

# Regional Service Centers: Impetus for Change

**LUCILE ESTELL**

**N**OW approaching the beginning of their fifth year of operation in Texas are the 20 regional education service centers. During these initial years of operation, these centers have functioned in a manner which assures their becoming an integral part of the education scene in Texas. It is likely also that the regional concept will become a part of the nationwide scene in education.

The initial step in the establishment of these regional centers came when the 59th Legislature of Texas authorized the state board of education to establish media centers throughout the state. This original plan was broadened by the 60th Legislature so that other services might be provided to schools according to needs identified as priorities. The philosophy of these centers was then and continues to be expressed by the slogan: "Services available anywhere available everywhere."

Twenty regions in Texas were designated by the state board of education and a site for each center was determined. General guidelines for the organization and implementation of these regional centers were outlined in the *State Plan for the Establishment of Education Service Centers*. This plan provided for the selection of an advisory group, the Joint Committee.

This Joint Committee is composed of one representative from each 12-grade school district and one representative designated by the county board of trustees to represent all school districts in the county with fewer than 12 grades. The plan also provided for a five- or seven-member board of directors elected by the Joint Committee to serve as the policy-making body of the center. Boards of directors in the respective regions are responsible for the employment of an executive director to serve as the executive officer of the centers.

As this machinery moved into operation, the centers began to take shape and to function as educational entities. The shape and form of each were varied and soon assumed the form dictated by the region in which it was to serve. As a pattern of operation emerged for each center, each operation tended to develop a regional flavor. Although these regional aspects still exist, the centers have a number of similar areas of operation.

*Media Services.* Schools of Texas were no exception to the flood of technology which engulfed schools following passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. There developed a pressing need for teachers to be trained and retrained to assure effective utilization of this technology. Re-

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gional education service centers planned and implemented numerous workshops for teachers. These workshops emphasized the operation of equipment and also, in many instances, the development of teaching materials.

Lending libraries of films, filmstrips, and other media materials were established in each region. Facilities for producing and reproducing audio tapes, transparencies, and slides are provided in this area of service center operation. Also, many service centers acquired equipment for videotaping and thus have assisted schools in this area.

*Educational Planning.* Services to administrators are another important function of these centers. These include training in long-range planning, aid with the consolidated application for federal assistance, and—increasingly in today's climate of accountability—assistance with the evaluation process.

*Data Processing.* Direct service to teachers is a primary function of these regional service centers. One such service is furnishing released time for teachers through providing services such as student scheduling and grade reporting, test scoring and analysis, payroll, information retrieval, and other services which vary among regions. To date, most of the efforts in this area have focused on record keeping and statistical data. Increasingly, study and attention are being given to developing and utilizing the potential of the computer in instruction.

*Curriculum and Instruction.* All activities of the regional service centers are directed toward the improvement and upgrading of instruction for the schoolchildren of Texas. Thus, direct attention to helping schools improve their instructional program is a major objective of each of the service centers. This may take the form of awareness conferences or in-depth efforts. Whatever the form, innovation and change are the key descriptors. For example, many of the new approaches to instruction such as *Science—A Process Approach* and the *Taba Social Studies Curriculum* have been introduced into the schools by the service centers.

*Special Education.* Each regional service center includes a staff in special education. It is the function of this staff to improve the quality of special education services both within the region and on a statewide basis. The efforts of these staff members vary from one center to another. They may include piloting of an instructional material to determine its effectiveness, and training of teachers and paraprofessional personnel. Five of these centers have been designated as instructional materials centers to provide a wide variety of materials for examination and use by regional teachers. Cooperatives operating through the regional schools provide consultant and appraisal services to participating schools.

*Pupil Appraisal.* Operating from each of the centers is a program for measuring pupil aptitudes and for identifying special learning problems. These services may be provided through a special division or through a cooperative arrangement as described previously.

*Driver Education.* A number of the centers are providing driver education using simulators for initial training. Through these simulators, many hazards of driving may be provided. Thus the young driver may have an opportunity to react without facing real danger. Both classroom instruction and on-the-road training are provided for participating school districts. School districts which participate pay according to the number of drivers trained.

*In-Service.* Training and retraining of teachers are an integral part of every phase of service center activity. Ten days of in-service work are now mandatory for Texas teachers. Because of this, service centers have been called upon to plan and execute programs for regional preschool in-service training, primarily for small school districts. Many of these programs involve more than 2,000 educators; thus the planning must be large scale. In addition to this regional effort, other in-service work is provided as requested by local school districts.

*Dissemination.* Because of their new-

ness, a system of providing information about activities and services of these centers was a necessity. Communications are both to school personnel and to news media. Activities in this area may include assisting local school districts with public relations programs.

**M**any centers have programs which operate only within their region. An example of this is the Classroom Grant Program in Region VII in Kilgore. This program utilizes money donated by regional business and industry to help teachers develop and implement innovative ideas within their own classrooms. A maximum of \$500 may be awarded for each grant.

Certain centers within the state provide services in vocational education for the handicapped. Some include programs for the academically talented, some include special reading programs, and some provide cooperative purchasing.

Federal funds available under the Education Professions Development Act are utilized in these centers through the six consortia organized for this purpose.

The face of these regional centers is not static but rather is a constantly changing one, the changes for the most part being dictated by the schools which are served by the centers.

Who foots the bill for these services? A lion's share of it is paid from Title III funds. Special projects are funded through Title IV and Title VI. For certain services such as those provided through the film library, driver education, and data processing, local school districts pay on a cost basis.

Because these centers are establishing a firm place for themselves, increasing attention is being given to permanent funding for them. Meanwhile, each center labors daily to make both meaningful and truthful their slogan that educational services available to any child in Texas are available to every child in Texas.

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