

● Innovations in Education

A COOPERATIVE BOARD PROVIDES REGIONAL SERVICES

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COOPERATIVE service programs are an efficient and economical way to provide vocational education, special educational services, curriculum development, educational data processing and shared specialists' services. This has been the experience of the Board of Cooperative Educational Services of the First Supervisory District of Erie County, New York.

Cooperation between school districts through legally constituted regional organizations is one of the most rapidly developing movements in education today. Several states are planning or have provided for such state-wide regional units. The movement has received its greatest impetus in the Supplementary Educational Center concept of Title III, Public Law 89-10.

A number of such centers have been funded for planning and will soon be submitting operational projects. Each center will develop programs around their educational needs. The experience of this Cooperative Board may assist in defining broad areas of successful cooperative action and point out pertinent operational principles.

The First Supervisory District is a 900 square mile suburban area partially

surrounding Buffalo, New York, and includes 19 independent school systems with an enrollment varying from 2,000 to 8,000. Total public school registration exceeds 80,000, with an additional 30,000 enrolled in non-public schools. The component schools have their own boards of education with administrative and instructional staffs.

The Cooperative Board employs more than 250 instructional and technical personnel, and has an operational budget exceeding three million dollars per year. Each district is directly involved in the planning of service programs. New services are initiated only if the need has been established and component districts have shown sufficient interest, acceptance and support for them. Contracts are signed between the school districts and the Cooperative Board authorizing administrative and service expenditures subject to approval by the State Education Department. Contracts are also authorized and encouraged for shared programs between two or more cooperative boards.

The Cooperative Board is an extension of the local schools, responsive to their needs and subject to their control. The State Education Department ap-

proves service programs and substantially assists in financing such programs.

Vocational Education

Fourteen hundred students are presently enrolled in area centers, remaining in their home schools for academic offerings and attending the vocational centers two or three hours daily. Students are able to choose from a wide range of trade, service and technical subjects designed to provide occupational opportunity for those with varying interests and levels of ability. The centers are planned to meet the geographic and population needs of the entire district.

Offerings include: auto shop, cosmetology, practical nursing, technical electronics, electronic maintenance, home appliance repair, machine shop, electronic data processing, building maintenance, food service, dental assisting, commercial art, heating and air conditioning, vocational agriculture, home and institutional health service, microbiology and welding. A multi-occupational course is designed specifically to accommodate the potential drop-out student and enrolls students age 15 or over regardless of class placement. Evening occupational extension courses, work-study programs and Manpower Development programs serve additional students and adults.

Special Educational Services

The Director of Vocational Education and his staff develop these programs with the advice and assistance of local school guidance and administrative personnel, State Education Department specialists and a lay advisory committee broadly representative of industrial community needs.

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The Cooperative Board operates 68 classes for educable and trainable retarded children and children with learning and behavior problems (those students generally included under the label of brain injured and emotionally disturbed). Emphasis is upon educational—not medical—disability. It is the policy of the Board to keep these classes as near to the home of the student as possible, consistent with proper age grouping for class range and available facilities. Wherever possible these classes are located within the local schools, with the Cooperative Board leasing required facilities and providing proper instructional, coordinating and supervisory assistance.

In the classes for children with learning and behavior problems, class size is limited to ten, classrooms contain study carrels, and instruction is individualized

with detailed "educational prescriptions." An intensive in-service training program, locally operated, provides specialized training, and teacher aides relieve the classroom teacher of clerical and housekeeping duties. A project for training and utilization of behavior specialists is designed to explore ways other than special classroom placement for these students, and to identify potential problems at an early age to prevent them from becoming acute.

Itinerant teachers of the blind and partially sighted, speech therapists, and psychological and social workers share their services wherever needed. When individual schools grow in size and acceptance of the need for such specialists, they are encouraged to incorporate these personnel as local school staff members.

Physically and multi-handicapped students attend other schools or community agencies designed to meet their needs. The Cooperative Board works with local schools to identify the disability, provides placement and tuition payments and contracts for necessary transportation.

Curriculum Development

The curriculum development program grew out of the need to reduce the time gap between educational research and classroom practice, and to help teachers to bring greater depth and flexibility to the classroom. The program is designed to strengthen and supplement the curriculum departments of each school, and to provide leadership to update administrative and instructional staff in new technologies, theories and practices.

The five programs presently functioning to achieve these objectives are: in-service teacher and administrative

workshops, materials production and graphic design service, cooperative film libraries, the services of a media-specialist with particular responsibility for educational television, and a coordinating role to provide cultural programs to the schools through contracts with the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

Workshop-seminars may be organized at any time, may be of any length, and usually grant in-service credit. To meet current educational needs, flexibility and timeliness are emphasized. Outstanding consultants are hired temporarily for specific experiences and skills. Consultative service is also provided schools to assist local in-service programs.

One of the most ambitious and potentially significant projects thus far attempted is the Implementation of Learning Theory into Classroom Practice. This project, jointly sponsored with the State Education Department, involves 26 teachers and a coordinating committee of curriculum specialists from the local schools. The objective of the project is the application of established principles of learning to classroom teaching. Consultants who have already agreed to participate include: Aubrey Roden of the State University of New York at Buffalo, Thomas Clayton of Syracuse University, Ned Flanders of the University of Michigan, and Jack Fraenkel from the Curriculum Development in the Social Studies Project at San Francisco State College.

A second project, also jointly sponsored with the State Education Department, involves teacher teams to develop computer based instructional units for individually tailored curriculum guides.

A specially designed curriculum laboratory features a "teaching wall," a con-

sole controlling up to five audio-visual remote controlled programs, and tele-lecture equipment to provide the proper environment for these workshops.

Local schools are in varying stages of implementing television as an instructional tool. The Cooperative Board plans to develop a video tape program library and a mobile production studio. These units will provide the software and necessary equipment for local program production. The talents of the four material production staff artists are utilized in the preparing and servicing of visual needs—posters, transparencies, slides, slide stories, and special projects for classroom teachers—and will increasingly be directed to educational TV production.

Educational Data Processing

Operations—Programming—Systems! These three departments are developing a total educational information system in the three areas of pupil, teacher, and business applications. Only through such a total system approach can the potential of the computer be realized for educational purposes.

The Cooperative Board is presently providing 29 Western New York school systems with a variety of educational data processing services. With the financial assistance of a Title III E.S.E.A. grant, services will expand into more direct instruction for pupils, computer based instructional units for teachers, and management information data for curriculum and administrative personnel.

Shared Specialist Services

The services of professional and technical personnel are frequently needed

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Julietta K. Arthur

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less than full time in local schools. The Cooperative Board provides the administrative agency to offer such services on a shared time, pro-rated cost basis. As schools grow in size, specialists frequently become full time members of local school staffs. Thus the Cooperative Board introduces the services of specialists; and, as their work becomes better known and utilized in the local school, the board supplements the services through additional shared personnel.

Operational Principles

Experience indicates that there are identifiable principles for successful regional operation:

1. The regional unit should be service oriented. Such an orientation permits local control of service programs, but provides on a cooperative basis those services local schools cannot more eco-

nomically or efficiently provide for themselves.

2. A real—not artificial—sense of identity with the regional organization should exist.

This requires a legally constituted administrative organization with direct lines of authority to and from the State Education Department and the local schools. Such an organization “belongs” to each school district but will be recognized as the decentralized unit of the State Education Department through which its objectives should be financed.

3. A reliable State and local financial base should undergird the regional organization.

Financial stability is essential to attract expertise, lease facilities and develop long-range educational programs. Where such financial stability exists, supplementary funds can be used to develop exemplary programs that will continue after these monies are withdrawn.

4. Cooperative decision making requires regularly scheduled meetings at which ideas may be introduced and evaluated.

The chief school administrators have to participate in program development and evaluation to properly interpret local needs to directors of regional programs. In addition, the directors are assured the support of the chief school administrators when implementation difficulties arise.

5. Clarity of line and staff relationships is imperative for multidistrict operations.

Definition of job specifications must precede the hiring of program directors. Such directors must be sufficiently competent in their specialties to be accepted by chief school administrators.

Regional operational units will become increasingly active in the next few years. There are few guidelines to follow, and several unanswered questions. Two of the most pressing questions on which research is lacking relate to the optimal size of a regional unit and the degree to which urban and suburban school districts should work together regionally. Some agonizing reappraisals of school district organization would seem to be in order. ¶

The Changing Curriculum: SCIENCE

by RICHARD E. HANEY

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