

# Team Building for Supervisory Support

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*When faced with budget cuts, a region of the District of Columbia public schools undertook a massive training program to make up for reduced supervisory services.*

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What can a large urban school system do to meet the needs of classroom teachers during times of declining enrollments, budget cuts resulting in reduced staffing and services, and public lack of confidence? The issues are common to most schools, but responses differ. One region of the Public Schools of the District of Columbia addressed the problem directly and undertook a massive training program to provide supervisory support services at the local school level with no increase in budget or personnel.

In the spring of 1974, the school system was decentralized into six administrative units. Regional superintendents were given administrative authority and responsibility for educational programs in their regions including all grades pre-K through 12 and the programs in special education, career development, pupil services, curriculum and instructional support, and staff evaluation.

## Teacher Needs Not Met

The first order of business was to look at the instructional program and determine how the regional staff might provide the

necessary instructional support to its teaching staff. The number of supervisors had already been cut prior to decentralization, so only three supervisors could be assigned to each region. This was not adequate to support the needs of approximately 1,200 classroom teachers.

After a year and a half of functioning with these reduced supervisory services, administrators in the region made it clear that teacher needs were not being met. Other indices supported this concern. The problem was most critical at the secondary level because there were no subject area specialists; all three of the supervisors had been elementary-based. School administrators and regional personnel formed a committee to consider means of providing increased support. They suggested clinical supervision as a model because it seemed to fit with changing ideas in the area of teacher development and, more importantly, held promise as an approach that teachers would not view negatively.

Since there was no hope for increased support personnel or funding, the school district looked within to see what could be done with existing resources. Administrators recognized the need to increase their own involvement in providing supervisory support for teachers. They also recognized the need for training in supervisory techniques, with specific emphasis

on the newer concepts of supervision.

### Inservice Training Designed

In response to the identified needs of the region, a program of inservice training was designed that had as its focus the improvement of the supervisory process. The program also had to meet the following criteria:

1. Be adaptable to different organizational settings; there are 26 schools in the region.

2. Be adaptable to different leadership styles; there were potentially 65 administrators to be involved.

3. Be adaptable to different teacher needs; the hundreds of teachers to be reached were at different stages in their professional growth.

4. Be realistic and believable; personnel had grown skeptical about change due to the school system's history of start and stop efforts.

5. Be self-sustaining; after the initial efforts involving an outside consultant, the regular staff would have to be able to continue the program.

6. Be integrated with ongoing programs in the system; there were certain givens that were requirements of the larger school system.

7. Be all-inclusive; that is, involve everyone who would ultimately have responsibility for improving classroom instruction.

8. Be a team effort, and not the dictate of one or two leaders; thus there would have to be many stages for decision making, shaping, and assessment by the participants along the way.

The first year of the program provided an inservice course for all administrators in the region. There were many administrators who had responsibility for supervision but had only limited training in the

supervision of instruction. There were others with training but limited experience. Still others had not had any formal training in the techniques of supervision.

The course was designed to provide not only additional skills, but also opportunities for administrators to assess their current supervisory behavior, examine trends in the field of supervision, compare their ideas and efforts with those of their colleagues, and, finally, to consider the values and assumptions that underlay their administrative/supervisory behavior. Taught by a consultant from a local university, the course included lectures, roleplaying, case studies, value testing, and opportunities for relaxed social interaction.

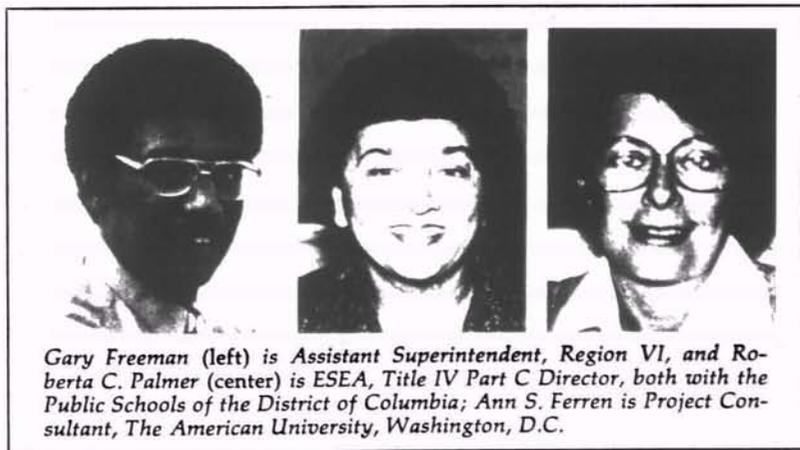
Every administrator in the region was invited to participate. The regional superintendent was involved, acting assistant principals were involved, and there were no distinctions among participants. The active participation of the regional staff underscored the fact that this was a total regional effort and a cooperative venture. (Initially there were several reluctant administrators who did not participate in the program. However, after hearing the enthusiastic comments of so many of their peers, they, too, became members of the team.)

After seven formal training

sessions, the administrators were ready to practice their new skills and attitudes. Some did, and some didn't. The consultant visited as many of the schools as possible to encourage, demonstrate, provide feedback, and facilitate the practice phase.

The administrators then met with their colleagues to share their experiences. They brought soundtapes and videotapes to be critiqued. They shared both the good and the bad. They carefully evaluated the potential of clinical supervision as adapted to their own needs and conditions. As a group, they concluded that clinical supervision required skill, was time consuming, but, nevertheless, was worthwhile. Several administrators decided that they were still not prepared for the required supervisory role. Finally, they noted that it would help if teachers understood the model. All of these evaluative comments were important in planning the next phase of the program.

During the second year, the consultant continued to meet with the administrators to deal with specific concerns. Discussions emphasized adapting clinical supervision to specific settings and leadership styles. The administrators asked for specific help with problems such as time management and the relationship between supervi-



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sion and evaluation. They found that getting together on a regular basis was of as much value as the formal content, for it encouraged the administrators to think regularly about supervision and share experiences in providing services to their teachers.

By the end of the second year, evaluative data indicated increased interest and confidence in the regional effort to provide additional supervisory support. Ninety-five percent of the administrators expressed confidence in the clinical supervision model as an aid in the improvement of instruction; 90 percent of the administrators felt that continued implementation of the supervision project would ultimately provide a strong system of supervisory support for teachers.

### Teachers Brought Into Program

Also, during the second year, a major effort was launched to bring teachers into the program. With the help of Title IV funding, a full semester graduate course was offered for selected teachers from every school. Secondary school departmental chairpersons and key teachers from the elementary schools were invited to participate. The teachers received exactly the same training in supervision skills as the administrators, with additional sessions on alternative teaching strategies and peer supervision—the aim being to develop helping teachers who have a repertoire of both teaching and supervisory skills.

In order to meet the criteria of adaptability and credibility, the design of the course received careful attention. At the beginning of the course, the consultant provided large group instruction, which was followed by small group discussions. Administrators who had been in the inservice program the previous year led the discussion sessions. Because of their direct experience with clinical supervision,

they were excellent on-the-spot resources. Furthermore, their obvious commitment encouraged the teachers to believe in the process.

Midway in the course, the teachers, with their administrators, were asked to start planning a program of peer support for their individual schools. Each plan was to utilize skills and ideas from the course and identify organizational constraints existing within the school. Out of this planning experience came many useful questions and concerns that served as a focus for the rest of the course and helped to ensure that the instruction was reality-based. The teachers shared the constraints that they recognized in the schools and asked such questions as, "How can I give support and help to a teacher 15 years my senior?" "What can I do if my principal is unable to provide time for clinical supervision?" This planning process gave the instructors additional insight into organizational differences and relationships between teachers and administrators.

The teachers concluded their course with a practicum. By this time, many of the questions and fears had disappeared. As teachers began working with their colleagues to practice the clinical supervision model, new relationships developed. They reported many cases of genuinely rewarding interaction.

Formal evaluation of the perceptions of the teachers at the end of the training year showed that 89 percent of the teachers had a more positive attitude toward supervision; 98 percent of the teachers professed an interest in improving instruction, an essential first step in improving teacher performance; 94 percent of the teachers expressed confidence in the clinical supervision model as an aid in the improvement of instruction. During this first year, 154 Region VI teachers successfully completed the training program. A second year of

federal funding supported the training of 197 additional teachers.

### Program's Success Analyzed

The program is now in its fourth year and has met the goal of becoming self-sustaining. The consultant no longer teaches in the program. The administrators who initially taught with the consultant are now teaching the course with the help of teacher assistants who received their training in previous years. By the end of last year, one-third of the teaching staff and the administrators in each school had completed the training program.

The questions now to be answered are: "Will the peer supervision program continue? Will teachers help each other more systematically than the old buddy system? Will administrators spend more time on instructional support? Will classroom instruction improve?" The answers to questions such as these will determine the long-range success of the program. There is clear evidence that the short term goals have been met. Within the constraints outlined, the region was able to provide a massive training program that was adaptable and individualized, yet consistent with a central purpose. What is most exciting about the program is that it evolved out of the needs and ideas of the participants. This may be easy to do with a dozen or so people; not so with 26 schools, 65 administrators, and 323 teachers.

The secret to success has been the commitment of the individuals involved. This came from the openness with which the program was designed, the immediacy of the training to known needs, and the team approach to solving a problem. While it cannot be proved that classroom instruction has improved as a result of this effort, there is clearly a renewed sense of commitment to the potential of supervision and confidence in the merits of peer supervision. *E7*

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