

bulletin of the Educational Policies Commission; and *Education in a Divided World*, by James B. Conant.

A JOB TO BE DONE

With this our reflections may well conclude. All who look to schools as an important aid in coping with the

problems of our times should be heartened by the present emphasis upon in-service education. Indeed, we should seek to expand greatly what is now being done—an expansion to provide means whereby all of us who serve in the schools may learn to do the best jobs of which we are capable.

Organizing for Curriculum Improvement

GILBERT S. WILLEY

Setting up a functional organization is basic to educational improvement, writes Gilbert S. Willey. In this article Mr. Willey, superintendent of the Lincoln, Nebraska, schools points out the responsibility of the school administrator in establishing a functional organization which will give the entire staff of a school system an opportunity to participate in planning programs and policies.

THE MAJOR PURPOSE of school administration is to facilitate teaching and to improve instruction. It is the responsibility of the superintendent's office to provide opportunities for the staff to develop common understanding of the purposes and goals for which a school system is established. This is not an easy task—it requires careful planning and months and years to achieve a noticeable degree of success.

Widespread Participation Is Essential

In the past, the school administrator has depended too largely upon his annual message at the opening teacher's meeting or upon frequent bulletins to develop attitudes and basic understand-

ings on the part of the members of the school staff. Or he has expected the school principal to carry out directives from the central office without informing teachers of reasons for many of the orders.

This approach is psychologically unsound. *Teachers will be stimulated to do a better job to the degree that they have a share in planning the programs for which they are responsible.*

Principals, too, frequently do not know just what is expected of them. They also must have a part in planning the work for which they are responsible. It is important, therefore, that an organization be developed whereby gradually the entire staff of a school

system plays a vital part in shaping educational programs and policies.

The purpose of this discussion is to describe specifically ways in which school administrators can help elementary school teachers do a better job. One effective way is to organize in such a manner as to "help teachers to help themselves." This approach gives promise of developing within most teachers interest and enthusiasm for their work.

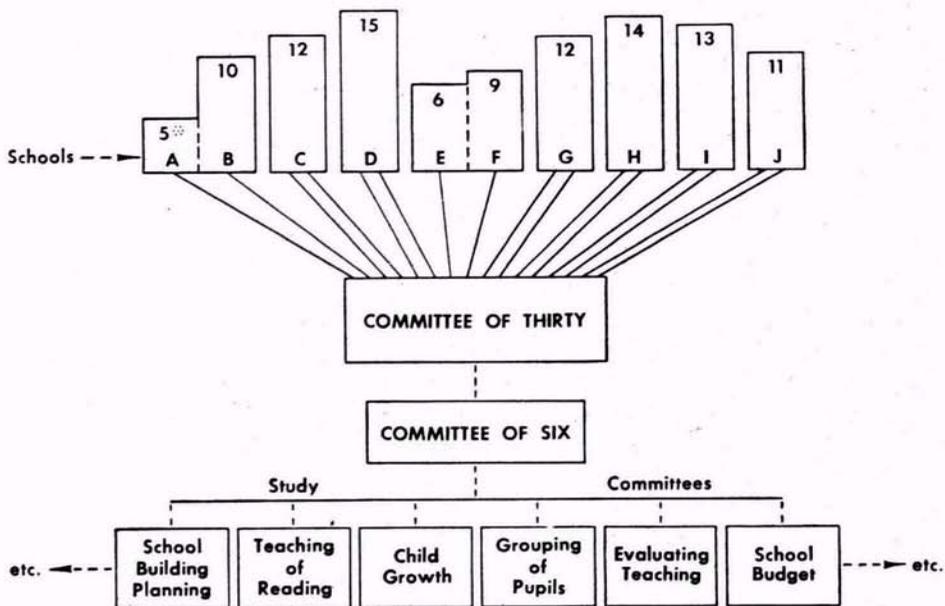
A Proposed Organization

The following chart illustrates a plan whereby elementary school teachers may contribute in a real way to an evolving elementary school program. This particular plan is applicable to a

city of about 30,000 people. It can be modified and adapted to school systems of any size. Although the plan described is a hypothetical one, the fundamental principles involved are generally accepted in theory at least. Many school systems have evolved similar plans in developing improved educational programs.

In the school system outlined in the chart there are ten elementary school buildings ranging in size from five to fifteen teacher units. One principal is assigned to Schools A and B, another principal is assigned to Schools E and F. There is one principal for each of the other six school units. This arrangement gives each principal full time for administrative and supervisory duties. *The*

SUGGESTED PLAN OF ORGANIZATION



⊛ Indicates number of teachers in buildings

principal is the key person in any organizational plan.

The Committee of Thirty

The Committee of Thirty is the key group in the total plan, with the faculties in the various schools holding the final authority in approving recommendations. The Committee of Thirty is the general clearing group and is responsible to the faculties for approval of plans that involve fundamental change. The two representatives from each unit keep the members of the staff informed of progress being made by the committee. Schools A, B, E, and F have one representative each, making a total of sixteen classroom teachers on the committee. It is highly desirable that both the primary and intermediate grades be represented.

In addition to the sixteen classroom teachers, the Committee of Thirty would include the eight elementary school principals and the supervisors who work primarily with the elementary schools. The superintendent of schools by all means should be a member of this group. This makes a total of about thirty people—hence the title “Committee of Thirty.” Such a title denotes no special function and leaves the committee free to evolve its own program of action.

There are some who might argue that there are relatively too many principals and supervisors on the committee in comparison with the number of classroom teachers. It is very important to have all of these persons included in order to keep them abreast of the plans so that they will be in a position to exert the necessary enlightened leadership in the respective school buildings.

The Committee of Thirty is a deliberative body—one that moves by consensus rather than by voting. It should, in time, become a group in which ideas expressed are accepted because of their value rather than because of positions held by the persons who suggested them. Free discussion in this group should not be expected, however, until initial reservations and suspicions of participating members regarding the workability of the plan are pretty well erased. The ultimate values of the deliberations of the Committee of Thirty are great if all members come to a full understanding of effective group processes.

The Committee of Six

The Committee of Six is chosen from the membership of the Committee of Thirty for the purpose of expediting the work of the larger group. Four classroom teachers, a principal, and a supervisor would constitute a representative group of six persons. This is not a planning committee, a steering committee, or an executive committee—it is merely a committee chosen to do whatever is authorized by the Committee of Thirty. Ground is lost if this smaller committee assumes authority that has not been delegated to it.

INITIATING THE PLAN

At a meeting of elementary school principals the superintendent might present some general ideas about organizing for curriculum improvement. Generally speaking, educational workers everywhere are striving constantly to improve their work, provided they are given proper encouragement and incentives.

The Entire Staff Must Share in Planning

This preliminary discussion could well be followed by a meeting of representative teachers and principals to consider ways and means of permitting teachers to participate in the solution of problems that are vital to them. A subcommittee of three to five members could be chosen to meet with the superintendent to develop a proposed plan which would fit the particular school system concerned. This plan would then be carefully described in a bulletin for all elementary school workers to read and study. Three or four regional meetings with thirty or forty persons in each group could be held with the subcommittee to give all teachers concerned an opportunity to ask questions and to become acquainted with the general plan.

Following these regional discussion meetings teachers should be asked to give their reactions and suggestions for changes and improvements. The plan would then be modified in the light of suggestions received and Revision No. 1 would be submitted to the teaching personnel for study and additional improvements.

It is highly probable that a second revision by the subcommittee made as a result of additional suggestions from teachers will receive as general acceptance as is necessary before putting the plan into operation. By this time all elementary school personnel will be well acquainted with the plan and will feel that they have contributed to its development. It's implied that the superintendent is keeping in touch with the evolving organization and is making his contributions along with the others.

Cooperative Planning Takes Time

It will take three or four months before an acceptable plan is developed. Any organizational scheme that seems satisfactory should be considered tentative and subject to modification as experience with it requires. There should be no hurry in planning with groups representing the entire system. Time and timing are very important. This approach to educational improvement involving the entire staff derives its strength from the cooperative action of all staff members who are concerned with the program.

If the organization which is tentatively accepted is similar to the one presented in this article, then the initiative for bringing the plan into existence rests with the various faculties in choosing representatives to serve on the Committee of Thirty. This is as it should be—starting at the grass roots.

Committees Begin Their Work

The following items of business might well be used as a guide for the first meeting of the Committee of Thirty:

Presiding—the superintendent or some other person thoroughly conversant with the proposed organization.

- Informal introduction of all members present.
- Review the purposes of the organization with definite restatement of general functions of the Committee of Thirty.
- Elect members to the Committee of Six following a discussion of the general duties of this committee.
- Authorize the Committee of Six to prepare questionnaires addressed to elementary school teachers asking them to list school problems which they think should be given city-wide consideration.

- Give approval to the Committee of Six to tabulate the questionnaire returns and report results at the next meeting.
- Set a calendar for meetings of the committee during the year with time and place established.
- Select a chairman to serve for a period of a year. The superintendent should resist the demand that he continue as chairman—in the long run it will prove better to have another person serve as chairman, preferably a classroom teacher.
- Dismiss the meeting at the end of the hour. The above items will require an hour for adequate consideration. The meeting should start on time!

These items of business are possible ones for consideration at the first meeting of the Committee of Six:

- Selection of chairman.
- Arrange dates, time, and place for meetings—on school time if possible.
- Prepare a questionnaire to send to teachers asking for problems that should receive city-wide consideration.
- Arrange to have questionnaires returned for tabulation.
- Discuss possible duties of the committee. The members of this committee will need to guard against performing duties that rightfully are responsibilities of the Committee of Thirty.
- Prepare the agenda for the next meeting of the Committee of Thirty and submit same to chairman. It is helpful to have the chairman of the Committee of Thirty serve as ex officio member of the Committee of Six.

Problem-Centered Committees

Eventually the important problems for study will be identified and study committees will be appointed by the Committee of Six after having been authorized to do so by the Committee of Thirty. The whole organization will take on new meaning and significance as study committees make reports to the

Committee of Thirty and as these reports are referred by the committee to the various faculties for study and recommendations.

The Committee of Six keeps in touch with the study committees and places them on the calendar when they are ready to make reports of progress to the Committee of Thirty. The members of the Committee of Thirty reserve the right to reject, accept, or modify any or all proposals of a study committee.

In all the various phases of development of problems being studied it is imperative that administrative and supervisory officers keep in sufficiently close touch with committee chairmen to insure satisfactory progress and acquaintance with recommendations that are to be made.

Study committees should be asked to report their findings to the Board of Education if their recommendations involve school policy. In these instances the superintendent must be ready to support the recommendations of the committees if called upon to do so.

Guidelines for

Cooperative Organization

There are some who will say that such an organization is cumbersome and impractical. It possibly seems so on paper, but in reality it is quite simple when once developed and under way. The following considerations should be kept in mind when evaluating any organization that is designed to permit teachers to participate in the solution of school problems:

- ☐ Teachers as a group are capable and have a great deal to contribute to the improvement of the school system.
- ☐ Teachers want assurance that their ef-

forts on city-wide problems will be recognized and that their recommendations will receive careful consideration. This is a strong incentive to further effort.

☛ It is important for teachers to feel that they are a part of a "going concern" and that they are helping determine the direction in which the concern is moving.

☛ The faculties in the various buildings should remain the final groups to make important recommendations. The representatives on the Committee of Thirty should keep the faculties informed of progress being made in the various areas.

☛ The superintendent must work with principals and supervisors continuously on the problem of leadership in this newer approach to educational improvement.

☛ The values of any organizational plan "pay off" in the last analysis in improved teaching. A follow-through of the recommendations of study committees is absolutely essential for successful results.

☛ Improvement within a school system should be evolutionary. The plan de-

scribed in this article begins to yield real dividends after the second or third year of operation although it is gratifying to observe that in some school systems similar organizations have yielded most satisfactory returns by the end of the first year.

☛ In any plan to help elementary school teachers do a better job there must be important responsibilities placed upon teachers and channels must be cleared through which teachers are permitted to help themselves.

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Although there are many ways in which school administrators may help elementary teachers, it seemed to the writer that setting up a functional organization like the one described is basic to educational improvement. It could become the means of considering practically all problems affecting teachers within any given school system.

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