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Health Bulletin for School Administrators

The 24-Hour Plan

THE SCHOOL administrator and those who work with him in the school and community, are continually faced with the problem of providing for the school population an adequate amount of time for all the different activities of a 24-hour cycle of day and night—work, play, meals, relaxation, and sleep. Some of the questions overlapping this central problem with which every administrator is familiar are: What should be the length of the school day? Is it ever profitable to prolong school hours in an effort to solve an individual intellectual or disciplinary problem? How can the student's program of work be planned to meet his individual health requirements? Should home work be reduced? Should extra-curricular activities be curtailed or expanded? Is it possible to base participation in extra-curricular activities upon individual needs, and if so, how?

In a discussion of sleep, the answers to questions of this kind are of considerable importance inasmuch as activities in the period of wakefulness have a profound effect on the amount and quality of sleep, and adequate sleep is vital to the successful performance of daytime activities. Sleep and wakefulness are bound together as day and night and light and darkness are bound together by one revolution of the turning earth. Modern life, with its increased tempo and noise, is a strong competitor of sleep and rest. The quality and amount of sleep each person gets has a real effect on his capacity for work, his enthusiasm, his creative activity, and his relationships with others. Without the rehabilitation of sleep, "great nature's second course," no individual can enjoy to the fullest degree the activities of his waking moments.

The principal function of sleep is that of freeing the brain of the fatigue of yesterday and revitalizing it for the work of tomorrow. Scientists report that although loss of sleep produces few tangible physiological changes in the workings of the human body, it does result in a fatigue of the higher levels of the cerebral cortex. Consequently, repeated deprivation of sleep tends to increase irritability and emotional instability, and to decrease the speed and accuracy of muscular and mental performance. The reverberations set up by one individual's state of sleepiness are many within a school system where good human relationships play such a vital part. Students with poor posture, lack of attention, and disciplinary problems, and teachers who are exasperated, impatient, and disturbed, may simply be suffering from lack of sleep.

The amount of sleep required varies according to the physical make-up of the individual and his daily occupation and recreational activities. Thus it is for each one to study and understand his specific needs and the most profitable way of meeting them. Good health habits, a regular

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routine, a setting conducive to sleep, relaxed posture, and peace of mind, all promote ease of going to sleep and influence the quality of the sleep itself. Sometimes acute or chronic insomnia is caused by a physical defect, but apparently it is more often due to an incapacity to banish the responsibilities and cares of life during the period set aside for body recuperation.

Coexistent with the body's need for sleep are the related needs of rest, relaxation, and play. Children and adults alike need the freedom and relief from tension which may be found in recreational activities. Play contributes to good attitudes and gives as much opportunity to recognize the happy, the humorous, the real, and the valuable, as do other aspects of living. Good balance between work, sleep, and play is fundamental to effective living. The administrator who encourages the proper organization of daily schedules and the planning of pertinent activities and instruction helps students to acquire an understanding of the physiological reasons for the establishment of a well-balanced routine.

Statistics for the school year of 1940-1941 show that there are approximately 30,000,000 students enrolled in our public day and night schools. More than 1,000,000 teachers and a proportionate number of administrators possess a fortune in opportunities to help boys and girls arrive at a workable philosophy of life. But are all the teachers of these 30,000,000 boys and girls bringing to their groups humor, serenity, and confidence, as well as intellectual stimulation? In the 1938 yearbook of the Department of Classroom Teachers of the National Education Association, *Fit to Teach*, only 64.5 percent of the teachers who participated in a health questionnaire report that they observe the habit of getting plenty of sleep, while 37.5 percent report that they have "persistent worries intense enough 'to interfere with sleep, efficiency as a teacher, or health'." To help teachers push out of their lives strain and overloading details is to provide a more healthy emotional environment for students.

Sleep and play are vital factors in the well-being of the administrator himself for the fuller accomplishment and enjoyment of life and for the prevention of the all too common nervous breakdowns and other physical incapacities. Now more than ever before school administrators need to build up a physical and emotional reserve as a defense against the added tension and pressure which surrounds them. This country needs its school administrators and all the good judgment they possess to carry the responsibility of developing the most valuable of all national resources—youth. With adequate sleep and recreation as his allies, he may help this generation to meet with true courage and assurance problems of ~~more far-reaching importance than those which his predecessors have ever been called upon to face.~~

SCHOOL HEALTH BUREAU—WELFARE DIVISION
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