Wilmington has met new pupil problems head-on

By
DR. GENE A. GEISERT

WILMINGTON, Del. — Urban public school systems are failing.

This simple statement has become something of a universally accepted axiom in the United States today. But it is far from being either universally applicable or true.

MRS. ETHEL CLOSSON, a Wilmington, Del. teacher and author of a book on family life education, works with children in an elementary classroom. She is one of the many teachers, who have helped reverse the pattern of declining education in the school system. With the shift of the school population from white to black, teachers have developed courses and workshops to enable teachers and students to learn the best of all worlds.

Constantly under the critical scrutiny of parents, newsmen, taxpayers, government officials and "experts," urban schools are portrayed as reservoirs of hopeless inefficiency if not incompetence.

Some criticism leveled has legitimacy and must not be ignored. But it is the feeling in Wilmington, Del. that the nationally reported difficulties of hopeless failure should not be "laid on us."

Wilmington offers no exception to the pattern of changing student population in cities.

Here, the so-called "minority group" is the majority with 78 per cent of the students being black.

But Wilmington has refused to equate a burgeoning student population of largely low income blacks with imminent educational failure.

One recently brought to light fact supports this — achievement results for the 1969-1970 school year.

Five grades (3, 4, 6, 7, 10) were given pre and post achievement tests with an intervening period of seven months. Results show that on the average the students gained a month in achievement for each month of instruction.

This growth rate occurred at all ability levels ranging from youngsters designated for special education classes (with I.Q.'s

(Continued on Page 29)

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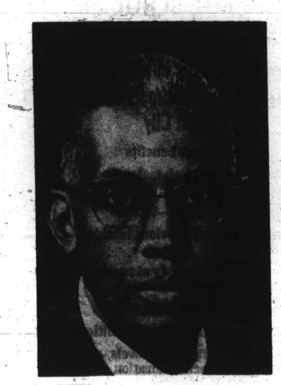
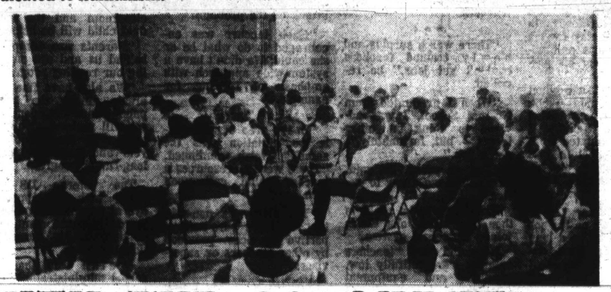


WILLIAM H. SIMONS

The Washington Teachers' Union stands ready to meet the challenge of the new decade — "Providing Optimum Educational Opportunities for the Students in the Nation's Capital.

Teaching offers an excellent career for those who are interested in bringing about the necessary changes needed in order to make this nation a society of people dedicated to humanism.



WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY

"The parents are demanding and are going to have a greater say in the operation of the schools, whether the teachers are with them or against them. We want to be with the parents and we have no intention of aligning ourselvs with reactionary forces that fear community involvement."

Implementing these words into concrete action, the Union has fully supported the Morgan Community School Project and the Anacostia School Project. At its September 1968 membership meeting the Union voted to adopt a position in support of the community control school concept.

A COMMITMENT TO IMPROVE THE SCHOOLS

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Following the recommendations of the Passow Report, the Union secured in the second contract the opportunity for teachers to render decisions regarding inservice training. In this connection, the Union teachers throughout the system assisted in formulating effective staff development programs on May 28 and May 29, 1969. The contract calls for ongoing staff development programs.

WORKING WITH STUDENTS TO SECURE CHANGE

The Union teachers at Margaret Washington Vocational School supported the militant boycott tactic of the students last Spring as the students sought to dramatize the plight of the conditions at the school. Through their direct action efforts and with teacher support, the students forced the board and the city fathers to correct some of the gross inequalities existing at the school.

CONTINUING THE EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION

The programs briefly mentioned above represent the kind of Teacher Power actions in which we believe teachers must engage, if we are to produce a real revolution in our schools. We further believe that the Washington Teachers' Union must continue to be profoundly involved in the social movement to eradicate racism and poverty. As in any social movement seeking change, there are battles that must be waged on all froots from the classroom to the picket line, and the Washington Teachers' Union is convinced that in our sick society today, the Teachers' Union must exert its energies beyond the normal "bread and butter" issues.

A new professionalism