

A City Launches a High School Curriculum Improvement Program—

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Thinking educators today are convinced that the curriculum in our secondary schools needs renovating if it is to serve the needs of youth growing up in society as we know it. They are convinced, also, that if the curriculum is to be materially improved, adjustments in organization and administration of the typical high school must be made. This description of the way in which one large city is undertaking to develop improved programs of learning for its youth should be of help to all those concerned with the direction toward which our American high school shall point. Those working in cities of similar size will find it especially helpful. Because so much emphasis is placed on planning within the individual school unit, educators working in communities of considerably less size will also find suggestions. Robert S. Gilchrist, assistant superintendent in charge of secondary education, Minneapolis, Minnesota, is the author.

TOO MANY BOYS AND GIRLS still drop out of school at the high school level. Too many of our graduates are not ready to assume their roles in society as workers, home makers, and healthy, intelligent citizens. For these reasons, we in Minneapolis believe that secondary schools *must be improved*.

Two years ago a system-wide program of curriculum improvement, which provided an opportunity to redesign our secondary schools, was started. A series of meetings of the central office staff during the fall of 1945 resulted in the development of a plan for system-wide curriculum study. The plan was presented to all teaching and administrative staff members at a mass meeting and was also published in the School Bulletin. The proposal included a tentative statement of objectives for Minneapolis public schools, suggested areas for study and problems to be

solved, and a proposed organization for curriculum improvement.

After study and discussion, ninety-one percent of the teaching and administrative staff submitted reactions, criticisms, and suggestions. The staff accepted the statement of objectives as a working platform. Seventy percent agreed to work on specific curriculum improvement projects. The proposal of the central office staff for the system-wide organization for curriculum work was rejected. Several changes were suggested which resulted in an improved organization.

WE ORGANIZE FOR WORK

The plan of organization which was adopted is based on the assumption that much of the curriculum work should take place in the individual school; but that there should also be system-wide coordination, leadership, and assistance.

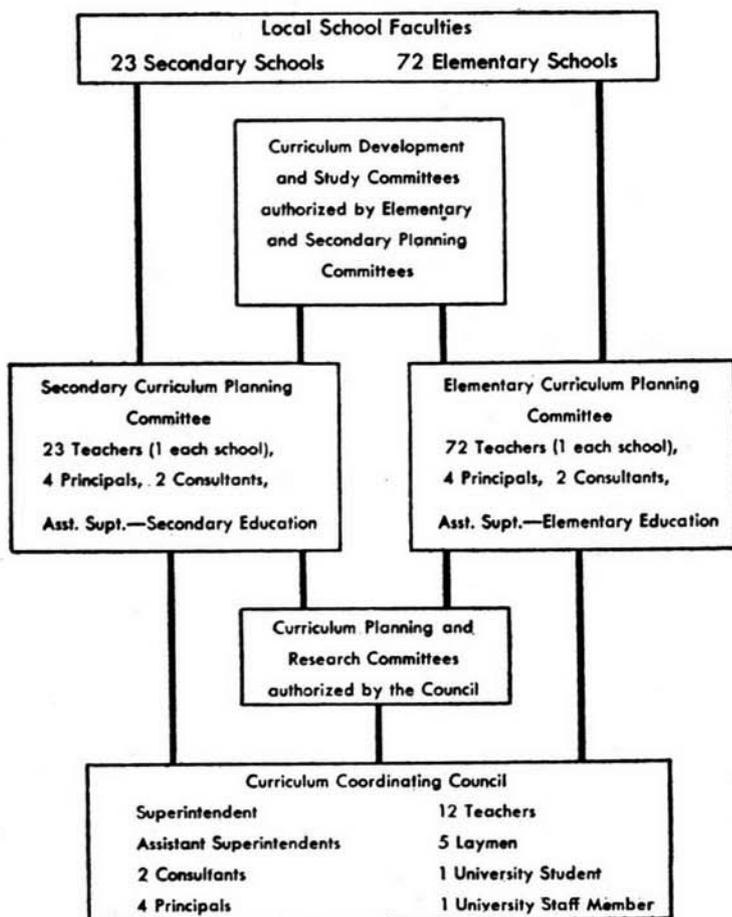
Planning committees at the elementary and secondary levels, which include a teacher from each school and representative principals and central office staff members, are part of the plan. In addition, a Curriculum Coordinating Council includes six teachers from each of the planning committees, plus representative laymen, principals, and central office staff members.

The plan of organization which was finally adopted is shown in the accompanying chart.

Teachers and administrators undoubtedly became more cognizant of the need for curriculum improvement in their study and discussion of the proposals of the central office staff. The fact that so many committed themselves to the platform of objectives and to working on jobs to improve the schools paved the way for the starting of specific projects. Thinking through together a plan for curriculum study gave the central office staff more unity in its purposes.

Since the spring of 1946, when the planning committees and the Curriculum Coordinating Council held their first meetings, several committees and commissions have been authorized. Each was established when the need became apparent. Several of the committees, such as language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science, have as their purpose the improvement of the curri-

ORGANIZATION FOR MINNEAPOLIS CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM



culum in terms of the existing organization. Other committees are designed to explore new functions and make recommendations for the incorporation of experiences and procedures not now in common use. They include Commissions on Democracy, International Understanding and World Peace, Conservation, Intergroup Education, Promotional Policies and Standards, Health, Home and Leisure Living, Work Experience, Small Class Experiment, Driver Education, and Common Learnings.

EFFORT IS BASED ON RECOGNIZED NEEDS

As committees and faculty groups analyzed their curriculum problems, several needs became apparent. It became increasingly evident that the basic unit for curriculum study and change is the staff of a building, which is in a position to study first-hand its children and community. It was also recognized that system-wide coordination must take place at the same time that vigorous building activity is occurring. Needs for in-service training and growth in order to achieve the new objectives agreed upon became more and more evident. Teachers began to ask for more varied and different helps and resources. Time to engage in curriculum work was difficult to discover in already crowded schedules.

Recognizing the Individual School Base

As a faculty analyzes the problems of improving a particular school, it becomes apparent that the variations in vocational plans, use of leisure time, health, and home conditions demand that a school tailor-make its curriculum in terms of its own students. An addi-

tional factor which gives further support to this proposition is that teachers will be more enthusiastic in their leadership of youth if they have had a part in deciding what should be taught and the policies which should give direction to the program of the school.

Councils for participation

Several of the secondary schools have established faculty councils or executive committees through which staff members participate in program developing and policymaking. In one senior high school, the council analyzes and evaluates proposals made for the solution of problems and then recommends procedures or policy for the further consideration of the faculty as a whole.

Last spring it proposed four experimental activities for the year 1947-8, which the faculty, after modification, adopted. One of these was participation in the common learnings project, described later in this article. Other activities of this particular faculty council include the working out of the extra-curricular assignments for the staff, proposing a PTA-faculty committee to develop recommendations concerning the completion of a building project, and beginning an in-service training program for the staff. After one year of operation of this council, there seems to be evidence that there is greater willingness on the part of the faculty members as a whole to help determine, support, and carry out the school program.

Local materials centers

Recently a request has been made for the establishment of secondary school

curriculum materials centers in each of the junior and senior high schools, a means for all teachers to keep up to date on the learning materials which are becoming available for each field. The proposed plan provides that sample copies of textbooks and other curriculum materials be available within a building and circulated among teachers. One individual in each building, probably the librarian, will be designated as the person in charge of this materials center. A teacher in each field will be responsible for the books and learning materials in the center. The system-wide consultant for librarians will be in charge of the coordination of this plan.

Improved faculty meetings

In several buildings the principals and faculties have recognized that significant work cannot occur unless faculty meetings are held for a long enough period of time to enable adequate discussion of problems. In several schools students are dismissed as much as an hour early once each month in order to allow a longer block of time for staff meetings. Most faculties devote at least one meeting a month to the problems of their particular buildings. At least one other meeting per month is utilized for discussion of problems of system-wide concern.

Coordinating the Efforts of All

The Secondary Planning Committee has accepted, as one major function, the coordination of the various curriculum activities taking place at the secondary level and the helping of individual faculty members and building groups to see the relationship between their efforts and the work in all secondary schools.

A guide for modern high schools

To this end, in February of 1947 a chart was developed for display in each of the secondary schools. This chart listed the objectives of the Minneapolis public schools, the behavior characteristics of youth which must be developed to attain these objectives, the kind of secondary schools necessary to develop adolescent citizens with the behavior characteristics mentioned, and a proposal of the characteristics of an individual school program which would give promise of bringing about realization of the objectives. The system-wide resources available, which the individual building might call upon for help, were then listed. These included the in-service courses, the system-wide committees, and the services the central office staff were prepared to render.

A small bulletin, published to accompany the chart, elaborated upon the significant points. A history of the present curriculum program since its inception was given and a statement made of just how far we had come. The work of the various committees was summarized and the relation of the parts to the whole program was described. Basic issues facing the Minneapolis secondary schools were identified, and next steps, both at the individual building level and on a system-wide basis, were listed.

Two-way reports

This year the Planning Committee is attempting to coordinate the work of the various committees by calling for reports from groups at work, attempting to identify the gaps where no work is being done, and endeavoring to re-

solve issues where there seems to be conflict between the activities of the different committees. It is also encouraging each school faculty to identify and think through the major problems which the group should solve.

The fact that principals must have both time and the opportunity to keep abreast of the work of the various curriculum committees is becoming more and more apparent. There are indications that it may prove desirable that they become members of the Planning Committee in order to participate in the policymaking and to be in a better position to implement administratively the policies adopted.

The committee is at present also engaged in a project to determine the "musts" for every boy and girl in our secondary schools. Each committee is asked to decide upon the experiences which it believes essential for all boys and girls in terms of the developmental needs of youth, the demands of society and youth's responsibility for these demands, and the values as stated in the system-wide objectives. After receiving these listings from the various secondary committees, the Planning Committee will build a framework for the general education offerings.

Providing for In-Service Experiences

For the past two summers a curriculum workshop has been sponsored jointly by the Minneapolis public schools and by the summer session of the University of Minnesota. The Board of Education provided scholarships to cover the tuition fee for those not desiring university credit and a considerable part of the fee for those who

earned credit toward degrees. In addition, approximately twenty scholarships were granted each summer to teachers to attend workshops in other cities and universities. Each summer approximately one hundred teachers from the Minneapolis schools enrolled in the workshops and worked on problems which they had identified during the previous year.

A pre-school workshop was held in the fall of 1946 during one week of the two-week period when the schools were forced to remain closed because of the polio epidemic. Several meetings were also held at the start of school in the fall of 1947 for pre-school planning purposes. It is hoped that a regularly organized pre-school workshop session of several days can become an integral part of the pre-planning which occurs each fall. Principals are now on a ten-month calendar basis and, therefore, have an opportunity for group planning and activity both at the beginning and close of the school year.

In-service study programs have been carried on during the past two years, with leadership from the central office staff. During 1946-7 more than a thousand teachers participated in such a program. For 1947-8 the following sixteen groups have been organized, including such areas as: Policies of Promoting, Grading, Crediting, and Reporting; Adolescent Growth and Development; Books Children Read; Color, Design, Crafts; Democratic Classroom Procedures; Common Learnings; Conservation of Human Resources with Emphasis on Needs of Handicapped Youth; "One World or None"; Demonstration Lessons in the Teaching of Reading at the

Secondary Level; Visual Aids Laboratory; and Guiding Child Growth and Development through Teacher-Parent Conferences.

Supplying the Necessary Materials

More and more teachers are recognizing that a textbook cannot be relied upon as the only source for classroom reading. So they are asking for a wider variety of reading materials for their students and resource guides for their own use as they work out learning units with their boys and girls. For example, in the common learnings program, resource guide material has already been developed on orientation to a new school, Minneapolis City Government, Natural Resources of Minnesota, Home and Family Living, World Citizenship, Driver Education and Training, Beliefs and Values, and The World in Which We Work.

Out-of-school resources

The field trip office, disbanded during the war years, has been reopened in order to assist schools in their efforts to have boys and girls take appropriate trips in relation to their curriculum experiences. Consultants in radio and in visual education are facing increasing demands as teachers sense the possibilities of education through these media. There are many efforts to capitalize on local resources for more effective learning.

For example, a meeting was arranged at a downtown broadcasting auditorium for representatives of all social studies classes to listen to a discussion of the pros and cons of charter revision by the mayor of the city and a prominent lawyer.

Guidebook for boys and girls

As more teachers realize that good teaching demands a sensitivity to the various outcomes to which the classroom environment may contribute, appropriate guides and suggestions must be organized to assist the teacher in attaining the objectives. An illustration of the kind of help which is being made available is the *Guidebook for Common Practices in School Work*, prepared by more than one hundred teachers of the system. This book includes the sections: Know How to Get School Jobs Done, Know How to Present Thoughts to Others, Know How to Use the Tools of Learning, and a glossary of words used in the classroom. It is hoped each student will refer to this guidebook when he is in doubt concerning a point. It should be an invaluable aid to any teacher attempting to create an environment in which boys and girls can practice—in terms of what they already know—the skills which they are supposed to have acquired.

Kit in communications skills

Another aid, a kit of materials and suggestions, has been developed by the Language Arts Committee for the use of English teachers. Included in the thirteen topics are an analysis of growth factors as they relate to language skills and reading, a bibliography of books which deal with human relations, and a chart of the responsibilities of the language arts to the individual in the four phases of communication.

Help from consultants

Undoubtedly the most important aids to teachers are the human resources

available. The functions of central office staff members have been redefined with a corresponding change of titles from supervisors to consultants. The redefinition of functions includes the idea that the primary purpose of a consultant is to render service to a school or to a teacher rather than to impose a program.

In addition to local personnel, consultants from the outside are invited to work with various curriculum groups when the need becomes apparent. Experts in health education, common learnings, social studies, reading, and language arts have spent two or three days each in consulting with local groups during the past year. As a member of the Intergroup Education Project sponsored by the American Council on Education, we have also profited from the services of four consultants for this project.

Making Time Available

Teachers who carry a full teaching load cannot be expected to have either the time or the energy to do all curriculum work after school hours. The organization for curriculum improvement in Minneapolis includes policies providing for released time for committees to do at least part of their work. Each committee is allowed three half day meetings during the school year. Whenever a committee has defined a job which requires continuous effort of a small working committee, provision is made for substitutes to take the place of teachers while they are engaged on their work project. When a need for experimentation is defined by a school and approved by the administration, an

attempt is made to provide the resources with which to carry on the project.

EVIDENCE OF PROGRESS IS APPARENT

Through the stimulation of the curriculum improvement program, many changes have already been brought about in the secondary school curriculum. The common learnings development is an illustration of the progress which has been made in providing new and different experiences for youth.

Experimenting with Common Learnings

In the spring of 1947 an in-service study program was arranged for two hundred teachers who were stimulated to examine the possibilities of a common learnings organization because of experimentation in common learnings which had already taken place in some Minneapolis secondary schools and because of their reading of such literature as *Planning for All American Youth*. As a result, a system-wide common learnings committee was organized with representatives from each of the secondary schools.

The committee agreed that resource guide material should be developed for some of the problem areas upon which teachers agreed the units of work should be developed. It also identified problems for the consideration of teachers attending the summer workshop. Plans were made for fifty-seven teachers in junior and senior high schools to have one or more groups in common learnings for the school year. A primer on common learnings, started at the workshop, is now available as a basis for study and discussion by both professional and lay groups. It attempts to clarify the thinking concerning com-

mon learnings and its possibilities for improving secondary education.

This year the common learnings committee is busy with such projects as the identification of problem areas which boys and girls in the secondary schools ought to have an opportunity to study, the discovery and organization of resource materials for developing units of work in problem areas, and the development of a program of evaluation.

Working on a Health Project

A health demonstration project has been introduced in a junior high school. This demonstration is partially financed through the Hennepin County Tuberculosis Association. All faculty members of the junior high school are on committees related to the demonstration. With the aid of a part-time staff member from the University of Minnesota and the consultative services of a health education leader from another university; the staff is making definite progress in discovering not only the requisites for sound health education in the school, but also the techniques by which a faculty can successfully work together in solving a problem. A steering committee consisting of the consultant, the principal, and a coordinator of the health project channels the various parts of the project to the proper committee, arranges time schedules, and provides integration of the health work with the rest of the educational program. A council, which includes both parents and pupils, meets monthly.

There are already in evidence concrete results in terms of new materials and new procedures. Changed points of view and deeper insights, not only with respect to health but to education

in general, have resulted. Physical education is now offered five times a week in all three grades of the junior high school. An extended after school recreation program is being planned. There is a greater demand for films and other visual and audio aids. The individual homeroom teacher now recognizes that he must become more of a guide to the students assigned to him.

Other projects which promise significant results include: behind the wheel driver training in three high schools, the adaptation of veterans vocational guidance methods to high school seniors, community centers in two of the junior high schools, and a small class experiment to discover the values accruing from smaller classes and more individualized guidance and instruction.

RETHINKING HAS RESULTED

During the two years in which the present plan for curriculum improvement has been underway, certain essentials for success have clarified themselves.

It is futile to try to change practices unless beliefs and values change. "Words without music" make for a sterile education. The verbal acceptance of objectives and the actual direction and guidance from beliefs which an individual accepts as his own are not synonymous. Our thinking about practices in terms of what we purport to believe must be checked constantly.

The actual job of deciding on changes which are needed and then starting to make the changes is the heart of curriculum improvement. Group action demands that we learn the problem-solving approach—to discover the data

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which is pertinent, to assemble and organize this data, to make tentative conclusions as to how to solve the problem, and then to test these conclusions. Leaders must learn to coordinate and give leadership, rather than to dominate. A group meeting, in order to be a success, must have much pre-planning.

Every educator must try to understand the process of education as a whole in addition to making a contribution to the special aspect of education for which he has been particularly trained. Neither is it enough that we in education understand what we are doing and why we are changing the curriculum. Others who are affected by the change must have a part—the parents, the students, and fellow teachers. Evaluation must become one of the most important aspects of our curriculum program. The test of any program is, "Are boys and girls growing into the kind of citizens the world needs?"

We recognize that curriculum improvement is a continuous process and that we are just well underway. We believe the public has the right to demand that secondary schools "deliver the goods." We can say that the public must provide more money to pay higher salaries, to reduce class size, to improve facilities, and to secure more adequate learning materials. But while working for a better financial base for our schools, we have a solemn obligation to improve secondary education. Otherwise society will turn to other social institutions or create new ones through which to serve youth adequately.



Helping teachers
make the civics course

A SPRINGBOARD FOR CITIZENSHIP

One of the most encouraging post-war educational developments is the new emphasis on giving young people meaningful experiences in citizenship now.

Some schools, for example, are using the school itself as a laboratory for learning how democracy works. Other schools are making increased use of out-of-school resources—using the community as their laboratory.

Many teachers need help in teaching the new skills which these new types of learning involve. Some may need help in relating the very purposes of this kind of program to the kind of program they have been used to. Others may have little confidence in their ability to direct activities calling for use of community resources, to guide committee work, group research, or panel discussions, to give students rewarding experiences in leadership and "followership."

Many groups that have been successful in making the civics course "come alive" have found that *Living in Our Communities*, by Edward Krug and I. James Quillen, can give teachers a tremendous amount of help in implementing their aims. Through a carefully planned activity program, it guides students to use school and community resources to concrete and vitalize understandings of community needs and problems, of the privileges and responsibilities of the individual citizen. It develops skill in sharing ideas, in working together, in using the skills and abilities of individual members of the group. Ask for full-chapter reprint—SP-119.



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