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# How Can Schools Use Community

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*This writer's firm has designed the employer resources inventory, data bank, and scheduling system that serve the 57 school districts and 180,000 students in the Portland (Oregon) metro area. The objective is to create an efficient and responsive community resource delivery system for school districts and their communities.*

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**M**ANY ADVOCATES of educational reform are calling for increased use of community personnel, facilities, and institutions by educators as a means of making academic subjects more relevant to the students' everyday experiences. Community experiences, many claim, are necessary to provide students with the skills and knowledge required for self-sufficiency and independence in an adult world. Among the most articulate advocates of community involvement are career educators and social scientists who see the role of education as not just preparation for more education, but as preparation for one's life roles as citizen, family member, worker, and fulfilled individual.

There is no doubt in my mind that

community involvement in the educational process offers many benefits to both educator and learner, and that community involvement should be encouraged by each school district to the maximum extent possible. However, school administrators need to explore more fully the responsibilities and obligations the use of community resources imposes upon them. There are several specific requirements district administrators must cope with as their curriculum planners design new instructional programs which call for the use of community resources in the classroom and out in the community. This article will seek to explore two of these requirements.

The first requirement is for the development of better techniques for the effective use of community resources by classroom teachers.

Even though many teachers regularly invite community personnel into their classrooms, and take their students on tours and field trips, little in-depth expertise exists on how to utilize nonschool personnel in an instructional role. We believe that the instructional programs implemented by non-degreed personnel in the armed services and

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# Resources?

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industry demonstrate an *ability* to instruct. What we believe is needed is a technique to channel this ability in a productive direction.

The second requirement is for the design and operation of a community resource delivery system which can secure the personnel, facilities, and activities required by the new instructional programs and anticipated by the teaching staff.

Each local school district (or consortium of school districts in a multidistrict community) will need to individualize its delivery system to meet the needs of its own curriculum and instructional programs.

The first step in designing a delivery system is to research both the school system and the community-at-large to find answers to these five questions:

1. What types of resources, from which sectors of the community, in which occupations, at which grade levels, for which subjects, and in what time frame, will community resources be required to support new and existing instructional programs?

2. What are the present practices, abilities, and interests of classroom teachers to plan for, secure, and utilize community resources?

3. What capabilities do the economic, political, and cultural sectors of the community possess to provide the variety and volume of resources required to support the school's instructional programs?

4. What are the present interests, abilities, and willingness of community organizations and individuals in providing resources on a voluntary, contributed basis?

5. What logistical and administrative requirements must be satisfied in order to identify, select, recruit, train, and schedule community resources in a manner that is compatible with both the needs of the schools and the capability and willingness of the community to respond?

During our three years' experience working with educators and communities, we have identified these nine components which we believe are essential for the successful utilization of community resources:

*Needs Projection Procedures* Teachers and building administrators must be provided with a planning process to help them plan and project (preferably on an annual basis) the variety and volume of community resources needed to support their instructional programs and enrollment.

*Community Resources Inventory*. Each year the school district should conduct an inventory and recruitment program to identify the resources defined by the needs projection procedures. This inventory and recruitment program should allow each participating community organization to volunteer its *fair share* of the required resources in the same way it now budgets its financial contributions to local charities.

*Resource Data Bank*. A community resources information storage and retrieval system (data bank) is needed to provide ready access to information on each resource facility, item of equipment, person, training

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station, etc. Smaller communities can use a manual (file card) data bank, but the larger communities require a computerized system capable of storing hundreds-of-thousands of resource entries.

*Request Procedures.* Teachers will need a simple request procedure if they are to be encouraged to secure resources. In the de-

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livery systems we have designed and installed in Portland and Salem (Oregon) and Anchorage (Alaska), it takes less than ten days for a teacher's request to be processed and a confirmation notice to be sent to the teacher. In many instances, requests are confirmed and the confirmation notice is received by the teacher in the following day's mail.

*Centralized Scheduling.* A centralized resource contact, scheduling, and confirmation system has proven the best way to protect the community from multiple and duplicating contacts. Prior to the installation of a centralized scheduling system in Portland, one employer complained: "Our firm represents only twenty percent of the industry in our field, but we have sixty percent of the public visibility, and we are receiving over ninety percent of the requests for community resources."

*Staff In-service.* In-service training for school personnel is required in three areas: (a) what types of community resources are available, (b) how to plan for the use of these resources as instructional tools, and (c) how to secure these resources through the central scheduling system.

*Orientation of Community Resources.* Community resource organizations and their

personnel need to be educated on the role and function of community resources, and trained in the techniques of achieving the instructional goals identified by the teacher. Unless this education and training are provided, there is danger the community will make their presentations public relations rather than instructional in nature. Another factor revealed by our field testing is that many community resources do not feel they are capable of achieving educational objectives. In another instance, a major employer refused to allow its employees to participate below the high school level on the grounds that working adults cannot communicate with elementary and intermediate students.

*Performance Evaluations.* Evaluation criteria and procedures must be defined, and evaluations should be made of each community resource person and activity. This evaluation should form the foundation for improving teacher planning and resource presentation techniques.

*System Revision and Maintenance.* Each district must install its community resource delivery system with the foreknowledge that revision is inevitable. The delivery system must be viewed as a *process* rather than a *product*. Annual revisions will be required in order to meet changing educational priorities and changing social and economic conditions.

Although the retraining of teachers to use community resources and the design and operation of a community resource delivery system will require school personnel and dollars, the ultimate saving to the taxpayers in dollars and human resources makes it a bargain for both the school system and its community. For, neither our schools nor our communities can longer afford to allow hundreds-of-thousands of young people to exit our schools each year ill-prepared and ill-equipped for the responsibilities of adulthood. And, if a community and its schools agree on the absolute requirement for joint community-schools responsibility for and participation in the education of their young people, then the full potential of community resource utilization will be realized. □

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