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Men With Pizazz

His Business Is the Three-Rs

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Sentinel Staff Writer

Education has been undergoing some startling transitions in Santa Cruz City, County, the State of California and the United States.

To get a local view from the top, just ask Dr. Richard R. Fickel who is Santa Cruz County Superintendent of Schools.

He has been doing some serious analyzing of the whole public education scene recently, in connection with an interview for a book. The book — which is well underway — is a history of Santa Cruz County schools from the day of the first local residents, the Ohlone Indians, through the Santa Cruz Mission era, Mexican days, Yankee settlers and up to the present day.

It is being compiled and written at the request of Dr. Fickel because he believes

such a record is an important part of every Santa Cruz County resident's heritage.

Education has long been on the Santa Cruz scene and its path has often been rocky, as it is today.

"Going way back into history, from the 1700s through the 1800s education was mainly the concern of the church and of the parents," Dr. Fickel says.

"From the early 1900s to the 1960s education moved out of the realm of church and parents and into a more institutionalized atmosphere. From the late 1960s to date, education is moving back to the parents and the community."

He says the main thing he sees happening today is that education is being returned to the people.

We are in a transitional era of upheaval and conflict. But parents care. They are no longer in awe of author-

ities and institutions.

Another way of putting the whole picture: from early-day community involvement education has moved into institutional involvement, and is now on the way back to community involvement.

And — as the educational wheel turns, it hits some rough spots.

Parents sometimes want to usurp the powers of administration...

Oftentimes, people who are disenchanted with the public school systems don't know why they are disenchanted...

The role of the teacher is undergoing some unsettling changes...

Parents sometimes try to set standards for teachers and schools without having the adequate background information needed to do so...

There is a whole new morality — like it or not...

"We are dealing with the drug scene and unwed teenage mothers, for example," Dr. Fickel enumerates.

Money problems have always haunted the public schools to some degree, but they are acute in the present era. Bond issues fail; school programs are cut, some are dropped, and the students are the losers.

According to Dr. Fickel there is even the curious paradox of the protesters and the verbalizers:

"I believe the people who make the biggest noise are those who went into education and from it gained the ability to organize their objections and to verbalize their thoughts," he says with a degree of humor.

Santa Cruz County, the second smallest county in the State of California, has several conflicting forces at work, further complicating the job of public education.

There is the county's geographical location which has always isolated it to a degree (admittedly less and less); there's the older, more conservative population segment; the more liberal teaching community; cultural conflicts in the area of morality, and a newer, more liberal college and university segment.

With all these elements of conflict, Fickel believes public education is still doing an excellent job.

"I don't believe education is bad — but it must get better," is the way he puts it.

And where is it headed today?

"Definitely back to the community," he says. "Equal Opportunity programs, Community Action boards and the new Educational Acts require that parent advisory committees be part of the action."

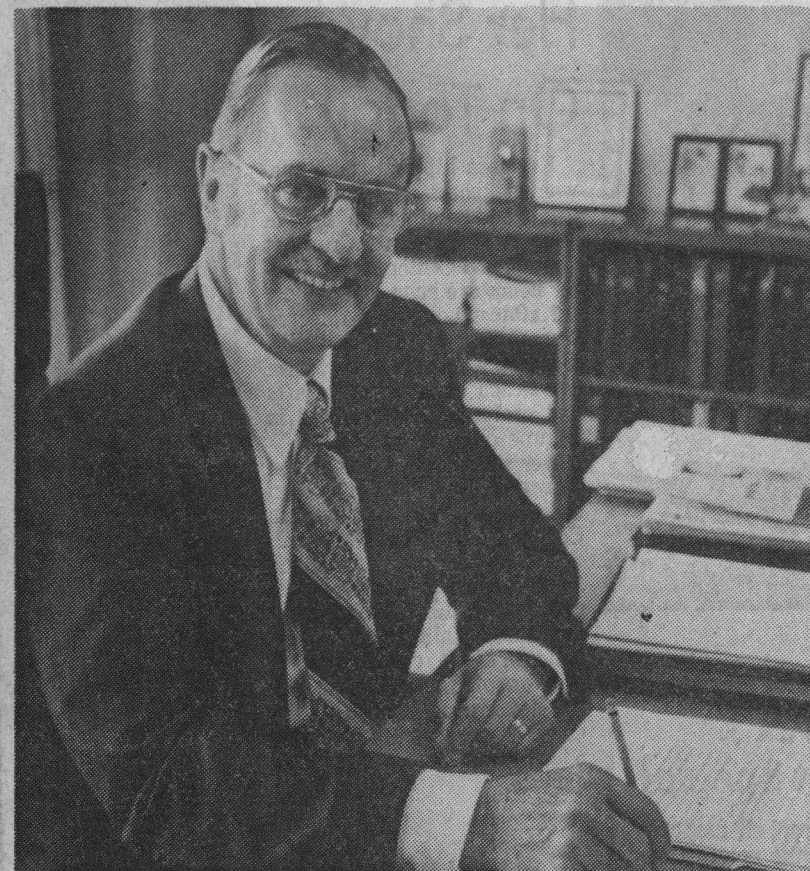
Early childhood education, which has come to the fore recently, requires that parents and communities become involved.

"Parent involvement is needed," he points out, "not to 'run' the schools, but to provide input so that better decisions can be made."

Families interested in education are important to Dr. Fickel. He was born in Wenatchee, Washington, and was 11 years old when his father died. His mother, who was a Church of God minister, brought him to Santa Cruz where she pastored the Seabright Avenue church.

Richard graduated from Santa Cruz High School in 1937, attended Fresno State University where he earned his teaching credentials, then was called into active service with the U.S. Airforce in 1943.

Three years later he arrived back in Santa Cruz



"My personal feeling is that the public schools are the servants of society..." Dr. Richard Fickel at his desk in the Santa Cruz County Governmental Center.

with the rank of Captain.

"I had always wanted to teach," he says, "and I took a job at Scotts Valley School at \$140 a month."

He had married and the Fickels had one child. Mrs. Fickel went back to work temporarily to tide the family over the drastic salary drop which resulted from his change of career.

Seven years later the Fickels welcomed another baby daughter and Mrs. Fickel returned full-time to mothering. She had been teaching at Boulder Creek and Gault, and a grandmother had been caring for their older daughter.

As a former teacher himself, Dr. Fickel is well aware of the teaching profession's constant striving for professionalism.

"We are now in the middle of collective bargaining which should be tempered with increasing professionalism. Teachers in their changing role must develop positive public relations," he points out.

being listened to and looked at.

Finding the disadvantaged students who have not been served well in the past, and learning to serve them better in the public schools, is high on the priorities list.

Language and writing skills must be brought up to significantly higher levels; mathematics skills have been raised in the past several years.

"There was a time when I pushed the separate junior high program," Fickel says. "Today I am led to believe that youngsters are losing something in not relating to younger and older students. The primary need of the junior high student it to find out who he is, and isolation does not serve that purpose."

Fickel turned in his desk chair to look out over the San Lorenzo River — the river which has seen so

many educational changes in the past 200 years...

"As I look at the future of education in Santa Cruz County with all its conflicting forces, I believe that all those forces must learn to work together to give the student a chance to make his own decisions."

And past the mind's eye there passes a parade of scenes out of the past...an Ohlone father teaching his son to catch a fish or snare a duck or go hungry...a Spanish Don and his son riding horseback to round up the family's stray cattle...a Yankee father teaching his son to shoot a gun in the willows where the wild birds gather...and today, in the same area, children of all heritages playing in the new public San Lorenzo Park — together.

Education — an all-encompassing word. A word for all ages, all peoples.





DR. RICHARD FICKEL

VERNON R. ATKINSON, M.D.
MEDICAL CORPORATION

Forest Service to be Topic



...he points out. "We must use the system to gain what society is after."

Today in Santa Cruz County some penetrating and discerning explorations are underway...Year-around school is being studied as a possible concept of the future (Pajaro Valley District has such a program).

What parents want is