

States Look at Their Secondary Schools

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This informative article on trends in curriculum development in state departments of education is by Robert B. Toulouse, School of Education, North Texas State Teachers College, Denton.

WITH INCREASING AWARENESS that the state should provide an adequate educational program for all children, state departments of education have, since 1940, added staff members to assist in carrying out these responsibilities. Many of the added responsibilities have been of a specialized nature and have required rather expert services. One such specialized service is concerned with secondary school curriculum development and improvement. While this service has been rather slow in developing, a recent study¹ revealed that there is a definite trend toward including personnel within the state department of education who are specifically responsible for secondary school curriculum improvement. Almost three-fourths of the states now include such personnel in their organization. However, in only four states, out of the forty-two states participating, is this a full-time responsibility.

Limited Financial Support

Trained personnel in this position of leadership is only part of the story. The extent to which any program of curriculum improvement can be carried out

is, in part, dependent upon the financial support given by the state. Just as any other specialized service, curriculum development requires funds for complete functioning. This study revealed relatively little state financial support for secondary school curriculum development. While almost one-half of the states make no direct allocation for curriculum improvement, eight states specifically set aside funds for secondary and elementary school curriculum development. A few of the states allocate funds as part of the general appropriation for the operation of the state department of education, with the proportion for curriculum development not stated.

Not all financial support for curriculum development, however, comes from the state. Various other agencies give support for curriculum development. For example, the Oklahoma Curriculum Division received a grant from the General Education Board to be used for a curriculum workshop in the summer of 1942. South Carolina also received a grant from the General Education Board for scholarships for members of a study conference on administrative and curriculum problems. In all, eleven states indicated their financial aid has been received from outside agencies for curriculum improvement.

¹ Toulouse, Robert B., *An Analysis of Secondary School Curriculum Improvement Policies and Practices of States and Cities*, unpublished dissertation, University of Missouri, 1948.

Policies as Guides to Practice

It is essential that any curriculum improvement program be consistent with a state's philosophy of curriculum building. In some cases this may mean the establishment of policies of aims for curriculum development by a state before beginning any such improvement program, or in other cases merely the acceptance of policies which are already in effect. Certainly without this important step any improvement program is likely to be ineffective.

Of the forty-four states participating in this part of the study, forty-two indicated that their state departments have an established policy in the construction of and use made of curriculum materials. Only two states indicated no such policy. From the responses made by participating personnel there appears to be a definite trend for state departments to stimulate teachers in local schools to develop their own materials. Thirty states indicated such a policy.

Even though there appears to be a rather general agreement among the states on the policy of stimulation, there is a difference in the manner of carrying it out. Michigan emphasizes the need for curriculum materials which are *produced* by the teachers. The very act of producing the materials is considered fully as important as having the materials available for use whenever needed. Texas, on the other hand, emphasizes the need for curriculum materials because of the value to the teachers who actually *use* them. Here, the main value is not so much the benefit to the teacher who produces the materials but that of having available well-planned materials when they are needed.

Wisconsin's program illustrates still a third policy—the coordinating policy of the state department of education—in which curriculum materials are produced locally but are distributed to teachers throughout the state by the state department of education. In this way the benefits of the labor of many scattered teachers are made available to all teachers through an exchange service.

Prescription on the Wane

There is a definite trend toward state-prepared materials which serve as *guides* for the local secondary schools and away from a policy *requiring* the use of such materials throughout a state. Only three respondents indicated a policy of requiring the use of prepared courses of study throughout all of the state secondary schools. On the other hand, forty stated a policy of preparing materials which serve as *guides* for local secondary schools. As an example of the latter, Virginia has made the use of all materials associated with the curriculum development program completely voluntary. Missouri, too, has emphasized the point that state courses of study have little value other than to serve as guides to assist pupils and teachers in selecting educative experiences.

In keeping with this trend away from requiring the use of prepared courses of study, there is little attempt on the part of the state to prescribe exact teaching methods. General methods regarded as best or desirable are suggested, but only one state indicated a policy consistent with the statement, "Courses of study should prescribe exact methods." In twenty states there is general agreement that, "choice of methods should be left entirely to teachers."

Several states have felt that the question of teaching methods is of sufficient importance to consider them in various publications of curriculum materials. North Dakota devotes a part of its course of study in social studies to a discussion of methods of motivation and suggests a variety which are considered desirable. On the other hand, Arkansas, in some of its publications, follows the practice of suggesting methods for treating subject matter. In some cases these are fairly specific.

Varied Personnel Resources

Educational authorities have not always been in agreement as to who should be responsible for construction of courses of study and other curriculum materials. However, recent trends appear to be in the direction of including more teachers—and laymen—in such curriculum building programs. Forty-two states indicated that secondary school teachers in the state are included in curriculum development programs, while forty-three indicated that university and teachers college professors participate in such programs. Twenty-nine states have used well-known curriculum “experts.” Thirty states use personnel in departments of government other than the state department of education, and twenty-eight indicate that lay advisory groups participate in curriculum development.

As an example of this wide use of professional and lay groups in developing the curriculum, South Carolina, at the time that it changed from an eleven- to a twelve-year program, adopted a cooperative program in which thousands of college and public school teach-

ers, students, and laymen participated. Iowa's recent curriculum improvement program has, as one of its objectives, the active cooperation of administrators, teachers, and lay people throughout the state.

Pupil Needs in Theory

The present study shows a definite trend toward a stated policy of organizing the curriculum around pupil problems. Thirty-six states indicated that “the secondary school curriculum should be organized around the problems of the pupils.” The Michigan program for curriculum improvement considers at some length the needs of a secondary school youth, how to get at these needs, and a consideration of the resource unit as a practical device around which to organize the curriculum to meet such needs. In both Maryland and Massachusetts, curriculum committees spent some time in defining the needs of youth so that the curriculum could be built around them.

In spite of the fact that there appears to be high regard for the organizing of the curriculum around the problems of the secondary school pupils, a scrutiny of the published materials of many state departments reveals no such organization. While there are numerous examples of unit organizations in the published curriculum materials of the various states, most of these are subject matter units. However, the bulletin on General English² of the Missouri program is one of the exceptions to the general practice.

² State of Missouri, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, *General English, Secondary School Series*, Bulletin 3A, Jefferson City, Missouri: State Department of Education, 1941.

Continuity As the Keynote

Continuous curriculum revision on a state level is now recognized as a definite necessity. All forty-four states in the present study indicated an agreement with the statement, "Curriculum construction is a continuous process." Recent activity in many states reveals adherence to this principle. While not all programs of curriculum construction result in publication of bulletins and courses of study, this is one measure of such activity. In spite of publication difficulties, several of the states continued publication of curriculum materials through the war years. Since 1945 there has been considerable evidence of renewed interest in the publication of state bulletins.

This study has revealed that improving the curriculum of the secondary schools on a state level is dependent upon leadership from the state department of education. However, it is a complicated process which should involve the participation of many persons. States are providing this leadership through including specialists within the staff of the state department. In turn, large numbers of teachers, "experts," and laymen are cooperating in carrying through the program. Consideration is being given to the importance of establishing policies for curriculum improvement and following through with specific activities in keeping with these policies. Only in this way can progress be made in improving the secondary school curriculum.

*Oregon's In-Service Program*_____

HUGH B. WOOD

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THE CONTINUOUS improvement of public education will depend in no small measure on an effective program of in-service training of teachers. The presence of many partly or inadequately trained teachers in classrooms makes this task doubly important. The increasing cost of, and public interest in, our educational system is focusing more attention on the schools and their products than ever before.

Opportunities for in-service professional improvement of teachers are numerous, both on the group and the individual basis. Some of the opportunities which are being utilized in Oregon are enumerated here.

THE ROLE OF THE CONFERENCE

The conference takes its name from the verb, "to confer." It is essentially a meeting of teachers who wish to con-

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