

to most people." Apparently this applies to improving the curriculum through the participation of all. The easy answer, "All who are affected should participate," remains valid. But it doesn't remain easy. And it doesn't answer some related problems.

So maybe you should read this issue, after all.

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Parents and Staff Cooperate in System-Wide Improvement

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Frequently, as the individual school attempts to develop an instructional program to meet its unique needs, evidence appears that its efforts are not coordinated with those of other schools within the system. In Corpus Christi, this problem is being met through system-wide coordination between the Curriculum Council and the Parents Council.

THERE have probably been as many attempts to involve teachers, parents and students in curriculum improvement as there are schools. The approach to this important activity has varied greatly—from "selling" and "telling" to genuine attempts to involve all three groups at the "grass roots" level in every step and procedure of curriculum development.

No more than a quarter of a century ago educators conceded to experts the right to determine the curriculum. Specialists in subject fields wrote textbooks which even today largely set the pattern for what is taught in the classroom. Experts wrote courses of study which teachers tried to carry out verbatim. Following this era school systems began to involve small committees of teachers in developing courses of study, which were usually inflexible and based upon content found in text-

books. A more recent improvement over the course of study is the teaching guide which provides help in methods of teaching and more flexibility of content. Both the course of study and teaching guide are based upon the assumption that a small group of teachers can become experts and pass on their expertness to teachers through written communications.

There are obviously many problems which arise when curricula are developed through procedures indicated above. Most significant of all is that such procedures largely ignore the wealth of experience and background of teachers, parents and students which are so important in planning and developing modern, life-experience curricula. Not infrequently, teachers are unable to use effectively courses of study or teaching guides developed by others because they have not had an

opportunity to participate in the studying and thinking upon which the guide is based. Although a course of study may specifically state that the contents are suggestive, there is a tendency upon the part of teachers who did not participate in its production to consider it prescriptive. This leads to rigid inflexibility and thwarts the teacher in attempts to deal with the problems and concerns of students.

Curricula that are planned and developed without full participation of all concerned—teachers, parents and students, are usually ineffective. This is especially true when there are appreciable changes suggested in the existing curricula. Changes in approaches, content and methods take place only when there are changes in the thinking of those who are concerned. From this point of view it is easy to understand why teachers sabotage changes, parents demand that the school return to the fundamentals and students criticize innovations. Understanding and effective use of curriculum materials are certain to come through participation by all concerned.

There is great need today for new skills and techniques to involve most teachers, parents and students in curriculum improvement. Although some progress has been made in teacher participation, too little has been done in involving parents and students. The problem becomes more significant and crucial in large city school systems.

The Individual School—Focus for Curriculum Improvement

How, then, does the curriculum leadership in a school or school system make possible a curriculum improve-

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ment program in which a large majority of teachers, parents and students participate? Since central planning and manipulation have been tried and have failed, it is obvious that a new approach warrants consideration. Recent experimentation seems to indicate that decentralization of responsibilities offers much promise. When this approach is used the individual school becomes the primary unit for improving the instructional program.

In each school using this approach, the principal, teachers, parents and students assume new and challenging roles, in that it is their responsibility to plan and develop a program which meets the needs of the students and community. The principal becomes an active leader in the field of curriculum development. He provides opportunities for teachers, parents and students to plan together. He assists those involved in planning to identify problems and to find ways in which these problems can be solved. He facilitates work by providing time for planning and by making resources available.

Teachers, too, must assume new responsibilities. They must be dedicated to the task of working toward providing the best possible instructional program for the students in the school. They must be willing to work cooperatively with parents and students. They must be willing to give time and leadership to the work to be done. They must be willing to experiment.

When the individual school becomes the primary unit for curriculum improvement, the role of the central curriculum staff changes in many respects. The major responsibility of the central staff becomes one of facilitating in every possible way the work in each school. Consultants or supervisors work through the principal and provide services to teachers as they are needed and as they fit into the on-going plans developed by the principals and faculties. The curriculum staff also provides leadership in coordination of the program at the city-wide level.

Much more could be said about the functions and responsibilities of individual schools and about ways in which teachers, parents and students can work together toward better education for children. However, since the purpose of this article is to describe an experiment involving participation of professional personnel and parents at the all-school level, space does not permit further exploration.

Central Coordination and Service

Although the individual school should function as the primary unit for improving instruction there is still a need for activity at the central level. There are many problems which arise at the individual school level which are common to most schools that can be dealt with democratically at the all-school level. There are policies which should be determined through participation of the total school personnel; there are a multitude of services which should be provided to schools; there are needs for city-wide in-service activities; there are comprehensive research studies to be made for the bene-

fit of all schools; there are teaching materials to be developed. In fact, there are a host of services that can be provided to individual schools which will facilitate their work in developing a program to meet the needs of the students and the community.

In the past, in some school systems, many of these problems have been solved and services provided through decisions made by the administrative and supervisory staff. This procedure denies the opportunity for participation of all concerned and often impedes the work of curriculum improvement in individual schools. If individual schools are given autonomy in improving instructional programs it is important that the principals and teachers participate in solving problems which are city-wide in nature.

Central Curriculum Council

In the Corpus Christi Public Schools all problems of school-wide significance are dealt with by a Curriculum Council which was democratically conceived and organized. The council is composed of a teacher representative from each school, elected by the faculty, an elementary principal, a secondary principal and a supervisor, all elected by their respective groups. The council meets at least once a month for a half-day on school time. During some months it is necessary to call an additional meeting. A chairman, vice chairman and secretary are chosen by the council and these three plus a representative from the curriculum staff serve as the steering committee.

Although specific functions of the council have been determined, a general statement encompasses all of

them—the council determines policies cooperatively, deals with all-school problems, and provides services which are of school-wide significance and which facilitate the work of principals and teachers in individual schools but do not block the efforts of each school faculty in developing a program which meets the needs of the students and the community.

The council attempts to work in such manner that all professional personnel will have an opportunity to participate in every phase of its activities and program. At the beginning of each school year a census of problems is taken. This is done by having each council representative carry on a discussion with his faculty or group to unearth significant and critical problems. These problems are brought to the October meeting of the council where a composite list is developed followed by discussion for clarification. The list, usually containing from fifty to sixty problems, is then sent back to the schools so that first, second and third priority problems may be selected by each faculty or group. After tabulating the choices it is often necessary to return the high priority problems for additional consideration and evaluation.

Keeping in mind the projects not completed during the previous school year, the council then decides how many problems may be worked on during the current school year and usually chooses problems of highest priority for consideration and study. Problems which are being studied during the present school year are:

How to help students develop desirable democratic attitudes

Identification and effective use of materials for slow and rapid learners

Study of the ungraded primary

Improvement of reporting to parents.

Usually the council authorizes the appointment of committees to make a comprehensive study of each problem. The names of prospective committee members are obtained from council members. They discuss each problem with their faculties or groups and obtain the names of principals, teachers and supervisors who are interested in serving on each committee. Since many more names are provided than can be used, the steering committee of the council has been delegated the responsibility of selecting committee members from the lists sent in from each school or group.

A member of the central curriculum staff is a participant on each committee. A main function of the staff member is to encourage the committee to use research techniques in the study. The committee usually makes detailed plans for the study and these are presented to the total council membership who in turn discuss them with their faculties or groups. From the discussions many suggestions are obtained and most often the committee is able to improve the plans as a result of the faculty reactions. Each new development in the study is presented to the council and faculties for criticisms and suggestions. Although this procedure is slow, it gives assurance to the committee that all teachers understand what is being done and that they have an opportunity to participate in all phases of the study. During the past year the council completed its work on

a new cumulative record which was in the developmental stage for eighteen months. This record, in part and as a whole was studied and discussed by the faculties seven or eight times before a cumulative record that was acceptable to the large majority of the professional personnel was completed.

During the past two years the council has provided leadership in developing a number of significant projects. Among these is a comprehensive in-service program, which includes a workshop scheduled two weeks before school opens each year and a year-around workshop which meets each Tuesday afternoon, and for which the school day is shortened by one hour. The council has insisted, and rightfully so, that workshop participation be voluntary. Attendance has increased with each workshop—the current one has enrolled 506 of a little more than 900 potential participants. Two other council projects which are now in their second year are the development of teaching guides in mathematics, 1-12, and in language arts, 1-12. Both guides are being developed on a co-operative basis, in that each step in their development is submitted to the council and the faculties. By this procedure, the guides are being put to use before they are actually completed for publication.

Parents Advisory Curriculum Council

Many ways have been developed to involve parents in curriculum improvement at system-wide level. The most commonly used is that of having a small group of parents as members of a curriculum council such as that described above. There are several dis-

advantages to this arrangement. In the first place a few parents cannot be representative of "grass roots" groups. They do not usually have affiliations which would make it possible to involve many more school patrons. Second, parents who have participated on such a council are often bored with what goes on in the council. They say that many things of a routine nature are considered in which they have no interest.

With these shortcomings in mind it was decided to try another approach in Corpus Christi. The president of the PTA City-Council after discussion with her Board of Managers agreed to establish a curriculum committee in each school and have a chairman of each committee serve as the school's representative on a Parents Advisory Curriculum Council. It was also agreed that a man would be appointed to serve as co-chairman. This was done primarily to involve fathers in some of the work of the Parents Advisory Curriculum Council.

Members of the Parents Council meet at least once a month for half a day. During several months last spring three meetings were held. The Parents Council works in a manner similar to that of the professional council. At the beginning of the year the members carry on a census and consensus of problems. In so far as active participation in studies is concerned, members have asked to be limited to one project. For this reason the professional council has agreed to work cooperatively with the Parents Council on the problem having highest priority according to the parents consensus. Last year the co-operative study involved developing a

policy for promotion and placement. This year it is on reporting to parents. A committee composed of professional personnel and parents was chosen to carry on each of these studies.

Three main activities are regularly scheduled on the agenda of the Parents Council:

- A report of progress on the cooperative project, with opportunity for discussion.
- A report on each project carried on by the professional council, followed by discussion and full opportunity for parents to criticize and make suggestions. This information is carried back to the next meeting of the professional council.
- Consideration of other problems of high priority on the parents consensus list. This is done by having someone present information, which is followed by discussion.

Each Parent Council member has the same responsibility as have members of the professional council. Plans and information are carried back to the local units and as much participation as possible is encouraged and enlisted. The members have done an exceptionally creditable job in this respect.

The procedure and work on developing a promotion and placement policy might well illustrate the thoroughness of studies carried on in which parents participate.

Full information from each of the studies was made available to all professional personnel and to parents. The joint committee proposed a statement of policies on promotion and placement which was based upon the studies made. This statement was sub-

mitted to faculties and parents for criticisms and suggestions. After several revisions the policies were approved by both groups.

What of the Future?

This account of attempts to involve most of the teachers and many parents in curriculum improvement at the school-wide level leaves much to be desired. There are many problems and there are still many things left undone. The development of the councils has been gradual. The professional council was started first—the Parents Council more than a year later. The next step will probably be a Students Curriculum Council.

One of the most persistent, crucial problems is that of communication. Most council members have a great desire to involve others in the solution of problems but the opportunity is not always available to them in their schools or in local PTA units. Constant consideration of this problem has resulted in gradual improvement. *Curriculum News*, a bulletin, is sent to every teacher, administrator and supervisor after each council meeting. Additional bulletins are sent when information from committees needs study and consideration. *The Parents Advisory Council Bulletin* has the same function for parents. This year plans are made for using tape recordings as a medium of communication.

Those who are participating in leadership roles in this experiment are encouraged as they observe its possibilities. Through continuous evaluation and experimentation they hope that increasing participation in curriculum improvement may be realized.

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