

Overcoming Barriers to Creative Individual School Leadership

One large city system is attempting in several ways to remove barriers to creative individual school leadership at the local level.

IN A LARGE school system many of the barriers to creative individual school leadership have to be dealt with by the superintendent of schools. Such problems have to be handled on a system wide basis. They cannot be dealt with by the principals separately.

For instance Chicago was sliced into nine elementary school districts by arbitrary east-west lines. There were also five high school districts. In many cases schools in the same high school area were in different elementary districts. Under such circumstances coordination between high schools and elementary schools was difficult.

On August 1, 1955 General Superintendent Benjamin C. Willis put into effect a complete reorganization of school districts. All the elementary schools and high schools within each of the fourteen new districts are under the supervision of a District Superintendent. All of the cluster of elementary schools contributory to one high school are in the same district with this high school. Each district is made up of one or more such clusters, plus

any technical high school which lies within its geographical boundaries. Each of the District Superintendents has jurisdiction similar to that of a superintendent of a small city.

For purposes of school administration Chicago is divided approximately into north and south halves each under an Associate Superintendent in Charge of Instruction. These two Associate Superintendents coordinate their work through a third Associate Superintendent. The whole set up is of course under the supervision of the General Superintendent of Schools.

Dr. Willis stated that the present reorganization measures would offer greater opportunity to localize issues in the future; thus many problems will be handled at the local level.

It is expected that the decentralization will facilitate the solution of community education problems, and bring about wider use of developmental procedures and the integration of curriculum. The individual school is given greater opportunities for creative leadership in its own community.

In-Service Opportunities

Within his province as leader of his staff a principal can endeavor to have his teachers take advantage of opportunities for in-service training. How-

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ever, the principal as an individual cannot provide the incentive of a school system promotional plan based on attainment of credit hours or higher degrees.

Many teachers in Chicago have been attending summer school and late afternoon and evening classes in the several universities and colleges in the Chicago area. However it is natural for more teachers to promote their professional growth, learn new techniques, methods, philosophies and understandings while putting themselves in line for higher salaries.

Dr. Willis announced in the public press an experiment in giving even greater in-service aid and training. The Chicago Board of Education is coming to the aid of principals in schools with continual turnover of students. Their problem is further aggravated by a continual turnover of teachers. Since the regulations for transfer of teachers are liberal, teachers tend to leave difficult schools at the earliest opportunity. Many of the teachers in these highly transient schools are newly appointed young people. Experimentally, some mature experienced teachers are being assigned to oversee and assist the work of perhaps eight new and relatively inexperienced teachers in selected highly transient schools. If the experiment results in better instruction, the project may be expanded.

Another barrier to creative leadership by principals is inadequate or antiquated buildings. There are in Chicago, out of a total of 434 school buildings, 154 which were built before 1900. In the next five years, the Chicago Public Schools anticipate an enrollment increase of 55,000 pupils. Added to the 43,000 enrollment increase since 1951, the total is larger than the entire adult and child population of any other Illinois city except Peoria or Rockford.

With money from a 1951 bond issue, 21 school buildings were completed, and three are under construction. Nineteen additions were completed and 13 are under construction. Besides there were major and minor rehabilitation jobs and property was purchased for sites.

At an election in the spring of 1955 a fifty million dollar school bond issue was authorized. Work is under way in utilizing the newly available funds.

Individual school leadership is never a simple undertaking. In a city such as Chicago, school policy must needs be set by a central organization. The problem of applying that policy to a local situation can at times seem insurmountable. However, when the central policy is one of considering the problems of the individual schools and of treating local issues at local levels, many of the barriers to creative individual school leadership are removed.

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