

Today's schools are about more than education. Yes, that is their prime mission, but social changes are forcing schools to adapt to new times. Besides teaching, teachers have to be social workers, counselors and surrogate parents. And schools are faced with classrooms filled with children from different households with different backgrounds and challenges. In this edition of *FOCUS*, we look at how education is changing with the times.

Juggling Act

From A to Z, Teachers Do It All

By Melanie Threlkeld McConnell

Fifth-grade teacher Connie Bunch is careful which children she pats on the back because some of them have been abused and they flinch at her touch. She struggles to find quality time for her 31 students on the classroom's two computers.

And more often now than in the past, this veteran teacher of 37 years quiets the growling stomach of an underfed 10-year-old or wipes away the Monday morning tears of a child still hurt by an absentee parent who failed to show for a weekend visit.

Times have changed since 1960 when Bunch first started teaching, and as a result she and other public school teachers now teach basic social and behavioral skills once taught at home.

In today's classrooms, teachers still teach children reading, writing, arithmetic and community values *in addition to* teaching them about AIDS, gangs, drug and alcohol abuse, nutrition, conflict resolution, grief, death, sex and on and on.

"The reality is kids can't learn until they're fed, clothed, warm and loved," says Bunch, BA, education, '70 and MA, curriculum and instruction, '87, who plans to retire in May from Boise's Mountain View Elementary School. "So we spend more time being sure they have those feelings, the basic needs. If we don't, we lose them, and we lose them early."



WOLF



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"Clearly there is a growing set of responsibilities for teachers we never dreamed of in the past," says Robert Barr, dean of the BSU College of Education. "It's a reflection of the nature of our society today."

While the demands are growing on teachers to meet the multiple needs of so many different children, the support services are increasing as well. Schools now have multidisciplinary teams of social workers, school resource officers and counselors. "That support system is critical in any school," Bunch says.

As the classroom has changed, so too have teacher education programs at universities such as Boise State.

Students enrolled in teacher education today are working in real classrooms earlier than their predecessors. They are taking additional courses in diversity and social work to better understand their future students, and they are applying theoretical approaches more often, says BSU education professor Jeanne Bauwens.

Additional courses mean some students take fewer electives or stay in school longer, a move that may be the norm for future students in teacher education programs at Boise State.

BSU's secondary education department is developing a new fifth-year graduate certification program. Students would enter the program with a bachelor's degree and then

spend their fifth year working solely on graduate education courses.

"You go out to schools and ask teachers what they need help with," says William Parrett, BSU education professor, and "it's not library skills; it's 'How do I work with these increasingly challenging diverse classrooms?' Teachers' skills are being pushed to the limit in terms of how you teach all kids."

But a shift in societal behavior is not the only force behind teachers' struggles to keep pace with the changing needs of their students.

State and federal mandates now require teachers to prepare for the impacts of cultural diversity, technology and special education on their classrooms.

In the area of diversity, for example, the State Board of Education voted last September to require training in multicultural education for all Idaho teachers, and to commit \$3.5 million dollars to develop and implement statewide educational

standards for English as a Second Language programs in Idaho schools.

In November, the state board accepted a plan that requires teachers to become proficient at using computers in the classroom. The plan includes technology training for 90 percent of the state's certified teachers by the end of the 2000-2001 school year, a task BSU's Technology Outreach program has already started with teachers in southwest Idaho.

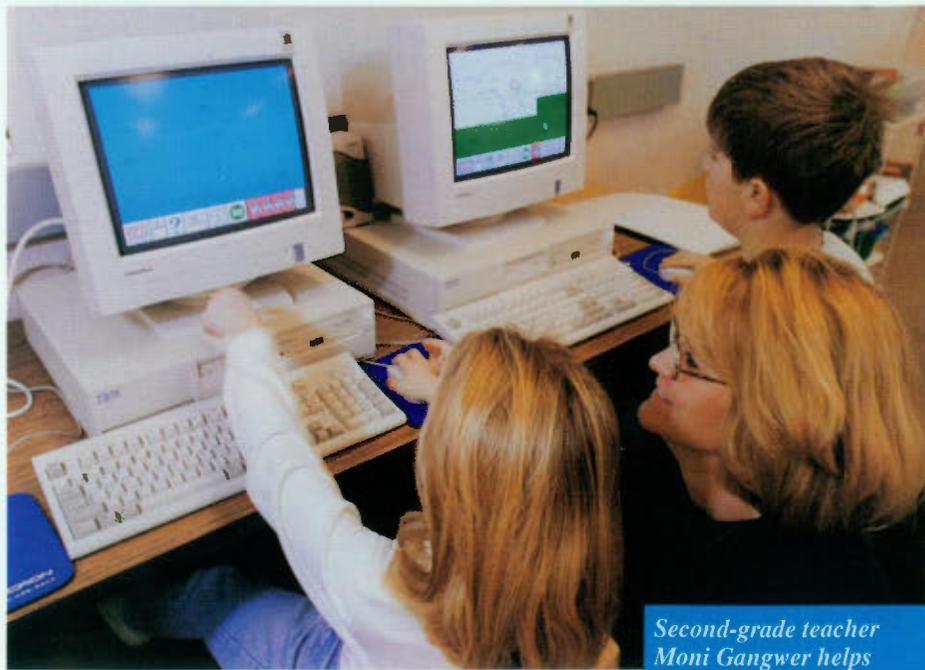
"Legislatures are investing millions of dollars in technology for schools, and it's important teachers know how to use it," Barr explains.

And because of federal laws, the number of students with learning disabilities or severe emotional problems who enter regular classrooms has increased over the past 20 years.

Federal legislation requires all students to have a free and appropriate public education in the "least restrictive environment." But educators say there is no room in their budgets to pay for the additional training that teachers need to educate these children. In Idaho last year the number of special education students topped 25,200, up 20 percent since 1990.

BSU's College of Education plans to require secondary education majors to take additional credits in spe-

'How do I work with these increasingly challenging diverse classrooms?'



CHUCK SCHEER PHOTO

Second-grade teacher Moni Gangwer helps students develop computer skills at Seven Oaks Elementary in Meridian.

cial education. Elementary education students already must take at least six credit hours in special education.

BSU education major Becky Monro, who will graduate in May with a degree in special education, believes that the added training would be good for all future teachers. "My special education classes have been so great. I've learned a lot of strategies to deal with kids whether I go into special ed or not."

All in all, Bunch believes, teachers are better prepared than ever before for the increasing challenges they face. "We've become better at what we do because we need to know more and be so much more aware all the time."

Still, educators say, they're working harder than ever to protect classroom time for teaching traditional academic subjects. "That's what we're really supposed to be here for," says Dee Burrow, BA, elementary education, '76, MA, '78, principal of McKinley Elementary in Boise. "But all the other things — teaching proper behavior, teaching about AIDS — leave us less and less time. At some point, we're going to have to look at what we're teaching all over again and think about what is essential."

For Monro, working as a volunteer at her children's school has given her an insight to her role ahead. "I saw children who didn't know their colors, their alphabet, the basics. Things they could have picked up on *Sesame Street*. I saw such a need in these kids," she says. "You have to be a social worker, a mother, a teacher. It's a vast role and it keeps expanding with our society."

But is society demanding too much of its teachers? Maybe, educators say. But someone has to teach the children, and many parents are not carrying their share of the load.

"The tradition in the United States

is to turn to our public schools to address the needs of society," says Barr. And in many cases, the schools are the best places to do that. "It's the only place it's going to happen," he says. "It's the last hope to provide kids with a common set of goals."

Bunch agrees: "The reality is no one else is doing it. We get the children. We do it. The frustration comes when we get criticized by an unaware public. Most legislators, most school board members, don't have a clue what's going on in our public schools."

One group that is working to spread the word about today's classroom is Boise Educators Serving Together, a committee formed last fall by the Boise School District and the Boise Education Association.

The group includes volunteer teachers and other educators who speak to community groups, parents and businesses about education and dispel the myth of failing schools.

"Education is no longer just a one-way street," says spokesman Dan Hollar. "It's a partnership with parents and businesses. How well we succeed depends on how much community support we have."

As society continues to ask more of its teachers, Bunch warns them to keep in mind their reason for being. "Public education was designed to prepare people to be knowledgeable citizens. That's still a primary goal — to be aware and understand the rights and responsibilities that go along with citizenship.

"We teach them coping skills, conflict management and conflict resolution. I'm surprised when I stop and think about it. But the reality is, it's necessary for these children." □

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

The Evolving Role of America's Public Schools

In 1647, the Puritans in Massachusetts established schools to teach basic skills, including reading, writing and arithmetic and to develop values that served the community.

How things have changed. Since the 1950s, new topics have been added to the public school agenda as the American public expected more and more from its teachers. Today, teachers must teach a dizzying array of topics in addition to the basic skills they always have taught.

Below is a chronology of how schools have taken on added responsibilities. The list was provided by the Boise Educators Serving Together committee.

1950s

- Sex education
- Additional foreign language requirements
- Driver education
- Safety education

1960s

- Consumer education
- Career education
- Peace education
- Leisure/recreational education

1970s

- Special education
- Drug and alcohol abuse education
- Parent education
- Character education
- School breakfast programs

1980s

- Keyboarding and computer education
- Global education
- Ethnic education
- Multicultural/nongender education
- English as a second language
- Bilingual education
- Early childhood education
- Full day kindergarten
- Preschool programs for children at risk
- After school programs
- Stranger/danger education
- Sexual abuse prevention education
- Child abuse monitoring

1990s

- HIV/AIDS education
- Death education
- Grief education
- Gang education
- Inclusion
- Multiculturalism/diversity

N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z