WPA SCHOOL AID PROGRAM TO REACH MORE THAN 1,000,000 CHILDREN

More than a million school children will benefit this year through various health and educational measures provided for them by the Works Progress Administration, Administrator Harry L. Hopkins said today. For many, it will mean the difference between attending or not attending school.

In practically every state, Mr. Hopkins said, needy children are being given physical check-ups, dental examinations and sight and hearing tests which they otherwise would not have. Physical and constitutional ailments will be discovered in thousands of cases which might otherwise progress to the danger point, and treatment provided for. Other thousands will be immunized against communicable diseases.

At the same time, plans for resuming school lunch programs are under way with renewed vigor, with many communities prepared to support their programs on a more stable, year-round basis. In many places community gardens operated by WPA workers have been harvested, and the produce canned or preserved against the time it will be needed to feed hungry school children this winter. WPA sewing rooms have accumulated quantities of warm clothing -- coats, sweaters, dresses, suits, etc. -- which will be distributed soon.

And in thousands of schools, many of which are themselves the product of WPA labor, the course of learning will be noticeably easier
this year because of new facilities which the WPA has provided. New recreation and playground equipment has been installed in many places. Others have acquired libraries or had old ones improved by cataloging and book repairs. Many will be brightened by the additions of pictures, murals and sculpture provided by the art projects. Visual education aids -- graphic presentation by means of charts, pictographs, dioramas, etc. -- will facilitate instruction in hundreds of schools.

"The WPA has been a powerful prop to education in many communities which have had to economize during recent years," Mr. Hopkins said. "Declining revenues have caused many state and local education bodies to make drastic reductions in their budgets. In hundreds of communities all but the most essential functions have been dropped, and school children have suffered in consequence.

"In reestablishing these functions the WPA has not only helped the cause of education in maintaining its advances of the last decade, but frequently has extended them. For example, educators have long recognized that undernourished children are among the most backward in their classes. Practically every school has its quota of needy children who do not get enough nourishing food at home. Their plight, in most cases, was simply one of the paradoxes about which nothing could be done.

"In the last two years, however, the WPA has prepared and served approximately 125,000,000 nourishing, hot lunches to needy school children all over the country. The results have been spectacular. Not only has the health of these children improved, but so has the quality of their work. It has actually been the determining factor in whether or not many of them would be able to attend school at all."
Mr. Hopkins said that he had been assured by Ellen S. Woodward, Assistant Administrator in charge of women's and professional projects, that the school lunch program would continue undiminished during the coming school year. Approximately $6,750,000 in Federal funds was spent on this work last year, giving employment to nearly 15,000 women in the preparation and handling of food. The program will be conducted this year on a commensurate scale.

Hundreds of schools throughout the country, particularly in rural regions, have no medical service other than that supplied by the WPA. Working cooperatively with state and local boards of health, doctors and nurses are supplied many of these schools on either a full- or part-time basis to render superficial medical care, conduct physical examinations and give simple instruction in health and hygiene. In the last two years more than 940,000 school-age children were given medical examinations through the WPA and 550,000 were immunized against communicable diseases.

An interesting phase of this work consists in giving tests for hearing deficiencies. Such deficiencies, if discovered in time, often can be treated to prevent deafness in later life. In New York City alone more than 1,000,000 such tests have been given school children in the last three years by WPA workers. By repeating the tests at stated intervals, development of hearing deficiencies can be noted and proper treatment prescribed.

Projects related to school libraries operate in many communities, both urban and rural. Book repair projects have saved schools hundreds of thousands of dollars in prolonging the life not only of library volumes but of text books as well. The Chicago Board of Education announced only a few weeks ago that WPA workers had saved the city an
estimated $100,000 in the last three years through the salvage of approximately 450,000 damaged and discarded text books. Experienced library workers have been found on WPA rolls to direct the work of cataloging and generally increasing the usefulness of school libraries. Many isolated schools get their only library service through traveling libraries -- by mail, truck and even horseback -- operated by the WPA.

The use of visual aids to teaching is a relatively new field in which the WPA has done a considerable amount of exploring. It is recognized that many people learn more quickly through what they see than what they read or hear. Hence, some subjects which are unassimilable when presented in the conventional school room manner are quickly understood when offered in graphic form. WPA workers in many localities have prepared a great number of charts, posters, dioramas and other ingenious devices for this purpose.

In a few states, California in particular, the preparation of these visual aids has been extended to the point of creating portable museums. Exhibits depicting the early life of the state, of its principal industries, its population groups and its several social and economic problems are sent various schools in rotation, where they have been declared of great value in imparting reality to subjects formerly considered too complex for the ordinary school child's understanding. Several other states are expected to copy this plan during the present year.

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