

**STUDY OF THE NEED FOR LAW-RELATED EDUCATION
IN VIRGINIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**REPORTED TO
THE GOVERNOR AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA**



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MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE APOINTED TO STUDY AND REPORT ON
SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 66, 1974 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, both the legal profession and law enforcement agencies throughout the United States have noted with concern a lack of respect for law on the part of youthful Americans. The rising incidence of youthful involvement in crime testifies to this lack of respect. It also suggests that this attitude may stem in part from lack of knowledge of the law.

It has become increasingly clear that many public school students have a lack of understanding of why law is essential to the functions of a democratic society. At a time in our history when great emphasis is placed on individual rights, we have discovered that many young people do not possess a comprehensive understanding of what rights they possess. More significantly, it is apparent that young people and adults alike fail to consider that if they have rights under the law they also have responsibilities.

This emphasis on rights which are not fully understood and responsibilities which are ignored has led lawyers and educators in many parts of the nation to advocate and devise programs in law-related education at all grade levels of the public schools. Many of these programs have been successful and have become an integral part of the educational program in a number of states.

In February of 1974, the Board of Education recognized the growing interest in law-related education and approved a recommendation of the Superintendent of Public Instruction that a committee consisting of teachers, administrators, and members of the legal profession be appointed to study this matter and submit a plan for giving appropriate emphasis to this area of instruction.

In Virginia, some exploratory efforts at law-related education have been undertaken on the initiative of individual school systems and representatives of the legal profession. In the City of Richmond, for example, the Young

Lawyers Section of the Virginia Bar Association conducted a pilot project in three of the city's middle schools. That 1973 pilot project, which was planned and developed in cooperation with the Richmond City School System and the Office of the Attorney General, will be expanded.

The Virginia State Bar has been involved in promoting the development of law-related education in Virginia's public schools since 1967. In the summer of 1973, the State Bar Younger Members Conference took over this State Bar project and appointed a Law-Related Education Project Committee. Utilizing a grant from the Division of Criminal Justice and Crime Prevention, this committee, with the Youth Education for Citizenship Committee of the American Bar Association, cosponsored a Regional Conference on Law-Related Education on May 3-4, 1974, which was attended by more than 50 Virginia educators and lawyers. A number of the conferees served on the Committee to Study and Report on Senate Joint Resolution No. 66.

The State Bar Committee has developed a course outline and materials which are being used in a law-related education course in a high school in Chesterfield County, with plans to expand to other county schools in 1975. The Committee also has been working in other school divisions in the State in the area of materials, visiting attorney-speakers, and law-related education planning and programming.

A law-related program has been established by the Alexandria City Public Schools. "Justice and Law: A Study in Rights and Responsibilities," was a project which enlisted the aid of not only members of the Bar but professional law enforcement officers to supplement the work of classroom teachers in Alexandria. Other Virginia localities have instituted law-related education programs in varying degrees in recent years. Law-related studies have been part of various programs from kindergarten through grade twelve. An in-depth study of law is included presently in the required course, Virginia and United States Government.

The General Assembly in March of 1974 approved Senate Joint Resolution No. 66, introduced by Senators F. T. Gray of Chesterfield, James T. Edmonds of Kenbridge, Paul Mann of Bowling Green, and Stanley C. Walker of Norfolk. Senate Joint Resolution No. 66 directed the State Department of Education to study the need for a course of instruction in the public schools to inform young Virginians of their legal responsibilities and relationships.

Senate Joint Resolution No. 66 stated:

Resolved by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the State Department of Education is hereby directed to study the need for offering a course of instruction and study which will inform young Virginians of the nature of their legal responsibilities and relationships. Such course shall place special emphasis on the obligation of a person not to violate the criminal law of this Commonwealth and the value to the individual of a noncriminal life. In addition, the course shall include instruction in the nature and meaning of legal relationships created in everyday life between citizens of this Commonwealth such as; marriage, divorce, contracts, insurance and other similar matters.

The Department shall conclude its study and make its recommendations, to include the subject matter content of such a course, to the Governor and the General Assembly not later than December one, nineteen hundred and seventy-four.

NEED

In 1973, more than 26 percent of the crimes committed in the United States were committed by young people under 18 years of age. This age group, according to the FBI's annual report, "Crime in the United States, 1973," accounted for criminal charges as indicated:

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| Murder and Nonnegligent Manslaughter | 1,497 |
| Manslaughter by Negligence | 363 |
| Forcible Rape | 3,772 |
| Robbery | 34,374 |
| Aggravated Assault | 26,270 |
| Burglary - Breaking and Entering | 170,228 |
| Larceny - Theft | 310,452 |
| Auto Theft | 66,868 |

The under-18 group was also charged in 1973 with 83,428 instances of vandalism, 127,316 drug violations and 103,556 counts of disorderly conduct.

While comprehensive statistics are not readily available in 1974 on juvenile offenses in Virginia, it is obvious from a routine appraisal of reports throughout the State that young people in Virginia are contributing to the overall crime statistics in the Commonwealth.

Lack of knowledge of the law and its purposes, of course, cannot be viewed as the principle reason for the participation of young people in criminal activities. The Study Committee, however, has no doubt that it is a contributing factor. Lack of respect for law, on the other hand, is

obviously a major contributing factor. Based on a premise that knowledge breeds respect, the Committee came to the decision that there is an immediate need to encourage some form of law-related education in the public schools of the Commonwealth. If the next generation of Virginians is to influence and to lead this State toward continued achievement among her sister States, that generation must have both knowledge of and respect for law. It is the conviction of this Committee that law-related education can provide both.

There was general agreement of the committee that there is a need for law-related education in the public schools of the Commonwealth in all grades, kindergarten through grade twelve. The consensus of the Committee was that law-related education in the public schools can be of benefit as a means of making young people aware of their responsibilities, as well as their rights, as citizens.

Committee members felt that law-related education could be integrated into existing courses and thus made available to a maximum number of students; and that special courses could be designed in law-related subjects on an elective basis for students. Law-related education must be integrated into the total public school curriculum, kindergarten through grade twelve. Specific courses which should give attention to law-related education are Virginia and United States History and Virginia and United States Government. While various subject areas may give attention to law-related education, the major focus should be in the social studies (history and social science) curriculum.

Emphasis on law-related education will take various forms as programs are designed locally. It was recommended by the Committee that a school-community partnership be formed as law-related education programs are developed and that special emphasis be placed on the fundamental rules of law and the processes of a democratic form of government.

MATERIALS AND PERSONNEL

The Committee reviewed various types of law-related education programs now in existence, both in-state and out-of-state, the kinds of materials available to teachers. Committee members examined teaching materials available on law-related education from many sources.

Law-related education, the Committee agreed, can most effectively be taught by professional educators. Lawyers and other resource persons can assist teachers in classroom activities. Teachers will need some specialized form of education, both pre-service and in-service, in order to develop educational programs in the area of law-related education.

IMPLEMENTATION

While implementation of law-related education programs is a subject for continuing consideration, the committee recommends a number of immediate actions including:

- (a) Establishment of a State Advisory Committee on Law-Related Education of attorneys, educators, and laymen to be appointed by the Superintendent of Public Instruction.
- (b) Creation of a Curriculum Committee on Law-Related Education, appointed by Superintendent of Public Instruction, to provide educational materials, encourage in-service programs, and to suggest alternative approaches in law-related education for local school divisions.
- (c) Development of a Registry of attorneys, educators, law enforcement personnel, and similar resource persons who can assist in the implementation of law-related education.
- (d) Utilization of Educational Television.

- (e) Development of pre-service and in-service education programs for teachers who will instruct in the area of law-related education.
- (f) Utilization of community resource personnel.
- (g) Development of a Resource Center for Law-Related Education materials. The Resource Center would have both print and non-print materials.

Five local school divisions in Virginia were selected by the Department of Education in June 1974 to participate in a pilot study program in law-related education. School divisions and division superintendents participating in this program include:

| <u>School Division</u> | <u>Division Superintendent</u> |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Alexandria | Dr. John C. Albohm |
| Martinsville | Mr. John D. Richmond |
| Norfolk | Dr. Albert Lee Ayars |
| Henrico County | Dr. W. E. Campbell |
| Fairfax County | Mr. S. John Davis |

The experiences of these school divisions will be reviewed by the proposed State Advisory Committee and the Curriculum Committee and other school divisions.

Law-related education will continue to be an important and integral part of the total educational program as the Department of Education accepts the challenge to provide continuing leadership in this vital area of the school curriculum.

