided neither the type of integrated school library program that modern instructional patterns demand, nor the dynamic service to the adults and pre-school population that a community hopes for.

In spite of the accumulated evidence that there are sound reasons for maintaining the two separate library services, it is important that careful study be given to the acute needs of the new suburbs. It may be that some form of service can be provided by the school library to the community as a whole, as an intermediate step, but it behooves librarians to assess their objectives and to inform school boards and village trustees of long-range goals for adequate community library service. Such arrangements could be fruitful only where there is a strong community identity and mobilized public effort to provide the best possible environment for its residents, and where the school administration and faculty are committed to a role of leadership in the development of the community. It would be a stopgap arrangement that would become permanent in those areas that are not participating in long-range planning, or where the school maintains a position of isolation from the community.

The possibility of re-examining patterns of service to children has been recommended in two recent survey reports. In the study of public and school libraries in Hawaii by R. D. Leigh, there is this recommendation:

It might be worthwhile, however, if physical conditions make it possible, to initiate two experiments in the combination of a public li-
library branch and school library, one in urban or suburban Oahu in a
district where a new high school and a new public library branch are
being planned; the other in a rural, sparsely populated area on one
of the other island counties. For the urban experimental installation
it would be necessary to have the accidentally favorable situation of
a location making possible a separate library annex directly ac-
cessible to a shopping center and the library's school library section
directly accessible to the high school's classrooms as well as to chil-
dren and young people coming from other schools.²

In the study of the libraries of metropolitan Toronto, R. Shaw
examines the inadequacies of both public and school library service
to children and points out that "in Metro [Metropolitan Toronto]
structure we have a mechanism for long range planning and develop-
ment of equal educational and cultural opportunities for all children
and adults in Metro, which makes possible more positive approaches
than have been made in other places in the past."³

An aspect of planning for future service that seems to hold great
promise for the improvement of suburban libraries is the develop-
ment of district and regional materials centers that will serve as aids
in the examination and selection of materials, that may perform the
functions of a centralized acquisitions service, that will have resources
for bibliographic control and services available to a wide area through
the development of technological facilities. Such facilities should
provide additional dimensions for all types of libraries in an area.
A materials center could be a level of most fruitful cooperation be-
tween school, public, and special libraries. Reference libraries that
serve as district or regional resource centers might help solve this
problem of providing materials and guidance for the high school
students.

The need for more finances for all levels of public schools in the
next 20 years is likely to increase. The educational program itself will
cost more. Enrollments will be increasing, and most rapidly at the
secondary and junior college levels, where costs are greater than at
the elementary level. More research is being sought in every area
of education, and this will be an addition to the overall budget. Sal-
aries are still far from the averages proposed recently by the Depart-
ment of Health, Education, and Welfare and the Office of Education
—$7,439 a year for instructional staff as a whole by 1961–62, and
$7,216 for classroom teachers.

The financing of school facilities is a particularly difficult problem
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at this time. In 1959–60 the total national expenditures for schools increased 6-7 per cent, twice the size of the increase in the national income. This year has seen another increase in enrollment, and a rise in salaries will mean a similar increase. One of the particular problems of the suburban school district is the time lag of two or more years between the time at which pupils in newly-developed areas enter school and the tax money from their property is received.

A disquieting resistance of voters to school financing has been evident in the past two years. The office of the Cook County (Illinois) Assistant Superintendent of Schools in charge of research reported that of 24 bond issues put before voters between October, 1960, and May, 1961, seven failed. This failure represented a loss record of 29 per cent, whereas loss records of the previous three years were 15 per cent, 6 per cent, and 2 per cent. There have been a number of instances of new schools constructed without adequate planning for furnishings and operation, and which, as a result, have stood idle one or more years. Libraries in suburban schools have opened without a book on the shelves, or with the only books being those provided by State Extension services.

A super-school district for suburban areas has been discussed in one state, one that would have power to levy nonproperty taxes for schools. Similarly, a metropolitan area taxing unit of three, or even six, counties to supply school funds has been recommended in another. If there is a combination of enforceable standards for schools and the provision of equalization funds, state funds can often be used to bolster school libraries. “Twenty-one states provide some form of direct state aid to school librarians and/or libraries.”

In the area of scientific inquiry lies hope for future improvements in the suburban school and the school library. This area is particularly ready for some careful evaluation and experimentation. Many of the innovative practices hold promise for the suburban school, especially the fuller utilization of facilities and the new organization of classes and schedules. Librarians should take the leadership in preparing a comprehensive plan for the future. They should, in every case, make themselves thoroughly familiar with the factors of change in their community and the projections for future growth and change. With blueprints of the future in hand, librarians should be able to develop recommendations for the kind of library program that would best implement the goals of the school and community. Dimensions of such long-range plans would include the quantity and variety of
materials needed to support the instructional program, recommendations for adequate physical facilities, provisions for students to engage in independent study, appropriate provisions for newer media, and provision for accessibility of materials throughout all areas of the school.

The increasing interdependence of all parts of the metropolitan area is underscoring the need for coordinated planning at the local, regional, and state levels. It is imperative that there be communication between the school and public library in the essential task of providing youth with the materials of learning. A status survey of the accessibility of materials for children and youth is an important first step in any planning for future development of library services. New blueprints for financing are imperative, but even before these can be drawn up, there must be an assessment of the resources and needs of the suburban schools in a metropolitan area, or part of that area, along with an identification of those processes and activities that could be centralized or performed cooperatively and those program aspects that must be strengthened in each school. Only thus can we begin to overcome the growing imbalance of the suburban schools and raise the level of all library service. Unquestionably, the new frontiers of school library service for the next two decades lie in the suburbs.

References