

## What Are Duties of the Curriculum Director?

**These authors report a state study of the duties and related competencies of curriculum directors.**

ONE OF THE newer positions in American school systems is that of curriculum director. Naturally, the novelty of the position has led to much confusion as to its exact function. Several months ago, the organization of New Jersey curriculum directors designated a committee, consisting of the authors of this article, to propose a list of duties and related competencies of curriculum directors. The list which is proposed in the present article has special reference to the public schools of New Jersey, but it will probably prove useful to boards of education and administrators in school systems elsewhere, particularly as these school systems seek to define or re-define the curriculum director's role.

The work of our committee was facilitated by a basic study which was previously made in New Jersey by a graduate seminar led by Gordon N. Mackenzie, of Teachers College, Columbia

University. A report of the study conducted cooperatively by the seminar and the New Jersey curriculum directors representing 19 school systems was issued in 1955 under the title *The Work of the Curriculum Coordinator in Selected New Jersey Schools* (Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University). The report showed great diversity in both the duties and the titles of central office personnel in charge of instruction. Furthermore, it suggested to the organization of New Jersey curriculum directors the need for more careful definition of their duties, which might lead in part to recommendations about state certification policy.<sup>1</sup>

Our committee relied heavily on other sources of data in preparing our proposal. These sources included:

1. New Jersey curriculum directors' perceptions of their most important and least important duties, as revealed in group discussion and writing
2. Committee members' experiences as curriculum directors in several school systems
3. Educational literature regarding the

<sup>1</sup>For an overview of the cooperative efforts of seminar members and curriculum directors, see George M. Sharp, "Curriculum Coordinators Study Their Job," *Educational Leadership* 12:8, May 1955, p. 464-66.

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role of the generalist in elementary and secondary school curriculum

4. Two documents of considerable import: *The Role of the Curriculum Director in the Administration of American Public School Systems*, by Dwight L. Kirk, School of Education, The University of Texas, 1953; and "Summary of Study of the Position of Assistant Superintendent in Charge of Instruction for the School Year 1954-1955," by Theron Freese, assistant superintendent, Long Beach, California (mimeographed). The former is a study of the curriculum director's position in 134 school systems, 123 of which are outside the Southwest. The latter results from a questionnaire survey of 348 larger school systems, 227 of which reported that they had established the position of curriculum director.

Because the term "coordinator" usually implies, in the schools we know best, more limited responsibility than that held by the majority of New Jersey curriculum directors, we decided to refer to the "curriculum director" in identifying the person who leads the curriculum improvement program. We felt that what a curriculum leader is called should have no real effect on his professional behavior. Our search for an appropriate title was confused somewhat by the presence of 18 different titles in 19 New Jersey school systems. The Texas report revealed 66, with "assistant superintendent in charge of instruction" appearing most frequently. We noted that, whatever his title, the curriculum director's responsibility usually covers all the grades in the school system. Sometimes, for reasons of local strategy or availability of personnel, it affects the elementary schools only, or the secondary schools only.

The committee's proposal, which was approved by the whole group of New Jersey curriculum directors in October 1957, bears the title "A Statement Concerning the Duties of Curriculum Directors in the New Jersey Public

Schools."<sup>2</sup> It describes the curriculum director as an instructional leader who releases "potential in the instructional and supervisory staff to provide an effective educational program" by mobilizing and coordinating the abilities and efforts of staff members. It recognizes the superintendent as the person in whom ultimate responsibility for the educational program rests. It designates the curriculum director as the superintendent's "right arm" or delegate in instructional matters. Moreover, it specifies that the nature of the curriculum director's position causes other directors, coordinators, and supervisors to be responsible to him, not to permit him to glory in his authority but to provide effective coordination of the instructional program.

Here are the duties or activities of curriculum directors which the New Jersey group considers to be among the most important:

1. Planning for improvement of the curriculum and of the curriculum development program
2. Helping evaluate continuously both the appropriateness of the curriculum and the quality of the curriculum development program
3. Directing the formation of point of view, policies and philosophy of education
4. Directing the development of curriculum materials
5. Using ready-made research data, and promoting local research
6. Coordinating the activities of other special instructional personnel, e.g., supervisors, librarians
7. Working with guidance personnel to integrate curriculum and guidance functions
8. Providing for lay participation in curriculum improvement
9. Arranging time, facilities and materials for curriculum improvement
10. Serving school personnel as technical

<sup>2</sup> Copies available from Harold T. Shafer, Education Center, Ridgewood Public Schools, Ridgewood, New Jersey.

consultant and adviser regarding curriculum problems

11. Organizing and directing special in-service education projects

12. Interpreting the curriculum to the public and, in certain situations, to the Board of Education

13. Encouraging articulation among levels of the school system.

The emphasis in the list is on tasks that relate directly to instructional improvement. We believe that administrative tasks like those connected with bus transportation and public relations programs should assume minor or incidental importance among the curriculum director's responsibilities.

The New Jersey group believes that, in addition to his primary responsibilities, the curriculum director should be expected to assume some responsibility for related or adjunct activities, like these:

1. Helping orient new teachers
2. Making recommendations for the budget
3. Helping select teachers for appointment
4. Helping plan new buildings and modernize old buildings
5. Completing questionnaires dealing with instructional matters
6. Attending national, state and local conferences on education, and making reports of these conferences to local personnel
7. Conferring with commercial, educational and other representatives who visit the school system.

To perform his duties properly, the curriculum director should become especially competent in:

1. Practicing good human relations
2. Adhering to principles of human growth and development
3. Knowing when, where, and under what conditions curriculum change occurs
4. Using group process techniques
5. Relating quickly to other people
6. Developing the creative abilities of other people

7. Organizing time and making judgments as to priority of jobs and services

8. Fostering research activities

9. Discovering and using resources

10. Clearing channels of communication

11. Identifying and working with power structures in school and community

12. Seeing himself as others see him.

Finally, we have enumerated conditions that seem to control the curriculum director's work:

1. Curriculum directors are skilled in the work of improving the instructional program and should be employed for and assigned to this function.

2. Curriculum improvement generally proceeds most satisfactorily when the curriculum director performs his duties on a kindergarten through twelfth grade basis.

3. The responsibilities of each curriculum director should be evaluated frequently to determine whether the taxpayers of his school district are receiving the greatest possible benefit of his education and experience.

4. Whatever organization obtains in a local situation, the person charged with responsibility for curriculum development will function most effectively when good working relationships have been cooperatively established and have been enunciated by the superintendent.

5. Curriculum directors should function sometimes as staff officers and sometimes as line officers, depending partly upon the particular duties they are performing. Whatever their relationship at a given time with other staff members, they should seek to work cooperatively with them.

The curriculum director, from his base in the central offices or another strategic location in the school system, is a valuable stimulator, mobilizer and coordinator of curriculum improvement activity. He must recognize, however, that most of the detailed and significant planning for better pupil experiences is effected by teachers and principals in individual schools. Hence, he serves best when he facilitates action for curriculum improvement, whether he or someone else has originated the action.

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