

# HOW WELL ARE WE PROVIDING INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT SERVICES?

*TEACHERS ARE LESS SATISFIED THAN ADMINISTRATORS WITH SCHOOL DISTRICTS' EFFORTS TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION.*

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With the continuing press to improve the quality of schooling, it is important to seek agreement on the most productive avenues for school improvement. In this article we delineate the skills needed to improve instruction and report on an ASCD-sponsored research project carried out during the 1979-80 school year.<sup>1</sup>

The four major instructional improvement processes<sup>2</sup> used by school systems to provide instructional services to teachers are:

- Curriculum development—assessing needs, setting goals and objectives, selecting and organizing content and learning activities, and evaluating the curriculum.
- Clinical supervision—holding planning sessions with teachers before classroom visits; observing instruction; and, after observing, analyzing the thinking-learning process.
- Staff development—providing inservice based on teachers' and leaders' needs and on knowledge of how adults learn. Experienced-based learning is far more effective than didactic approaches.
- Teacher evaluation—determining the professional adequacy of individual teachers. Since the purpose of teacher evaluation is to improve teaching, good evaluation procedures can focus on characteristics of teaching that are substantive and related to effective teaching, rather than on trivial "trait" factors.

These components must be available to teachers when they are needed and through processes considered useful by teachers themselves. They must be available from some level (building, region, district, or service agency) but there is probably no one best way to organize for instructional improvement.

The ASCD study investigated perceptions of trends in the ways school districts provide instructional leadership in these areas. ASCD team members<sup>3</sup> visited school systems in seven

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Reference Group	Large Cities (7)	Medium Cities (6)	Suburban (3)
Teachers	357	386	112
Principals	50	46	19
Supervisors	68	35	24
Superintendents and Assistants	10	5	2

FIGURE 1

large cities, six medium-sized cities, and three suburban communities. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires given to four reference groups—teachers, principals, supervisors, and superintendents and assistants—in 16 school districts (Figure 1).

Members of each of the four groups were asked to rate on a scale of one to five (five being high) the extent to which each of the instructional services met their teachers' needs.

#### Adequacy of Curriculum Improvement Services

Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents who rated curriculum services "4" or "5." Only 28 percent of 357 teachers in the seven urban school districts rated curriculum services high, compared to 34 percent of the supervisors and 41 percent of the principals from these urban districts. This finding revealed a general trend—those reference groups farthest from teachers regarded the adequacy of services more favorably than did teachers themselves.

In most districts, only about one-fourth to one-third of the teachers felt their curriculum improvement needs were being met. Perceptions of groups in suburban schools were more positive than in other types of districts, perhaps because more leadership personnel are available in such districts to provide instructional services.

#### Supervisory Services

As shown in Figure 3, instructional supervision was rated the least adequately provided service in all three

FIGURE 2

#### CURRICULUM IMPROVEMENT PERCENTAGE EXPRESSING HIGH AGREEMENT THAT TEACHERS' NEEDS ARE BEING MET

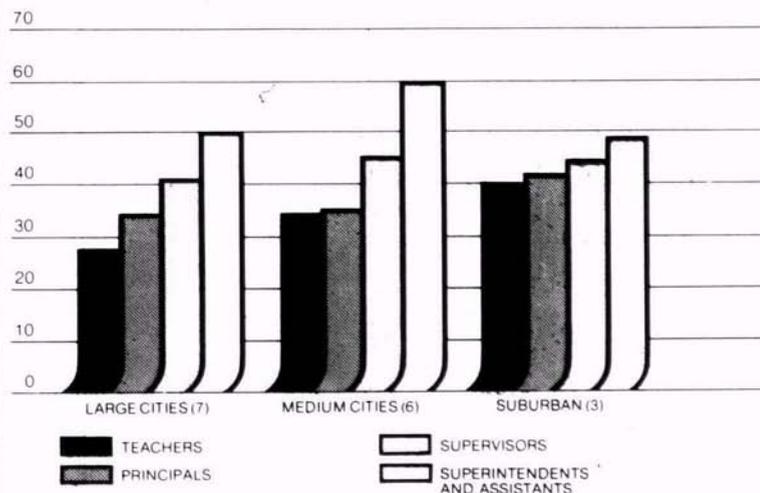


FIGURE 3

**INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION**

PERCENTAGE EXPRESSING HIGH AGREEMENT THAT TEACHERS' NEEDS ARE BEING MET

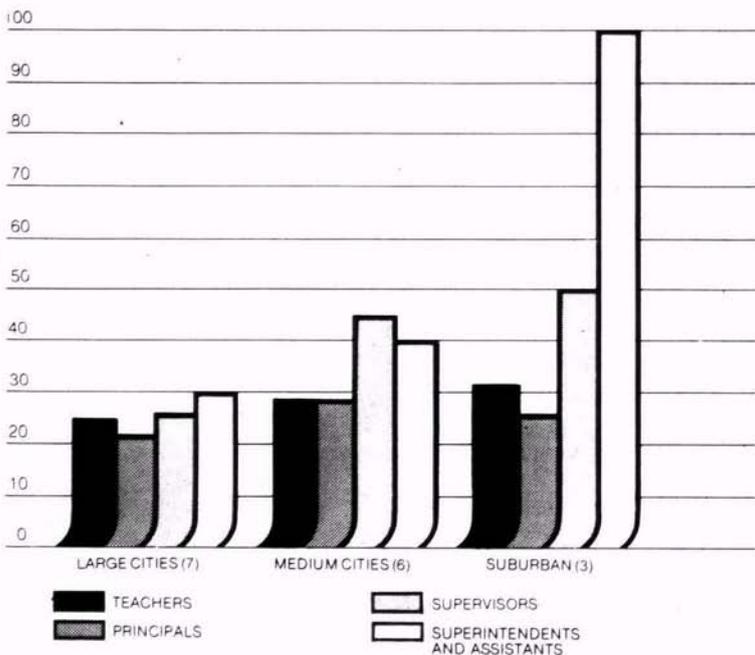
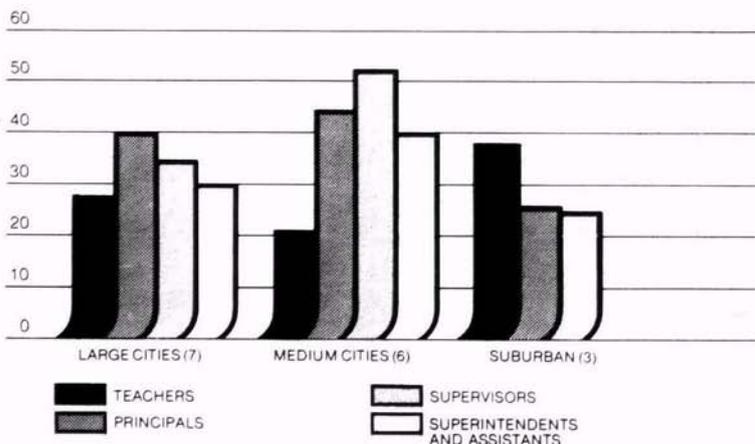


FIGURE 4

**IN SERVICE EDUCATION**

PERCENTAGE EXPRESSING HIGH AGREEMENT THAT TEACHERS' NEEDS ARE BEING MET



types of communities and by each of the four reference groups. Only 25 percent of the urban teachers rated supervisory services high. Again, the nonteacher groups felt supervision was somewhat more adequately provided than did teachers. Those groups also felt supervisory services had improved somewhat in the last five years, a view not shared by teachers. Only about 15 percent of the teachers reported having any experience with clinical supervision, except in medium-sized cities where about a fourth said the clinical model had been followed.

**Staff Development**

Figure 4 reveals that only about a fourth of the groups rated their districts high in meeting teacher staff development needs. There was little difference among the types of communities surveyed. One-day, district-run workshops or demonstrations were not frequently used for inservice education. Many teachers felt that more supervisors and administrators than teachers had opportunities for staff development. Teachers often felt that new ideas were subsequently imposed on them by supervisors and administrators without adequate training for the teachers. (Several teachers, for example, mentioned they were required, without sufficient training, to develop individualized education programs for special education students.)

One particular aspect that was studied was whether or not supervisors and principals focused on certain factors in their instructional improvement efforts during the past year. Some of these factors were derived from the research on effective teaching practices (high expectations, task orientation, climate, and abundant materials) while others were more typical characteristics of teaching often mentioned in observation reports but without a research basis for inclusion.

Figure 5 reports the percentage of teachers, principals, supervisors, and superintendents/assistants who said instructional improvement efforts had focused on each factor. These data were obtained from the seven urban school districts, but the findings are consistent with indications from the other two types of districts. They show that:

- The results of research on effective

tive teaching are finding their way into supervisory practices.

- Principals, supervisors, and superintendents/assistants feel attention has been given to direct instruction techniques. Teachers perceived this to a smaller extent.

- Factors such as bulletin boards and audiovisual materials have received less attention. The relationship of these factors to high achievement has been less firmly established.

### Teacher Evaluation

Figure 6 shows that again only about a third of the respondents felt that teacher evaluation is being done well. Interestingly, supervisors consistently rated this service less favorably than any of the other groups, including teachers. This may be because such persons, who are in a staff position, observe weaknesses they can do nothing about.

Half or more of the respondents reported that the evaluation process included some kind of self-evaluation. Evaluation by students was reported by 20 percent of the urban teachers and 35 percent of the suburban teachers, but the study did not establish whether this was part of an "official" evaluation. Student evaluation of teachers was reported much less by principals, supervisors, and superintendents, which suggests that it was often not "official."

### Trends

Another analysis sought to determine the effects of declining enrollments, decentralization, collective bargaining, management efficiency studies, principals' ability to provide instructional support services, and diminishing revenues on the capability of districts to provide instructional services. Results showed a positive effect on supervisory services by decentralization and meet and confer agreements. There was a negative effect by collective bargaining. The other hypothesized influences showed no effect on supervisory services.

The study did not conclude, then, whether diminishing revenues and declining enrollments have caused deterioration in the quality of instructional services. But it is clear just from observation that budget cuts have reduced the number of professionally trained people available for supervision and curriculum improvement work.

FIGURE 5

### URBAN

Percentage of Persons Saying Selected Teaching Practices Had Been the Focus of Instructional Improvement Efforts—Urban

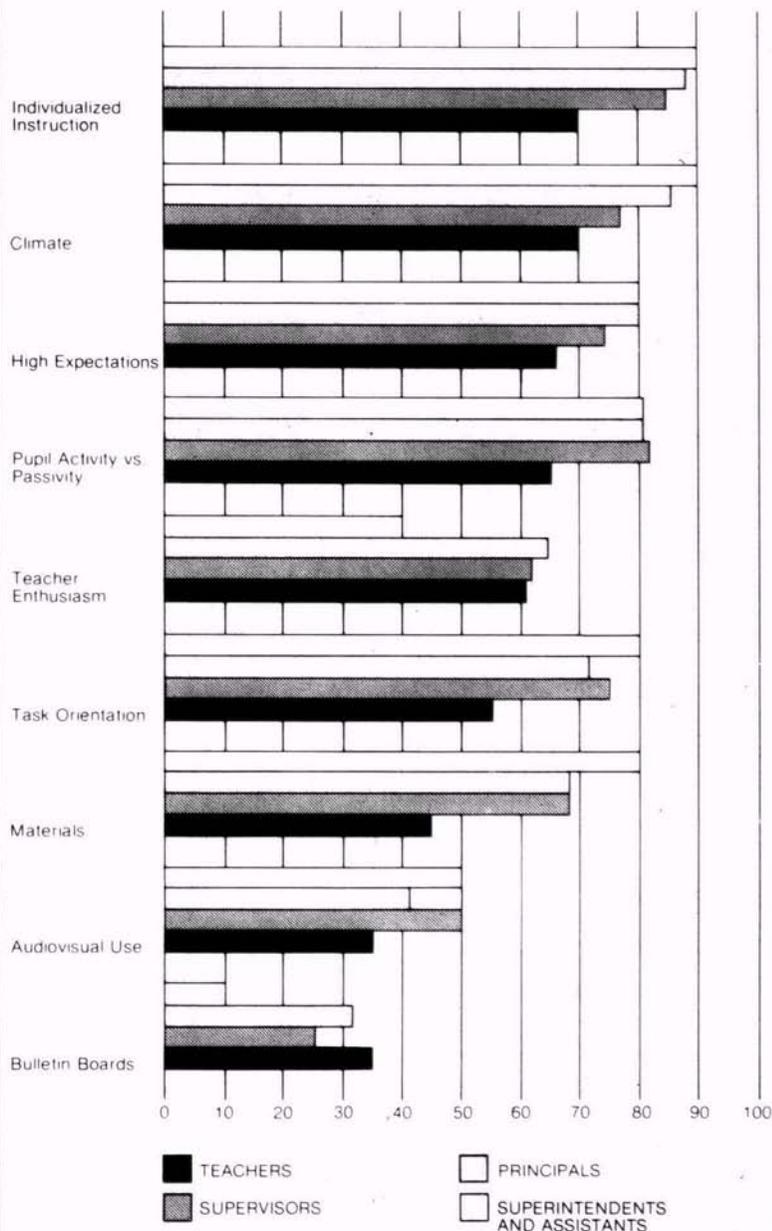
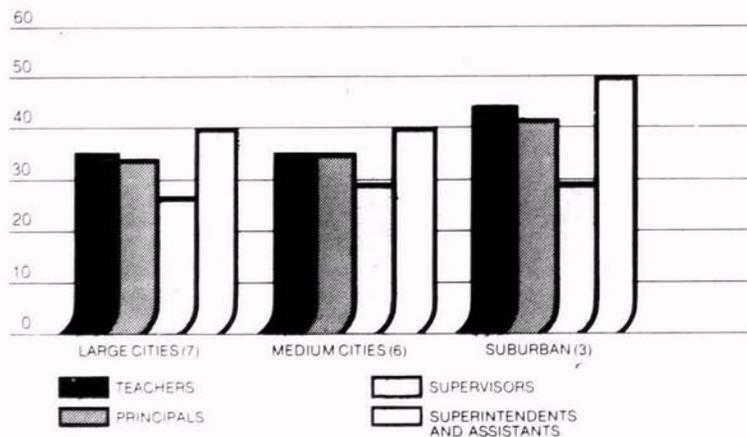


FIGURE 6

**TEACHER EVALUATION**

PERCENTAGE EXPRESSING HIGH AGREEMENT THAT TEACHERS' NEEDS ARE BEING MET



## EFFECTIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The **TIME** model for effective staff development stipulates four necessary elements for training people to acquire new skills.

**T—Theory.** Base training sessions or inservice on a proven theory; avoid cookbook approaches.

**I—Instruction and Interaction.** Give trainees plenty of time to discuss, raise questions, critique, and share their experiences.

**M—Modeling.** Show participants the desired behaviors; use live classes, real people, and videotapes or films.

**E—Enactment.** Provide for trainees to actually do the kind of teaching or other behavior being taught.

Based on their analysis of more than 200 research studies, Joyce and Showers<sup>4</sup> add that *coaching* and *feedback* (on the skills to be acquired) are also essential ingredients of effective staff development.

<sup>4</sup>Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers, "Improving Inservice Training: The Messages of Research," *Educational Leadership* 37 (February 1980).

Best bets for improvement of instructional services emerging from this study include:

1. Decentralization of services using a regional office pattern.
2. Utilization of principals in instructional improvement.
3. Reorganizing/redefining supervisory services to emphasize a more supportive orientation (with the backing and follow-up of top administration).
4. Increasing supervisory services (teachers who reported more involvement in any kind of services were much more likely to report that supervisory services met their needs to a high degree).

Further research is needed to determine if it can be demonstrated that a "critical mass" of instructional improvement effort results in improved achievement, better articulated curriculum, more skillful teaching, a more positive school climate, and so on. Other questions on which more research is needed include: At what level in a school district is curriculum development work best accomplished—in the central office or the school? Where should the responsibility and resources for staff development be assigned?

Another ASCD study carried out by Bruce Howell, to be reported in a future issue of *Educational Leadership*, found that time logs of principals across the nation reveal that principals spend less than one third of their time in instructional leadership activities. Senior high principals reported only 20 percent of their time was spent on visiting classes, curriculum work, or staff development activities.

It is a responsibility of any profession to continually seek evidence on how well its clientele is served and how services can be improved. ASCD hopes to continue funding research intended to establish the efficacy of instructional improvement efforts. ■

<sup>1</sup>The detailed report has been submitted to Educational Resources Information Center for dissemination.

<sup>2</sup>Gordon Cawelti, "Effective Instructional Leadership Produces Greater Learning," *Thrust* 9 (January 1980): 8-10.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Reavis (Project Director), Bruce Howell, Marcia Knoll, Jim Huges, Cathy Rolfs, Robert H. Anderson, and Carlos Lebya.

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