FACING THE FACTS

WE MUST squarely face the facts. The country is in one of those periods when all public institutions are finding it difficult to obtain the money necessary for their proper support.

The period of depression has made the whole country exceedingly critical of all public expenditures. This, combined with the general feeling of unrest, is putting many men into office whose platform is principally a general condemnation of the conduct of all public institutions and repeated statements that there is great "waste and extravagance" in all public expenditures. The schools are receiving a share of this general criticism. It will require both strenuous and intelligent efforts on the part of school executives and school people generally to win for the schools the support necessary for their proper development.

What are some of the facts that we should have clearly in mind as we work toward this objective?

First, the country is well able to meet its present educational expenditures. There is no basis, in fact, to justify alarm over the cost of public schools. The Nation is able to afford its present educational expenditures as well as additional expenditures when they become necessary. One glance at the chart reveals how small a proportion of the country's resources are being turned back into that greatest of all dividend-paying institutions—the public school. If the chart is not sufficiently convincing consider the following figures:

Cost of public schools, 1921: $1,129,000,000
Estimated National wealth, 1920: 232,977,598,000
Annual National income (average for 1920 and 1921): 62,000,000,000
Savings deposits, 1921: 16,618,595,000

All public school expenditures for the country as a whole could be provided for by a five-mill tax on our National wealth; these expenditures are less than two per cent of the National income and only slightly over seven per cent of the amount in the Nation's savings banks. These figures are sufficient justification of David Friday's statement, "The plea that expenditures for education or any other form of government activity for the benefit of the public must be curtailed for lack of funds cannot be treated seriously by those who know the facts."

Second, it is as easy for the country to provide adequate school support now as it was in 1913. Since the war we have been kept in such a fog of unanalyzed figures, all trying to prove that the increased expenditures for education have been "alarming" and "extravagant," that some of our most respected educators have been "taken in."

It is true that there have been some "real" increases in school costs resulting from increased attendance and the broadening of the school's work. Likewise, there have been some "real" increases in the National income in terms of quantity of goods produced, due to the wider use of machinery and general improvement of production methods. But far more important than either of these in bringing about the "rapid increase" in school expenditures and National income is the depreciation of the dollar. The so-called increases in educational expenditures have been largely fictitious. What has really happened since 1913 is that the dollar has depreciated in buying power. As a result educational expenditures, as well as National income, when measured in dollars, have both shown a rapid increase.

Had the cost of education, measured in dollars, increased more rapidly than National income, similarly measured, then it would be an entirely different matter. The table shows that educational expenditures after 1915 tended to increase less rapidly than National income. This is true until 1921, when the business depression had the effect of reducing the National income and at the same time increasing the relative percentage spent for the schools. The drop in National income in 1921 is generally recognized as an abnormal fluctuation rather than a permanent condition. Indications are plentiful that business conditions are again on the upward trend. When the figures are available they will probably reveal that the cost of the schools in 1922 and 1923 entailed no greater burden upon the country's resources than before the war.

The present difficulty in securing ade-
quate school support is more the result of an unfavorable psychological condition than a bad economic situation.

The temporary business depression and the barrage of unanalyzed figures on school costs have resulted in a rather wide acceptance of the view that school expenditures are extravagant, that they have unjustifiably increased, and that they are entailing unusual burdens on the Nation's ability to pay. Such is not the case. There may be some agricultural sections and isolated cities where school costs have exceeded the ability of the community to pay, but this condition is the exception and not the rule. Far more important is the general feeling of dissatisfaction that makes people especially responsive to negative suggestions touching school expenditures. Knowing the facts does not make the immediate situation any less serious. A cut in a school budget, whether based on sound or unsound beliefs, has a serious effect on the welfare of the children of the Nation. But the facts clearly indicate the policy that school people should pursue. We should bring every resource to bear upon the public consciousness to see that the schools are not crippled by the withholding of necessary support. People seldom fail to respond when legitimate school needs are placed before them.

The difficulty is that we have failed to recognize that we are living in an age when effective publicity is necessary in gaining public acceptance of any proposition. The public school has been so busy struggling with the forces that make for disintegration in our National life and in making itself a more positive force in the creation of a better citizenry that it has not taken time continually to "sell" itself to the American people, and now its improvement, and in some places its very existence, is threatened while less worthy causes receive generous support.

Conditions are different in every community and the appeal must be made with the audience clearly in mind. Let us indicate a possible approach. Figures just made available by the U. S. Bureau of Education give the following concerning per capita costs per pupil in 1921 - 22:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of cities</th>
<th>Population of cities</th>
<th>Average expenditure per pupil, 1921-22</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>100,000 and more</td>
<td>$88.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>30,000 to 100,000</td>
<td>$84.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>10,000 to 30,000</td>
<td>$73.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>5,000 to 10,000</td>
<td>$64.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These expenditures are now being attacked in several cities. Take the figure of $80 as representative of the cost per pupil in our city schools. Is this an unreasonable amount? Consider what it buys. In most cities it purchases 190 days of instruction of five hours or more, under a trained teacher, in a sanitary building. It often includes an hour or more of supervised physical training on a well-equipped playground. The cost is 42 cents per day. How does this compare with the cost of five hours' entertainment in the ordinary movie? How many children are spending this amount for unnecessary purchases that they would be better without? How many "heads of families" spend this much each day, with hardly a thought, for cigars for themselves and their friends? Surely a majority of the voters will not deny 42 cents or even more, for so important a purpose as the schooling of a child!

Direct personal appeals to the citizens of the community should be a part of every school program. These should be based upon the facts and should be scientifically worked out with the local audience concerned clearly in mind. The work that Alexander has done in this direction is suggestive and much more along similar lines should be worked out in the field. Upon the vigor and intelligence with which school publicity is carried on will depend the financial support provided for the schools. The money is there. The welfare of the children of the Nation demands that we obtain a proper proportion for the support of the schools. Are we going to do it?


Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.—James Davidson.

The nation as a whole has the obligation of measures toward its children, as a whole, as will yield to them an equal opportunity at their start in life.—Herbert Hoover.