

Staff Development in Florida

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In Florida, a legislatively mandated funding program supports statewide staff development efforts, which are primarily school-based.

Exciting events are taking place in staff development programs in school systems in the state of Florida. The fact that these programs are being developed during a period of scarce economic resources, a time in which many staff development programs in school systems across the nation are being severely curtailed or eliminated altogether, is directly attributable to a legislatively mandated program for staff development. That legislative requirement and the resulting staff development programs initiated in school systems across the state have implications for residents of other states and the school systems they support. Like Floridians, other citizens are becoming concerned about providing opportunities and funds for school system personnel to improve their professional staff competencies.

The year 1968 holds little special significance for most Americans, except as the election year in which Richard M. Nixon became President of the United States. But if one were to ask the citizens of Florida today to describe the event they most readily associate with the year 1968, many of them—especially educators, parents, and students—would respond, “That was the year of the statewide teacher walkout.”

Teacher Walkout Precipitates Change

Various positions have been taken as to the success of the teacher walkout, depending upon the perspective of the individual or group, both then and now. But one thing is quite

evident. The events leading to the walkout—and the walkout itself—did point out to the residents of Florida the tremendous need to examine the status of public education in the state.

During the next two years, there were attempts locally and statewide to assess the status of education in Florida. These efforts culminated in 1971 with the appointment of the Governor's Citizens' Committee on Education. This 22-member committee was composed of citizens representing the state legislature, business, industry, labor, the professions, and minority groups.

During the two years in which the committee was in existence, over 100,000 hours were spent in researching, deliberating, and writing the

committee's report. When completed and published in March 1973, the report contained 104 recommendations that would, in the future, prove to have a dramatic and positive impact on legislation for public education in Florida.

State Approves Omnibus Education Act

In 1973, the Florida legislature enacted the broad-based Public Education Act of 1973, often referred to as the Omnibus Education Act. The legislature completely revitalized the system of state financial support for public education in that portion of the act referred to as the Florida Education Finance Program. Following recommendations of the Gov-

ernor's Citizens' Committee on Education, the legislature replaced the Minimum Foundation Program, under which the state had operated since 1947, with this new finance program. The new program provided for a more equalized system for funding public education across the state, with a greater percentage of the educational funds (approximately 79 percent) to come from the state level.

Much of the credit for the specifics of the Florida Education Finance Program belongs to the National Educational Finance Project of the University of Florida. Since 1973, the Florida model for financing schools has received wide attention from other states that are searching for a more state-equalized system of funding public education.

Legislation Relating to Staff Development

Also included within the Public Education Act of 1973 was a section referred to as the Teacher Education Center Act. This was amended in 1974 to include Section 236.0811, Florida Statutes, In-service Educational Personnel Training. This section, although little heralded at the time, is now being recognized within the state and, increasingly, by many outside the state as a very significant piece of legislation for improving the quality of professional staff competencies within school systems, with the resulting expectancy of improved instructional opportunities and outcomes for students. Section 236.0811 reads:

Each school board shall develop and maintain a comprehen-

sive in-service training program for all educational personnel. Such programs shall be funded through annual appropriations in the Florida Education Finance Program to each school district at the rate of five dollars (\$5.00) per full-time equivalent student in each district or such higher rate as may be established by the legislature. Funds appropriated to school districts pursuant to this section shall be used exclusively for in-service personnel training programs meeting criteria established by the department of education for in-service master plans. When a district has an approved teacher education center, these funds, and the in-service programs, shall be conducted in accordance with the purposes of the Teacher Education Center Act of 1973 as amended.

Before proceeding with a description of the types of in-service programs which this legislation has generated in Florida school systems, some of the terms used in the amendment require further definition.

Full-time Equivalent Student (FTE): Within the Florida Education Finance Program, the basic medium of measurement for state funding purposes is the FTE. One FTE equates to twenty-five hours of instruction per week. One student may earn one FTE, or two or more part-time students may earn one FTE. For regular programs an FTE is equal to 1.0. In high cost programs, such as exceptional education or vocational programs, each FTE is weighted, with the highest weight (15.0) being assigned to homebound programs.

In-Service Master Plan: Each school district is required to develop and submit to the state department of education a plan for in-service education

describing the in-service activities in which personnel may be involved during the school year. Credits earned through in-service programs, as outlined in the in-service master plan, may be used for certificate renewal.

Teacher Center Education Act of 1973: Although an amendment in 1974 to the Teacher Center Education Act of 1973 stated, "Statewide implementation (of teacher centers) should be accomplished within five years," only 29 of the 67 school systems in Florida were affiliated with a teacher center by the end of the 1975-76 school year. Because Section 236.0811 provides for in-service to take place within school systems without affiliation with a teacher center and because of restrictions within the law (which will be explained more fully later in this article), few large urban school systems in the state have deemed it necessary, or wise, to affiliate with a teacher center.

Within Florida school systems for the 1975-76 school year, each full-time equivalent student earned \$745 from the state. Of this amount, \$5 was required to be budgeted for in-service, or, as it is more often referred to, for staff development purposes. In the largest school system in the state (Dade County, Miami, Florida, with an enrollment of approximately 240,000 students), the total amount budgeted for staff development purposes exceeded \$1.2 million.

In 1974, the State Department of Education was autho-

rized to use up to \$20,000 per teacher education center for start-up and other developmental costs. In agreeing to affiliate with a teacher center, each school board had to place under the control of the Teacher Education Center Council, the total amount of funds budgeted for staff development purposes. It is quite obvious that large urban systems, such as Dade County, did not consider it very prudent to relinquish control over the expenditure of \$1.2 million in order to gain an additional \$20,000.

It should be noted that amended regulations in 1975 and 1976 required that only three dollars of the five dollars budgeted for staff development purposes be designated for Teacher Education Center Council control, if a center were to be established. This reduction in the amount of funds transferred from school board control to council control is still not very likely to encourage the development of additional centers.

For the first time during the 1975-76 school year, Florida school boards encountered legislatively mandated collective bargaining for all employees. As a result of their collective bargaining experiences, school boards received a very quick education in management/labor relations. It did not take them long to realize that assigning to labor union leadership 60 percent of the responsibility, and the funds, for determining the composition of staff development programs (the legislation requires that classroom teachers comprise more than 50 percent of the Teacher

Education Center Council membership) simply did not follow good management/labor practices.

Quite obviously, those school boards that have not already placed themselves in the potential position of having teacher union leadership determine staff development programs, through Teacher Education Center Councils, are not likely to do so in the foreseeable future. Changes within the Teacher Center Education Act could, however, promote the development of additional teacher centers within the state that offer opportunities to enhance the collaborative efforts already existing between school systems and the universities.

School-Based Staff Development Programs

As indicated earlier, each school district is required to develop and submit to the state department of education an in-service master plan that describes the in-service activities in which personnel may be involved during the school year. The responsibility for determining what is to be included within the plan is left largely to individual school systems. In-service master plans that have been initiated have been quite comprehensive in content, providing ample latitude for the creation of a wide range of programs designed to respond to the multifaceted staff development needs within school systems.

A great deal of emphasis has been placed on "school-based" staff development programs in many Florida school

systems. John Thurber described the school-based staff development programs in the Palm Beach County, Florida, school system. He said:

The school-based staff development program initiated in 1973-74 was based upon the concept that it is desirable for teachers to be involved in the identification and articulation of their own training needs. Allocation of flexible funds to school centers, for staff development activities, allowed in-service activities to be carried on, for the most part, within the setting in which the learners normally work together. In essence, each school center now had the potential to become a professional self-renewal center, thus providing a major step towards the goal of program improvement through effective staff development.¹

A review of the literature provides ample documentation for a school-based approach to staff development programs. Sir Alec Clegg, when reviewing the change that has occurred in the British primary schools, said:

Those who have led the revolution are the ones American reformers traditionally and characteristically have tended to ignore—the classroom teachers. The kind of change that has taken place has not been brought about by professors or inspectors or administrators thinking great thoughts and imposing their idealized practices and techniques from above. It has come about because wise, enthusiastic, and experimenting teachers have inspired and convinced those of their fellows who are constantly looking for better ways.²

¹ John C. Thurber. "School-Based Staff Development." *Florida Schools*; April 1975. p. 4.

² Sir Alec Clegg. *Revolution in the British Primary Schools*. Washington, D.C.: National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1971.

Keith Berry said much the same thing when he stated:

We must individualize the growth experiences for teachers, principals, and school "systems" as well as for children. If growth experiences are to be meaningful, lasting, and important, they must "belong" to the learner, not be "imposed" by someone else.³

Then, in a conference held in February 1975 for the purpose of examining the changing role of the elementary school principal, this statement was made:

After almost three decades of attempts at large scale reform, and our subsequent realization that behind the schoolhouse door little has actually changed, we have begun to look increasingly to the individual school as an appropriate, and even powerful, unit of change.⁴

In his study of the League of Cooperating Schools, John Goodlad likewise recognized and emphasized the importance of the individual school in trying to bring about constructive change within school systems. Goodlad takes the position that:

The single school is the largest and the proper unit for educational change. . . . My assumption is that those within the school are both capable of and responsible for creating more satisfying settings for their daily living together. The accompanying assumption is that everyone outside of the school exists, so far as their school interests are concerned, to help make this happen.⁵

The positions taken by the educators who have been quoted here, and by others, lend considerable support to a school-based staff development approach. This author had even written earlier:

Frequently, educational diets formulated at the central office will



Teachers at Cheney Elementary School, Orange County, Florida, work on a proposal they will submit to the district staff development office for funding.

not be compatible with the needs in many schools and the school communities which they serve. An educational program formulated at the central level will need to be so compromised in order to meet the needs of the many schools and school communities in a large urban area that the finished program will have been compromised to mediocrity.⁶

During the 1975-76 school year, there were school-based staff development programs planned, funded, and implemented in 64 schools in Florida's Orange County school system. These staff development programs ranged from "Individualized Instruction and the Slow Learner" to "Motivation Through Language Arts" in the elementary schools, and from "Improvement of Pupil-Teacher Relations" to "Reading in the Content Area" in the secondary schools. The responses from the teachers and principals who have participated in the development and implementation of a school-based staff development program have been so positive, that there is the expectation within the school system that

the remaining one-third of the schools that have not as yet submitted a staff development project for review and funding will soon do so.

Gordon Lawrence, in a monograph prepared for the Florida Department of Education, presented many findings that lend important support for the establishment of school-based development programs.

³ Keith E. Berry. "A Humanistic Approach to Mainstreaming." In: Sally Keeney, editor. *Focus on Exceptional Children*. Denver: Love Publishing Company, 1974.

⁴ Paul L. Houts. "The Changing Role of the Elementary School Principal: Report of a Conference." *The National Elementary Principal*; November/December 1975. p. 64. Copyright © 1976 by the National Association of Elementary School Principals. All rights reserved.

⁵ John I. Goodlad. "Schools Can Make a Difference." *Educational Leadership* 33 (2): 110-11; November 1975.

⁶ Larry L. Zenke. "Toward Accountability Through Decentralization." In: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. *Impact of Decentralization on Curriculum*. Washington, D.C.: The Association, 1975.

Nine of his findings follow:

1. Teacher attitudes are more likely to be influenced in school-based than in college-based in-service programs.

2. School-based programs in which teachers participate as helpers to each other and planners of in-service activities tend to have greater success in accomplishing their objectives than do programs which are conducted by college or other outside personnel without the assistance of teachers.

3. School-based in-service programs that emphasize self-instruction by teachers have a strong record of effectiveness.

4. In-service education programs that have differentiated training experiences for different teachers (that is, "individualized") are more likely to accomplish their objectives than are programs that have common activities for all participants.

5. In-service education programs that place the teacher in active roles (constructing and generating materials, ideas, and behavior) are more likely to accomplish their objectives than are programs that place the teacher in a receptive role (accepting ideas and behavior prescriptions not of his or her own making).

6. In-service education programs that emphasize demonstrations, supervised trials, and feedback are more likely to accomplish their goals than are programs in which the teachers are expected to store up ideas and behavior prescriptions for a future time.

7. In-service education programs in which teachers share and provide mutual assistance to each other are more likely to accomplish their objectives than are programs in which each teacher does separate work.

8. Teachers are more likely to benefit from in-service education activities that are linked to a general effort of the school than they are from "single-shot" programs that are not part of a general staff development plan.

9. Teachers are more likely to benefit from in-service programs in which they can choose goals and activities for themselves, as contrasted with programs in which the goals and activities are pre-planned.⁷

Conclusion

It should be readily apparent that the legislatively mandated funding program for staff development activities in Florida is beginning to show some positive results in the state's schools and school systems. School-based staff development programs, which have been developed in many Florida school systems, are consistent with the recommendations contained in the Governor's Citizens' Committee on Education Report, from which the legislative mandate for funding staff development programs emanated.

In the report, the committee stated:

We believe the best strategy is to create a decision-making structure for instruction which fosters awareness and diversity. The instructional decision-makers should have specific knowledge concerning the organization of classroom activities, the kinds and quantities of materials being used, the numbers and qualities of personnel, the characteristics of the students, and the outcomes of the learning activities. Because this type of information is available only at the school level, we feel that it is the appropriate place for instructional decision making. . . . School-level decision making will provide an opportunity for innovators to implement their ideas and for a multifaceted investigation of the learning process to occur.⁸

Advocates of the legislatively mandated funding pro-

gram for staff development and the resulting school-based staff development programs mushrooming throughout the state of Florida take the position that many schools in the state are becoming "more satisfying work places."⁹ Concerned educators and lay people in other states may want to look to Florida with its experience in improving professional staff competencies and in providing more satisfying work places, both of which are expected to lead to improved learning opportunities for students. [7]

⁷ Gordon Lawrence. "Patterns of Effective In-service Education." Unpublished state of the art paper. Tallahassee, Florida: State Department of Education, 1974.

⁸ Governor's Citizens' Committee on Education. *Improving Education in Florida*. Tallahassee, Florida: the Committee, March 15, 1973.

⁹ When John Goodlad spoke at the American Association of School Administrators' Convention in Atlantic City in February 1976, the title of his speech was "Toward the Creation of Satisfying Work Places."



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