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INCREASING THE EFFICIENCY OF THE VIRGINIA STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

MR. Chairman, fellow teachers, friends of education, it is a pleasure and privilege to have this opportunity to come to you today and bring to you the greetings of the various divisions of the departments of the V. S. T. A. This assemblage of teachers and other educators who are devoting their lives and giving of their best in thought and ability to the cause of education is within itself an inspiration and an hopeful fore-shadowing of educational progress in the state. When bands of men and women such as this are gathered together throughout the state in the interest of educational endeavor, there is, I am sure, no just cause for discouragement as to the ultimate outcome. These conferences held year after year for the consideration of those facts and factors which enter in the composition of our educational system *must* result in permanent good.

It has been interesting as well as most encouraging to note not only the increased attendance upon the district conferences, but a deeper interest in those things which concern the organization. As I have visited the various divisions, it has always been with a spirit of sympathy with the difficulties confronting those who year after year plan the programs and through them make the influence of the districts far-reaching. I come to you today that I may bring not only the word of encouragement in the splendid work that you are doing, but that I may add that word which may be helpful in the future progress of those educational activities in

which *you, all of us*, are interested. My message today will be in the form of several recommendations, or suggestions, which I hope may be helpful and received in the spirit in which they are offered.

1. A uniform *spring* election in every district in the State.
2. A standing publicity committee in each district.
3. Every school in the district closed for the yearly district meetings.
4. A 100% co-operation of teachers, superintendents, and other school officials.
5. A larger rural participation in the activities of the districts.
6. A 100% membership in the Virginia State Teachers Association.

Let us consider for a moment the first recommendation: *a uniform spring election in each district*. It is known to most of those present that in accordance with the constitution of the V. S. T. A., the election of officers in the different districts can take place either in the spring at the time of the annual district meeting, or at the Thanksgiving Conference at Richmond, the result being that some districts hold their elections in the spring while others elect at the time of the annual State Conference. It can be readily seen that this may at times cause some confusion at least in the minds of those who are not so closely affiliated with the State organization. But this is the least serious aspect of the situation. The district meetings in Richmond are frequently very poorly attended and this is especially true if it does not happen to be the year for the election of the officers of the State Teachers Association. The time for the meetings in Richmond is brief, and the number present very often does not even constitute a quorum. And yet in the hands of this small number, which is not representative, is placed the choice of the officers of the various divisions.

An address delivered by Miss Lulu D. Metz, President of the Virginia State Teachers Association, before the Conference of District "G," held at Harrisonburg, March 21-22, 1924.

This is a bad situation and one for which up to this time no remedy has been suggested. The time for the meeting in Richmond has been changed from time to time in an attempt to secure fuller attendance, but in most instances (there are exceptions) the attendance has been small. The situation last November (it was not the time for the choice of officers for the V. S. T. A.) was an illustration of the point I am trying to make. At that time several districts should have elected officers, but failed to do so on account of the poor representation at the meeting. Others did not meet or failed to elect when the number present was too small for the transaction of business. This was the fault of no one, but rather of the situation. The result was embarrassment on the part of those who were then holding office, uncertainty on the part of the Board of Directors as to the elections, and doubt and confusion.

The matter was adjusted satisfactorily, and all those now holding office are constitutionally elected and represent the choice of their respective districts. But the situation could be avoided by having uniform spring elections, in all the districts over the state. From the time when, ten years or more ago, I first became interested in the great possibilities of the district organizations and later when I served for a number of years as president of one of them, it has been my conviction that the selection of officers should take place at the time of the spring meeting rather than during the State Conference. Here it is that all the machinery of the district should be carried on. A regular scheduled business meeting offers this opportunity, and what is more important, there is a real representation of the district present. Several districts have always held the spring election, district F among these, and have found the plan to work satisfactorily. It would mean a slight revision in the Constitutions of those districts which have been accustomed to elect at Thanksgiving. But with the election and other matters of business planned and out of the way, I believe that those representing the districts would be prepared for both more profitable and pleasurable participation in the work and the activities of the State Organization. As it is, the officers are either completing their term of office at the time of the State Conference or just preparing to enter upon their duties.

Passing from this to the second point, *a permanent publicity committee in each district*, I would suggest that this committee have three members, and this year that one be elected for one year, one for two years, and one for three years. The duty of such a committee would be a wider publicity not only for the district meetings, but the bringing to the districts that information concerning the State Organization and other districts that would make them real participants in the educational affairs of the State and make them realize that they are real and vital parts of the State Organization.

Although every year sees an increased attendance upon the district meetings there is room for improvement in this direction. When I enjoy the splendid programs that are given at the district meetings and am inspired and benefited by them, I return to my work with renewed enthusiasm. But the thought invariably comes to me, "What a shame that every teacher and educational worker in the division could not have been present." Nor is it sufficient to have interested the teachers and school people *only* in those activities in which the district is concerned and engaged; we want the wide awake citizens, the patrons, the tax payers, to know what we are doing and the odds against which we often struggle, in the fight for educational privileges and advantages for their children. I am more and more convinced every day that we shall never see the culmination of those things which we are trying to do nor the full realization of our ideas and ideals until *all* the people are interested in them, and become a vital factor in their making. The defeat of school legislation year after year is a striking example not only of the lack of interest in educational matters on the part of the public, but a lack of that knowledge that will bring about the needed interest. That man who understands the obstacles in the way, the amount of money necessary to educational purposes, the cost resulting from ignorance, the advantages of having all the people of a community educated, that man does not begrudge the taxes he pays to support education, even though he may have no children to be educated. We have long had as our motto "The education of all the children in the State." May we not realize what it would mean if we substitute

in its stead: "The education of *all of the people* of the State." As a first step we need to have all the people hear these programs on which often appear the most prominent educators and thinkers in the State and country, and which offer the best in thought, in culture, in inspiration.

There are numbers of our teachers who never attend the meetings nor do they feel that they have any part in the affairs of the district. We need every teacher in the State and especially those in the far rural sections, and it is these whom we are in many instances not reaching. The rural problem is still an ever-present and unsolved one, and just in proportion as the teachers in the rural schools and communities realize their part of the responsibility of giving to those children over whom they are placed advantages equal to those given the city child, shall we be able in greater measure at least to meet the situation. These conferences, as far as is possible, should be carried occasionally at least, to available rural points. And again, I realize the seemingly unsurmountable difficulties in the way. Our permanent publicity committee appointed from each district would give wider publicity to the meetings that are held from year to year, and see that no teacher, however far from the place of meeting, fails to have the opportunity of knowing what is going on.

And this leads us naturally to the next point: *How secure a larger attendance and a wider interest in the work of the different State divisions.* For the final solution to this I believe that we must look to the superintendents, for they, it seems to me, hold in their hands, perhaps as no others, the key to the situation. In many counties of the State, the superintendents close all the schools in their respective counties and every teacher (who is paid for the days at the rate of her salary) is expected to attend the meetings. In some instances the days are counted as time taught. The inspiration and good received from the programs more than compensate, I am convinced, for the loss of time, if in any possible way we can call the time lost. If our superintendents would all take this step, the attendance upon the conferences would be many times increased, and the usefulness and effectiveness of the district as an organization increased one hundred percent.

Many of our teachers are unable to attend the State Conference because of the expense of travel when the distances are far, and that they should have the opportunity of attending at least the district meetings is their due, both for their own sakes and the sake of those committed to their care. All of us need the inspiration of meeting together with others of our profession, as well as that contact with those influences outside our own circle. The superintendents have always co-operated in those things which make for progress and they will, I know, lend their co-operation and help in this too. I have been deeply interested in the matter of strengthening the efficiency and usefulness of the V. S. T. A., but at the same time I have realized that we must build from the foundation. The State Organization can never do its best work nor reach its highest point of efficiency until the local and district organizations realize to the fullest how vital and essential a part they are of the State Organization. The local associations have always functioned in a very special manner because the superintendents have accepted these as their responsibility and just in proportion as they realize the possibilities of the district organization, will it also become a more vital factor in our educational system.

We are not discouraged; we have no just cause to be. We know that when all have put their hands to the plow, the work will be done. These, my friends, and fellow-workers, are a few of the thoughts which I wish to leave with you. A spring election in every district; a standing publicity committee; a yearly meeting in every district; as far as possible, a 100% attendance as the result of co-operation of teachers, superintendents, and all State officials, and as a result, a 100% membership in the V. S. T. A. I have long had these upon my heart and conscience, and I leave them now with you, and ask only that you, too, give them your careful and earnest consideration.

And before I am through may I add my word of appeal to that of your Chairman in behalf of the Preventorium campaign which is now going on and to ask for him your hearty and sympathetic co-operation. I am delighted with the ready response with which the whole project has been met. The reports are most gratifying, but we need the

help of everyone in the State to carry the work to completion. It is a most worthy cause and one for which the teachers of the State will be proud, justly proud, when it shall have been finished. We need only ask them how many times they have asked or thought: "What will become of me if I become ill?" "Where would I go should an illness overtake me?" and many others, to know that they realize to the fullest what the Preventorium will mean to them. And may I remind you that the Preventorium is not for the teachers only, but for all those engaged in educational work, which means that all will have a part in the building. The Preventorium will be erected at Charlottesville on the University of Virginia grounds. It will cost about forty thousand dollars. It will contain about forty beds and accommodate forty on sleeping porches. It will be under the control of the Medical Board of the University of Virginia Hospital, and a permanent board of control appointed by the V. S. T. A. A thorough physical examination, any necessary operation, one week in the University Hospital will be given those who apply, and at a cost not to exceed \$25.00. (The cost of this week elsewhere under ordinary circumstances might easily amount to several hundred dollars.) After this week under the special care of the University physicians, a bed in the Preventorium will be ready for those who need additional rest and treatment. If the week in the hospital is unnecessary, a few weeks of rest in the Preventorium may prevent a long illness or a nervous breakdown. The Preventorium gives us the opportunity of paying a debt we have long owed those of our profession who have broken down in service and need our help. It is here that any teacher or school official in the State of Virginia may go and receive that expert medical assistance that will renew physical vigor, prolong life, and make retirement unnecessary. It is perhaps the greatest and most needed piece of work ever undertaken by the Virginia State Teachers Association for the welfare of its members. Your bed will be ready if you need it. Help make it and if you are fortunate enough never to use it, pass it on to one of your profession who may need it. Your individual contribution is four dollars. This added to your help and sympathetic support will result

in that which will open the doors of hope to all. Your chairman is Superintendent Shelburn. Give him your check or make your pledge as soon as possible that sufficient funds may be in hand to assure the breaking of the ground as soon as winter is over. No worthier cause was ever undertaken by the teachers of the Commonwealth.

LULU D. METZ

STUDENT GOVERNMENT IN A FIFTH GRADE

MY decision to institute student government arose from the desire to maintain a more natural form of class discipline, and to inspire the principles of co-operation and citizenship.

When the plan was proposed and outlined to the children, it was accepted by them with great enthusiasm. The idea of taking care of themselves, as they expressed it, appealed to them strongly. After we had discussed it at some length, they wished to establish some laws; so each child thought out and wrote such laws as he felt were necessary in school.

When these were brought up for consideration some were voted out as unnecessary by the class, and some of course were duplicated. Those which the children voted to keep were the nine following:

- (1) No drinks of water when in line.
- (2) No unnecessary talking when Miss Magruder is out of the room.
- (3) No talking when it will disturb others.
- (4) No eating in school.
- (5) No playing with toys during class.
- (6) Always walk up and down the stairs.
- (7) Keep floor and desks neat.
- (8) Keep lines straight and quiet.
- (9) Do not talk when another person is speaking.

These were accepted as written by the children and copied into the books which they had bought for that purpose.

I then suggested the need of officers who would see that the laws were obeyed. The