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Educators should use well-defined political strategies and public relations techniques for the benefit of schools and students.
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CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AS POLITICS

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Who influences curriculum decision-making? Nearly any organization, at any level, that has a concern.

Who controls curriculum decision-making? No one.

(Phillips and Hawthorne, 1978)

Curriculum development is a monumental task. In a politically active community it's like treading water in a hurricane while wearing concrete boots. External pressure groups toss anchors rather than life preservers. Parents who once supported schools with bake sales now demand impact on substantial issues affecting their children's education (Granat, 1979). In the present education scene, political action is the vogue; from outright lobbying to incidental persuasion, a school district's curriculum is politically manipulated. Curriculum workers must learn how to function adroitly in such a political atmosphere (Hough, 1978).

Unchecked political intervention from noneducation sources can threaten the quality of educational programs. On the other hand, learning the political ropes can enhance the educator's ability to strengthen the curriculum.

There is a need . . . for more people to recognize the significance of the power and the influence of those who are external to the school, and who are able to direct decisions in a way that is supportive and not counterproductive to the teaching-learning process (Hough, 1978).

Educational policy makers often tend to respond more quickly and

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with more vigor to political demands than to true educational needs. The difference between what special interest groups and educational professionals perceive as curriculum needs can be very wide. Curriculum developers can, however, capitalize on political processes to institute change. Any community can take the following steps to use politics for the benefit of curriculum development.

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Compile a local who's who. The first step is to identify the persons who constitute the local who's who. Potent organizations and individuals, internal school groups and staff, parents and school board members should be recognized for their influence on the curriculum. School policy is often formulated and a system's reputation based on the views of certain key people. Reviewing major decisions that have affected the schools in the past can help to identify those who have been most responsible for change.

A card file should be set up, listing the name of each organization, its officers, type and number of members, dates of meetings, purpose of the organization, how it can work with the schools, special interest in education, and a record of each cooperative activity with the school system (Kindred and others, 1976).

This data can be analyzed to determine patterns, although patterns may indicate only limited community in-

fluence. Politics, power, and persuasion are dynamic and slippery factors.

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Identify existing communication channels and build new ones. "Communication must be an integral part of any planned educational project" (Estes and Johnson, 1979). School newsletters, parent handbooks, PTA meetings, district brochures, and the like can do much to foster the public's understanding of school programs. Parents' positive perceptions may fade if not supported by mass opinion.

The community members identified in the first step should be cultivated into a group of "key communicators" (Jones, 1978). By seeking their suggestions and keeping them updated on curriculum matters, the school system can acquire helpful partners. Respected leaders can boost communication efforts and improve the chances of success for curriculum development.

Significant organizations can also furnish communication channels. Some residents may get most of their news from publications of clubs and organizations, church pulpits, labor union headquarters, volunteer fire companies, neighborhood newspapers, and foreign language newspapers (Kindred and others, 1976). These links to the public are important, especially when a curriculum project, such as bilingual education or instruction on fire prevention, bears upon a particular part of the school district. Schools should also remember that their own staff members belong to community organizations and can become valuable communicators.

Among the more influential direct communicators with respect to school policy are those who have regular contact with board members. While it wouldn't be wise to try to alter the opinions of such people through sub-

terfuge, they should be kept informed and consulted. Communication channels are most effective when they are two-way streets for giving and receiving information.

Listen and observe. Sophisticated surveys with fancy names are inadequate substitutes for tuning in to the pulse of the people. Educators must heed even critical feedback from the community. It is far better to catch mild disgruntlement than to let it build up until it "hits the fan." The school system must establish specific channels for students, parents, and others to express their feelings.

Design a marketing framework. Commercial companies usually design a marketing framework before launching a new product. Educators, on the other hand, introduce different textbooks, change teaching styles, or show off new curriculum guides without appealing to their "consumers." The word from the National School Public Relations Association (1979) is that school communication is changing and "sophisticated marketing techniques are becoming part of the PR person's talent bank."

A marketing framework is a means of organizing the market, or area to be served, into a set of categories such as educational level, political and religious affiliations, population mobility, financial status, age and sex distribution, predominate attitudes, and other such traits. The terms *sociological inventory* and *demographic survey* describe similar procedures more familiar to educators.

Complicated charts, tables, graphs, and statistics are the tools of most market analyzers. It's a good idea to start small by reviewing ideas after listening to the community. This way, descriptive terms can be organized into a conceptual framework.

Figure 1 represents a grid I once used in looking at a particular community. I also used a list of 11 traits to analyze the "market." This approach was more practical than scientific although rigorous application of this technique could produce more exactness and validity.

Generate an overall strategy. Study the results of the local marketing research to formulate a general plan.

Should you attempt to appeal to all segments of the community? If most of the public believe in back-to-basics, what does that mean for curriculum? Do some citizens advocate special projects in the arts? These and other questions will stimulate thought about an overall strategy.

In the community represented by the matrix in Figure 1, we decided that the best plan was to appeal on an alternating basis to all four segments of the population—free-spending progressives and traditionalists, and tight-fisted progressives and traditionalists. Because we considered about 75 percent of the citizenry financially "tight-fisted," we decided to attract their attention first. We prepared a doomed-from-the-start proposal to eliminate an expensive elementary French program. A few well-organized and vocal parents convinced the board to retain this "link

Figure 1. Marketing Framework Giving Rough Percentages of Community Traits.

	Educational Progressive	Philosophy Conservative
Orientation Tight-Fisted	25%	50%
Financial Free-Spending	15%	10%

with culture," but the publicity made some people believe that educators were striving to conserve tax dollars. Next we proposed to spend several thousand dollars to extend an open classroom. The progressives were pleased although the tight-fisted progressives were less so than the free-spenders. This policy of rhythmically playing to different audiences kept all of them preoccupied to some extent.

One aspect of any such approach is timing. Is it necessary to revise the science program immediately due to pressure? Is a five-year master plan appropriate? Does something have to be concluded quickly to get some points on the scoreboard? How much time is available for planning before results are expected? An overall strategy should be broad in scope, although a specific and detailed plan should evolve eventually.

Create a motivational theme. "Managers can't motivate people to do something they don't want to do. But managers can find out what people want to do. That's the manager's job. And that's leadership" (Irish, 1976).

One of the hottest educational "findings" in recent years is that school principals are key figures in setting quality standards. The climate of a school and its neighborhood hinge on the principal's own level of motivation. Curriculum supervisors are well advised to assess how highly spirited their principals are, recognizing that they are often beleaguered and battle scarred. Principals will work their tails off and enliven the troops if properly aroused. The multiple effects will pave the road to many curricular improvements.

Of course, outstanding programming requires cooperation and dedication on the part of all members of a team. According to Rensis Likert (1961),

Management will make full use of the potential capabilities of its human resources only when each person in an organization is a member of one or more effectively functioning work groups that have a high degree of group loyalty, effective skills of interaction and high performance goals.

The creation of a motivational theme or slogan can set a standard for everyone in the school system. Companies like Xerox have used slogans successfully for years. The slogan must, however, create an instantly positive response with staff. The message must also demand followup if it is to be more than a hollow tune.

A surefire motivational technique is to clarify a challenge (Heller, 1972). The word "clarify" is important because people must be aware of what the catch phrase means. "Potential," "excellence," and "quality" are good words to use in a theme. "Commitment to Quality," "Excellence in Execution," "The Teamworks Here," or *Every Kid a Winner* (Lessinger, 1970) arouse more passion than the typical education buzz words.

Formalize the system's philosophy. Most states require that local boards of education approve a statement of

educational philosophy which usually ends up buried in a school district's archives.

Curriculum developers should push for the recognition of educational philosophies as the foundations on which programs are built. Every curriculum guide or major instructional project should make reference to the district's educational philosophy. A "good philosophy," which is continually cited, will prevent curriculum from becoming too narrow in terms of what children ought to have and what education is all about. An educational philosophy that does not meet these criteria or one that is obviously not supported by the staff or community should be revised. The process of creating, revising, or reintroducing an educational philosophy may be as significant to the improvement of the educational program as some curriculum projects.

Conduct a needs assessment. A thorough assessment of student needs helps lay the groundwork for future curriculum activity. Needs assessments are conducted to identify the gaps between "what is" and "what should be." These gaps or discrepancies are defined as needs; priorities are set, objectives with standards are formulated, and plans are created for closing as many gaps as possible.

Glensy Unruh (1976) makes the point that:

... prior involvement in making major decisions, it is necessary to identify needs and concerns through some systematic way of involving a diverse constituency. Once the needs and concerns have been identified, listed, and sorted into personal concerns, institutional concerns, and societal concerns that affect the school, priorities can be assigned.

Fenwick English (1977), a widely published writer on needs assessment, believes that by the very nature of the activity of soliciting opinions about needs and priorities, "the dynamics of politics are loosened and set into motion from within and without the school system . . . things become political in education the closer one comes to decision making."

One function of a needs assessment is to strip away false perceptions and deal with reality. In essence, a needs assessment enables the school system to take a snapshot of itself and set priorities based on what comes out as "underdeveloped."

Set priorities and select targets. Many needs assessment procedures include setting priorities as a concluding step. Another approach is to use quantified opinions and other data harvested during the needs assessment as the basis for setting priorities. I favor the latter because it affords more flexibility in selecting targets. Priorities derived only from a needs assessment, however valid, may not reflect the practical politics of curriculum development. Through a needs assessment process a community may identify reading as the number one priority for action. Publication of these results may raise unrealistic expectations due to other factors, such as that the expensive commercial reading program is only two years old, the reading coordinator's present health condition restricts the ability to lead an energy-draining revision effort, the leaks in the roof at the high school have necessitated the reallocation of nearly all discretionary funds, and so on.

Regardless of how priorities are established, there is no iron-clad rule requiring that the number one priority be addressed immediately; the number four priority could be taken up first. Of course, the school system should provide reassurance that the highest priorities will be addressed within a reasonable time.

Some matters to analyze when selecting targets include: (1) Is a quick "success" needed? (2) Are there areas with constituency groups already formed and prepared to support recommendations? (3) What role will test scores play? (4) How does the staff feel about change? (5) How much inservice will be necessary? (6) Must the results be visible and concrete? (7) Are resources available for development and implementation? (8) What is the relationship with other plans?

Define goals and objectives. From the priorities resulting from its needs assessment, a school system is ready to define the goals and objectives it will pursue. These general school goals are part of "the process of defining the purposes of the school" (Saylor and Alexander, 1974). The main ingredient for success is to have the broadest possible involvement in setting goals.

Formalize the structure for curriculum development. A formal structure and a clear set of procedures for curriculum development will aid in gaining approval of completed curriculum projects. Hence, it is recommended that the process itself be described and presented to the board of education. Adding citizens to curriculum councils or other such groups may also grease the skids of approval. Della-Dora (1979) believes, "Parents and other community people can be effective and active participants in planning curriculum, carrying it out, and evaluating its effectiveness." Members of the local who's who, individuals with access to communication channels, or persons associated with board members are prime candidates for inclusion.

Involving citizens, of course, also creates positive school-community relations. On a purely practical level, "the way to achieve the backing of parents and others in the community for the new system, experts agree, is to involve them as much as possible in the planning and implementation stages" (National School Public Relations Association, 1972).

The community attributes identified earlier may have implications for the way curriculum is built or the facts that are emphasized. For instance, will the community be interested in standards proposed by national professional organizations, in what other nearby communities are doing, or in the achievement of equity throughout the district's schools? What will be the impact of sending staff and community members to visit exemplary school sites with shiny new equipment? Anticipating reactions based on the characteristics of the community can conserve energies and focus efforts.

Of course, the specifics of curriculum development depend on the subject under discussion, national trends, research findings, principles of learning, and so forth. A curriculum development model ought to include provisions for the way these factors will be identified, assessed, and considered.

Organize the actual development for appeal to staff, parents, board members, and others. Curriculum de-

velopment and maintenance cannot be successful by relying solely on curriculum administrators and supervisors or by constantly tapping the same teachers for these tasks. An army of classroom teachers who participate in these activities enhances the effectiveness of the program and the teachers. Morale and work quality can be raised by creating a network of resource (classroom) teachers in every curriculum area. Resource teachers are also valuable assets when the time arrives for presenting curriculum products to other staff, the board of education, and parents for acceptance and approval.

The board of education's role is obviously of prime concern. The board should be kept abreast of progress and their preliminary reactions noted as a means of deciding how to sell the finished program. Attention should be focused on wavering or negative board members by using the method of presentation which most appeals to them. Some board members might be swayed by "hard facts," others by parent opinions or demonstrations by children. It should be remembered that the staff is not always heeded in these matters.



Disseminate the board's approval and/or acceptance. Curriculum developers should use all available communication channels to disseminate to community influentials the board's approval or acceptance of curriculum projects, giving the board members major credit. Boards of education like to deliver on their promises and these actions improve the chances of full funding. This move further builds an awareness of what is coming and lessens the impact of change. Expecting benefits, people will lobby for funding and proper implementation.



Relate curriculum development to funding requests. Some communities are proud of what they spend for public education, some trumpet dollar stretching tunes, and others are comfortable with demonstrated cost effectiveness. Public opinion about school costs should help curriculum coordinators frame their budget requests. A good marketing job will reveal how to approach "budget sales."

Typically, curriculum development

activities consider the issue of funding after-the-fact and then only as a necessary evil. However, without money for textbooks, supplies, inservice, and so on, a curriculum guide may never really be implemented. In other words, students will not be helped by the staff's labors unless curriculum development is related to funding requests.

Since needs were previously verified and program solutions accepted, the major budget question becomes: At what pace will the programs be implemented? Will the first three grades begin the new reading series this fall with everyone else following in the next year? Or will these expenses have to be spread over a longer period of time? Curriculum and instructional requests should state how program execution can be paced to meet educational and financial requirements.

In Beverly, Massachusetts, the ideas presented here greatly increased funding for the instructional budget. Funding jumped 250 percent within two budget periods. While this was an important achievement, the real victory was a political realignment of forces in support of education.



Reinforce success. Participants in the curriculum development process should be rewarded in every way possible. Praise may be the only available reward, but there is power in positive strokes for a job well done. Immediate successes ought to be reinforced along the way.

The governance of education in this country and elsewhere has always been political, although here it is usually nonpartisan with professional politicians absent from active involvement at the local level. However, a seat on the local school board is often used as a launching pad for a would-be political career. While some board members view themselves only as future politicians, in actuality they are all politicians as soon as they decide to run for the board.

Educators do not have the option of whether or not to participate in politics because they are natural parties to such activities. The choice is between "politics as usual," with school people as pawns, or a system

of educational politics with children as beneficiaries. ■

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