

H.E.L.P. helps kids

The beginning years of students' formal education are the most important and initial school experiences often established patterns that determine a child's success or lack of success in school.

With these facts in mind, Dallas Schools launched a dynamic plan for the 1975-76 school year to develop an improved primary educational program within the district. Project H.E.L.P., Humanized Experiences in Learning with Parents, directed by Mrs. Gloria Whitman, has already begun to build an adaptable model for improving learning, instruction, and positive parent involvement in all the district's elementary schools.

The project was funded in June by the United States Office of Education and was begun in early September. \$63,800 was awarded to Dallas. It was one of only four projects written within the Commonwealth which were funded in the nationwide competition established by U.S.O.E.

Through the scope of project activities for students, teachers, and parents, many of the good things that have happened for students in Dallas in past years are being pooled, shared, and organized into a coordinated program for all K-2 youngsters.

During the first half of the project year, a group of 37 Dallas teachers are working together in an in-service program, entitled H.E.L.P. I, in which they are outlining the scope and sequence of instruction for primary students. When their work is completed, Dallas will have developed a sequential listing of readiness, reading, speaking, listening, writing, and math skills that can be taught to students at the

primary level and a compilation of learning activities which teachers can use to teach, reinforce, and evaluate students' learning performance.

The scope and sequence of developmental learning skills will be used as the basis for determining what each child has learned, what skills he or she is ready to learn, and prescribes alternative learning activities and instructional strategies that suits the child's learning pattern and needs.

During the second half of the school year, teachers in each building will be refining the primary program scope and sequence and developing plans to implement it in individual classrooms and buildings. In this way, the H.E.L.P. I in-service activities will assist teachers and administrators to more effectively meet the individual needs of primary students by providing them with the time, resources, and leadership to coordinate their efforts.

Teachers at other educational levels are very interested in the progress that is being made by H.E.L.P. participants. By developing a model for improving the educational program at the primary level, it can be adapted for use by teachers to coordinate instruction at other levels, so that students can progress at their own rates of speed and according to their own developmental growth from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

The second major goal of Project H.E.L.P. is to work directly with parents. Project activities are already in progress that will provide them with useful and accurate information about the school program and about child growth and

development. Parents are meeting with staff members in small groups, planned to utilize group processes in helping them acquire supportive attitudes toward child behavior, and in discussing strategies and techniques helpful in becoming more effective parents. The teachers who are participating in H.E.L.P. II, in second-

service course organized through Project H.E.L.P., are expanding their communicating skills as they prepare for participation with parents in groups.

Through Project H.E.L.P. activities, much will be accomplished for Dallas students by the most significant adults in their lives—parents and teachers working together for and with kids.



Elementary teachers, Mrs. Linda Whalen, Mrs. Priscilla Liput, and Mrs. Lois Townsend listen intently to the evening's plan of action to guide their work together during a H.E.L.P. I Workshop.

300 participate in parent-teacher groups

Parents of Dallas students want to know what they can be doing to help their children meet success in school. They want to know about child growth and development and how they can be more effective parents. They are interested in learning more about the educational programs of their youngsters and want to know the teachers in the district as real people.

Dallas educators have expressed their

interest in meeting and working with parents on an informal basis. They have requested opportunities to build bridges of open communication between parents and school people so that parents can become more actively and positively involved in the school lives of their youngsters.

Through the current federally-funded program, Humanized Experiences in Learning with Parents, the Dallas School District has sponsored an autumn series of parent-teacher group workshops designed

to meet these and other related needs of our school community members.

This initial series of six weekly H.E.L.P. at home workshops, which attracted the participation of 27 staff members from all educational levels is focused upon parent-teacher relationships to improve the primary instructional program. In late October letters of invitation were sent to parents of Dallas students who were enrolled in kindergarten through second grades in all of the elementary schools. In the next few days over three-fourths of the parents replied positively. 275 registered for one of the eleven groups slated in the elementary schools. An additional 300 parents indicated they were interested in participating at a later date, and that conflicting schedules and other problems had kept them from this first series of workshops.

According to Mrs. Gloria Whitman, Project H.E.L.P. Program Director, district teachers, administrators, and parents have been very enthusiastic about meeting informally together to assist their youngsters. "There is so much that parents and teachers can do together to help kids that can't be accomplished through report cards and interim reports," she commented.

She reported that parent-teacher groups are running smoothly, and with a great deal of active interchange among group members. "We have a wide range of resources in each group to draw upon," she noted. "Although each group represents parents of youngsters in our primary program, our parents and teachers have had the full range of

parenting experiences. We have moms and dads of one-month-olds and 20-year-old college juniors participating in the same groups. We're learning many things from one another and from the approach we are taking to explore child growth and development together."

The H.E.L.P. at home program is benefiting from the resources and aid of local community service agencies, Family Service Association and Luzerne County's Mental Health-Mental Retardation Service's Primary Prevention Program personnel are lending their expertise in communication skills and group dynamics to develop the H.E.L.P. At Home program.

Dr. Richard Shipe, Coordinator of Dallas' Advisory Curriculum and Inservice Council, noted that the inservice plan, which is serving as the vehicle for staff members' planning and implementation of the program, is the first of its kind in the state. "Pennsylvania Department of Education personnel are very much interested in our progress with H.E.L.P. At Home," he stated. "They are looking to Dallas for leadership in developing models for involving community members in more school activities. Through inservice training teachers in Dallas are learning and refining skills that they need to work more effectively with adults in students' lives."

Following the conclusion of the first H.E.L.P. At Home series the scope of the program will be expanded to include more and different opportunities for parents and teachers to meet and work together to benefit Dallas youngsters.



Mr. John Doerfler, elementary counselor; Miss Cindy Linker, Intermediate Unit learning resource specialist; and Mr. Tony Chiarruci, Dallas teacher, discuss a plan to "break the ice" at the first Help At Home Workshop with Mrs. Ann Vernon, Family Service Association executive director.