

# UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL DIFFUSION NETWORK

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When we started the National Diffusion Network in 1974, we had two purposes in mind: (1) to develop a system whereby schools could learn about exemplary programs developed with federal funds and (2) to enable any school to adopt one of these programs, if it desired. Today, if someone asks what our mission is, we can express it in two words: school improvement.

The NDN was the first effort of its kind. There have been other efforts to disseminate education programs and products, but no other program ever attempted to have a direct impact on so large a proportion of students, teachers, and schools—and with so little money.

In the process of developing the NDN, we believe we have given a new meaning to the words "dissemination" and "diffusion." Our definition includes not only making educators aware of exemplary education programs but also providing inservice training, assistance before and after an adoption, and, sometimes, curriculum materials.

How are we doing? Very well, despite funding problems and start-up and growing pains. No fewer than 500,000 students are affected annually by new NDN adoptions. Our records show that more than 6,100 schools "adopted" an NDN program during 1978-79. And about half of these adoptions are "deep-rooted," that is, contain all of the critical elements found in the original programs.

NDN has been more successful in the interstate transfer of exemplary programs than we had thought possible. A mid-1980 survey of 107 NDN programs revealed, for example, that 12 programs had been adopted by schools in 35 or more

states. Twenty-six programs had spread to schools in more than half of the states. The average number of states in which the programs reported adoptions was 16.

NDN programs provide a vast resource for schools in meeting federal and state requirements, such as the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act and state student competency mandates.

For example, the Remediation Assistance Program in the state of Washington, set aside \$1.2 million annually for the adoption of NDN programs that offer diagnostic, prescriptive assistance to students in grades 2-6 who are deficient in basic skills.

An NDN program developed in Yorktown Heights, New York, the ECOS Training Institute, is helping Georgia school districts meet state mandates regarding competency requirements. ECOS trainers are teaching Georgia curriculum specialists and teachers how to infuse "life role skills" into existing curriculums.

Law in a Changing Society offers a supplementary curriculum to be used in social studies for students in elementary through high school levels. Developed in the Dallas Independent School District, this NDN program is included in the Texas state framework for citizenship education, and more than 7,000 Texas teachers have been trained to use it. Citizenship education programs in several other states also have used it as a model to revise their curriculums.

Another model for legal, political, and citizenship education is the Institute for Political and Legal Education (IPLE). It can take the form of a year-long required course or electives. In one school that adopted IPLE, students enrolled in the course were responsible for the formation of a school clean-up committee, an anti-smoking campaign, and the opening of a community evening center sponsoring classes and cultural activities. One of the highlights of the year for

*NDN not only alerts educators to exemplary programs, but provides inservice training before and after adoptions.*

the program in its home state of New Jersey is an annual three-day "model Congress." Students make all preliminary preparation, learn parliamentary procedure, prepare and introduce legislation, obtain witnesses and work in committees, and, finally, pass or reject proposed legislation.

We believe the NDN is conducting the largest teacher inservice program in the country today. During 1978-79, approximately 20,000 teachers and other educators received inservice training in their schools as part of the NDN adoption process. Many of these teachers will, in turn, train their colleagues, and some will be officially "certified" by the developer of a specific program to assist in making additional adoptions.

NDN's record of cost effectiveness is one of its best accomplishments. One educator told me: "The NDN is the only thing in my 30 years of public education that has immediate use in the public schools. And, it's the best thing that ever happened for nonpublic schools. The most conservative voter would have to support the NDN as one of the best uses of the education dollar."

The federal government's investment to develop 124 programs included in the NDN totaled almost \$66 million. Funding for each program, provided by Titles I and III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Office of Special

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Education, among others, ranged from \$2,000 to more than \$12 million. The median amount invested in the programs by the federal government was approximately \$250,000.

Now these programs are being installed in local school districts through the NDN at a cost to the federal government of approximately \$4,000 to \$5,000 each. The cost to the school making the adoption is rock-bottom. An adopter usually pays for any required curriculum materials and for release time for teachers to attend training. Some schools help meet adoption costs with replication grants under programs such as ESEA Titles I and IV-C.

Recently, public and nonpublic schools in urban and rural areas of Maryland spent only \$125 per school to adopt Early Prevention of School Failure, a very popular screening and remediation program for young children developed in Peotone, Illinois. This program has been adopted by schools in almost every state and several foreign countries.

Some of the programs in the NDN received federal development funds for up to ten years. More important to school people is the fact that each one was developed and continues to operate in a real classroom with real students. Some programs developed their own curriculum materials; others use commercial materials. Some of the programs show teachers how to diagnose and meet student needs with materials on hand. Others concentrate on giving teachers the guidance necessary to manage their classrooms, work effectively with small and large groups of students, and get away from the lecture method of teaching.

I can best illustrate the diversity of NDN programs and how they work by citing several examples:

STAMM (Systematic Teaching and Measuring Mathematics) was developed in the Jefferson County Schools in Lakewood, Colorado, about ten years ago for two reasons: students in the district were under-achieving, and the state had passed some tough new accountability laws.

STAMM offers a complete mathematics curriculum from kindergarten through Algebra II and Trigonometry. Program Director Glyn Sharpe says schools adopt it because of its "comprehensive, conservative approach" to teaching and its management system. In Sharpe's words, "STAMM enables schools to use the best of what they have and bring together what they are doing."

Records show that STAMM completed more than 300 adoptions between June 1979 and June 1980 and is now in operation in more than 25 states. Some districts, like Nashville and Washington, D.C., have piloted the program in a few schools as a prelude to making a decision about districtwide adoption. In small schools—where most STAMM adoptions occur—all teachers in the building receive inservice training in the program. STAMM is flexible enough that it can be adapted to different teaching styles and classroom settings. Schools may use the texts and other materials they have on hand, but use of the STAMM teacher manuals is recommended.

#### State Facilitators

Many NDN adoptions can be attributed to word-of-mouth advertising by satisfied customers. An administrator or a curriculum coordinator will hear that a neighboring school has adopted an NDN program. Another way school people learn about the programs is at an "awareness" conference sponsored by an NDN State Facilitator.

State Facilitators are funded in each state to help schools learn about and make arrangements for an adoption. A facilitator, for example, schedules inservice training for a school wishing to adopt STAMM. The STAMM staff provides the training.

Once the adoption process is under way, Sharpe says the ideal situation is to be able to work with a team, which includes the principal, the curriculum coordinator, and teachers.

Both administrative and teacher support are necessary from the time a district starts to look for a new program. Otherwise, an adoption may not be sustained in future years.

Curriculum coordinators and principals play a vital role in whether adoptions succeed or fail. Teachers need their support in implementing an adopted program in the classroom. And it is the principal or the curriculum coordinator who can arrange for teachers using the program to get together to discuss problems and share what they have learned in making the adoption.

Another NDN program, ISIS (Individualized Science Instructional System), was already familiar to the nation's schools before it became part of the NDN. Ernest Burkman, the program director, estimates that 3,000 high schools in 47 states purchased ISIS materials over the years from a commercial publisher.

ISIS includes 55 separate minicourses in areas such as general science, biology, health, and physical science. The minicourses can be combined by schools in a tailor-made curriculum or used separately to plug holes in the curriculum. Some of them have been fitted into driver training, home economics, and adult education courses.

Until Burkman received NDN funds to disseminate the program, however, ISIS materials often remained on the closet shelf following purchase because no one was trained to use them. With the NDN funds, Burkman is able to provide training to teachers and curriculum coordinators. Like many other NDN program directors, he quickly realized he could not accommodate all of the calls he received for adoption assistance. His solution was to train 26 persons in 17 states who could, in turn, teach others how to use ISIS materials.

Burkman prefers a four-phase adoption process. First, he says, he or one of the other trainers sits down and talks over school needs with the people who will have to make the adoption work, such as a central office administrator, the curriculum coordinator, and teachers. Next, the district buys the selected ISIS materials (if it does not have them on hand). Then, training occurs. Finally, a follow-up visit is arranged to

answer questions from the teachers and curriculum coordinator (or principal), after the school starts to use the materials in the classroom.

What other kinds of programs can NDN offer? As of September 1980, approximately 140 programs in 36 states were receiving federal funds to participate in the NDN. California, Illinois, and New Jersey each serve as home base for more than ten programs, and six other states have five or more of the programs.

One-third of the programs are in the basic skills area, and another 20 percent focus on early childhood/parent readiness. The balance of the programs falls into these categories: special education; gifted and talented, health, physical education; environmental education, science; career/vocational education; preservice/in-service training; bilingual/migrant; alternative schools/programs; adult education; school administration/organization; and arts, communication, technology.

Despite the diverse areas and audiences these programs serve, all have one thing in common. To be eligible to compete for dissemination funds as part of the NDN, each one is required to "pass" the Joint Dissemination Review Panel. The panel is made up of federal evaluation experts who meet about once a month to review program submissions. The panel requires programs to prove their effectiveness in the school in which they were developed and that they could be adopted or adapted in another school setting.

#### Gaps Remain

Although the Joint Dissemination Review Panel approved 24 programs between the fall of 1979 and September 1980, gaps remain in NDN offerings. Not enough programs are available for junior high and secondary students, particularly in the areas of science, social studies, and writing (composition). Nor do we have enough programs in the arts, for gifted and talented students, or in the area of school administration and organization. We encourage developers of such programs who believe they have sufficient evidence of effectiveness to get in touch with their State Facilitator, their state education agency, or my office. ■

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