

Leadership Can Improve Standards and Evaluation

Excellence is approached through cooperative planning and evaluation.

CONCERN for the welfare of each individual is a basic tenet of our American democracy. We are dedicated to the principle of universal education and we attempt to achieve this ideal by making attendance at school compulsory. This requirement that eight to ten years of precious childhood be spent in study imposes grave responsibility upon the established educational system. All children, their parents who support them, and the citizens who provide the facilities are entitled to a fair return for the time and money they invest. Educational leaders have direct responsibility for the quality of the learning experiences offered to children and for the standards of achievement expected of them.

The changing demands of society present a challenge to everyone in the school system. As the fund of knowledge increases, it becomes imperative for children to learn more at a faster rate than

ever before. School people must run in order even to stand still.

Rote learning may have seemed adequate in a less-demanding era. Now, psychological studies have shown that children learn better if they have a real reason for learning and can relate new information to facts they have learned previously. Memory is indispensable, but a person must be able to use facts for critical thinking in solving problems that concern him. Man's horizon is being extended so that the whole world and even outer space are becoming his immediate environment. The curriculum must keep pace and teachers must have retraining, if necessary, to meet the new demands.

It must be recognized that leadership in upgrading the quality of education rests primarily with school administrative and supervisory personnel. Teachers are busy helping each child in their classes to do the best work that is possible for him. Seldom do they have opportunities for observing other classes, comparing achievements, and seeing curriculum implications on a system-wide basis.

The value of a broad overview may be noted in the current findings of administrators in Cape Canaveral, Florida. They have discovered there are twice as many gifted pupils in that school system and the surrounding area as in the average

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American school population. All these children are not the offspring of scientists, as might be expected in that community. There are also many eager, alert children among families in the vicinity, regardless of the parents' education or occupation. The interest in science, the advanced courses in all subjects, and the activities at the guided missile test center have stimulated the desire to learn. Educators there are convinced that intelligence is not static but its effectiveness can be increased in a dynamic environment.

Cooperation Is Needed

Excellence in any undertaking is attained only with the cooperation of everyone concerned. Teachers, from the daily close association with boys and girls, have realistic knowledge of their needs and interests; therefore, curriculum improvement should include teachers at each step along the way. Committee organization which includes teacher representatives, administrators, and supervisory personnel is a practical way to use the vast potentialities that exist in these trained workers. The groups of teachers in each elementary school, or the teachers in each department of a secondary school, are the grass roots from which ideas for curriculum improvement spring. After local discussion, representatives can carry suggestions to a meeting of similar persons from a larger group. This provides a two-way communication system for the exchange and evaluation of ideas. The number of successive groups necessary will vary with the size of the school system.

Such a committee organization has been in operation in the Denver Public Schools since 1939. The city is divided into areas with each senior high school

as the center. Representatives of elementary schools in each area meet and the recommendations of these groups are carried to a central elementary committee. Representatives of all junior high schools form the instruction committee for that level, and a similar representation forms the senior high instruction committee. Curriculum committees of teachers representing all grades, kindergarten through twelve, provide for articulation in planning the courses for each subject. An executive board considers the suggestions from all committees and makes specific recommendations to the Superintendent for his action and referral to the Board of Education, the policy-making body. Working through committee organization takes time, but arriving at wise decisions that lead to real improvement is worthwhile.

In-service Education

Many times teachers and supervisors recognize their need for expert advice. Consultative service may be sought from persons with special competency who have had experience in other situations. For example, a specialist in methods of teaching mathematics may in a few conferences bring teachers up to date and give them a wealth of new, effective suggestions.

Educational television is providing dynamic in-service training for teachers. Observation of the methods used by a television instructor gives classroom teachers new standards. While pupils are learning subject matter or skills, their teacher is seeing an expert in action. A school system can arrange to present demonstration lessons by means of television at some of the regular faculty meetings. No time or energy is lost in getting to a central meeting place and

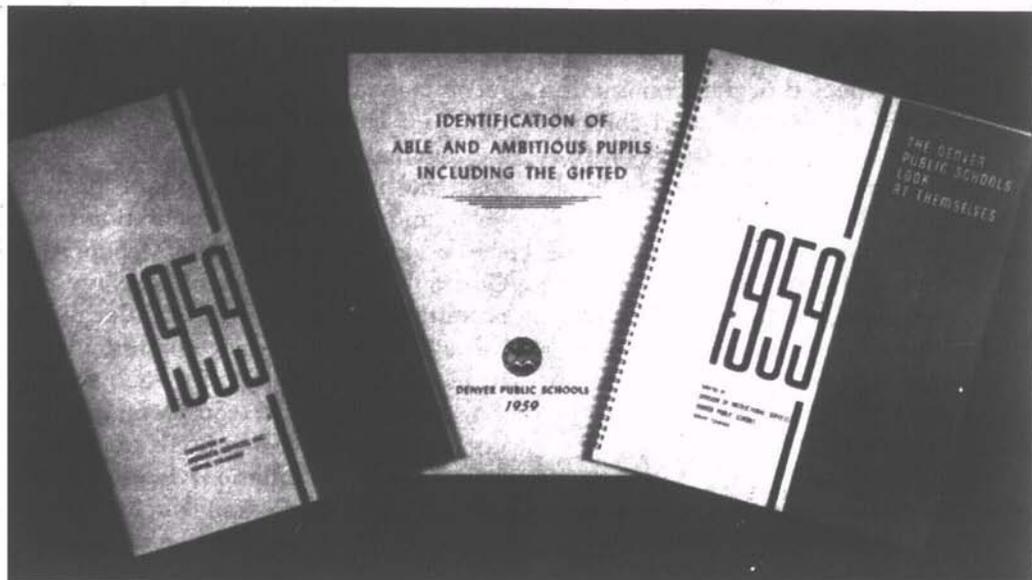


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Testing programs and surveys of public opinion help teachers in appraising curriculum and improving standards.

all teachers of a grade or subject can be reached.

Supervisors in Denver are using this method to demonstrate the use of new laboratory equipment now available for science and foreign language instruction.

Educators have much to gain from leaders in the community. Advisory committees of citizens working with teachers can help to make instruction realistic. In turn, citizens learn more about the problems of educators and mutual understanding and respect develop. Employers in local businesses and industries have specific suggestions for the training of prospective workers.

Planned visits by groups of teachers to local factories and business establishments help educators to know the standards of performance that are expected of pupils when they leave school. Managers are very generous with their time in answering questions and showing processes.

Opinion surveys conducted in the community are enlightening for both teachers and citizens. Questions asked often make people aware of new educational practices and problems; the answers give an evaluation of results and suggest improved standards to be established. The consensus of a large number of citizens gives a more accurate measurement than the opinions of a few vocal critics.

Action Research

Leadership is necessary to initiate and coordinate studies that will give scientific data to substantiate recommendations on new methods of teaching. Decisions about desirable class size, scheduling, grouping, and similar controversial problems can be determined only after changes are conducted on a trial basis with the variables controlled. Experience shows that teachers work with special

fervor when they have been selected to try out a new method and pupils benefit as a result, no matter what decision may be reached about the value of expanding the study.

Many endowed organizations, such as the Kellogg Foundation and the Ford Foundation, support educational research projects that are carefully planned. Financial aid from the Federal Government is available for studies to improve instruction in certain subjects. The National Defense Education Act, for example, provides for teacher education and equipment to raise standards in science, mathematics, and foreign language instruction.

Continual appraisal of achievement is basic if standards are to be improved. Pupils and teachers frequently need to measure their progress toward an established goal, and they need help in setting that goal. Too often goals are expressed in broad, general terms. They may be laudable objectives but so idealistic that the degree to which they are attained cannot be appraised. Instead, statements that describe the behavior of a person who is making progress toward a realistic goal can be understood by pupils.

Standardized tests provide a measuring stick for evaluation. On the basis of the achievements of a great number of pupils, expectancy tables are available for pupils of each ability group, in each subject, at every grade level. A child's performance can be compared with his own at a previous time or with the work of other children of his age and ability. Graphs of test scores and individual profiles help teachers and pupils to see their strengths and weaknesses.

To be of greatest value, test scores should be analyzed so that items in which achievement is low may be isolated and then retaught. As administrators visit a school and confer with the teaching staff, they can suggest changes in organization or methods to improve performance.

Understanding and cooperation of the family are vital in setting realistic standards for children. A report card by itself is a meager record of achievement. A personal conference in which teacher and parent consider the child, his potentialities, goals and interests, gives opportunity for warm, sympathetic evaluation. Attitudes fostered and plans made at these conferences are powerful forces for improving standards.

WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY ABOUT ARITHMETIC?

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