

Successful Program Implementation in Urban Schools

Public clamor over public education's alleged failure to educate has gotten so loud it nearly drowns reports of outstanding urban school programs helping pupils succeed.

New curriculum developments,¹ supervisory strategies and management techniques in 16 major city school systems nationwide² are helping thousands of pupils improve their knowledge of basic skills, reach their communities' sociopolitical goals, and gaining praise for school people from proud parents. These new programs also are redefining the roles of supervisors and principals.

Attendance and standardized achievement test scores are up, drop-out rates down. Children in Dade County's extended school day Title I program, for example, asked why they stay after school, said they remain for the two-hour sessions, "because we learn."

At an inner city high school in Philadelphia, pupils learn current factory techniques for repairing electrical equipment and appliances. Eighty percent to 90 percent of those enrolled are in class every day, compared with a 55 percent to 70 percent attendance rate in other secondary schools. The drop-out rate is nearly zero. Nearly 100 percent of the school's graduates are placed in jobs with a future.

Three years of research in these and 14 other major city school systems found several common elements contributing to effective educational programs.

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The over-sensationalized problems of large city school districts are real enough, but there is another side to the story. Investigations in 16 urban school systems disclose quality programs helping students learn.

One element is strong leadership combining knowledge of subject with new leadership techniques and a willingness to take risks for children. There was support from school administrators, school board members, community leaders, and other influential decision makers for implementing what frequently began as experimental programs requiring years to show results.

Another common element is a change in traditional school line and staff relationships giving principals more autonomy, authority, and control over how the instructional program is to meet its goals. This logically led to another commonality: school-based management and the freedom of local schools to adapt to change in their own way.

The investigation, called the Urban Education Studies, began in the spring of 1977 under direction from Francis S. Chase, Professor Emeritus and former Dean of Education at the University of Chicago. Operating funds came from a Spen-

cer Foundation grant in 1977 and, the next year, the National Institute of Education.

Programs and renewal strategies were studied in Atlanta; Chicago; Cincinnati; Columbus, Ohio; Dade County, Florida; Denver; Detroit; Indianapolis; Milwaukee; New York; Norfolk, Virginia; Oakland, California; Philadelphia; Portland; and Toledo.

Teams of experienced urban school district personnel and university scholars spent a week in each district. Interviews, observations, and document analysis provided the data. Team members interviewed superintendents, other central office people, program directors and coordinators, principals and teachers, parents, children and youth. They saw meetings, instructional settings, and other interactions. Various planning and evaluation documents provided other information.

The programs investigated reflected a wide range of effort. Most districts implemented elementary and secondary school alternatives similar to those in Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and Columbus. Many, such as Dallas and Milwaukee, have substantially increased programming in the visual and performing arts.

Dade County, Dallas, Oakland, and Toledo inaugurated bilingual and multicultural education programs. Teaching in basic and life skills is another area receiving increased emphasis in several cities, including New York, Indianapolis, and Denver. Early childhood education projects have been implemented in Chicago, Philadelphia, and elsewhere to provide preschool children with experiences to help ensure

better academic performance and social behavior in school.

Efforts also are being expanded in such "regular" curriculum efforts as Chicago's Mastery Learning Reading Program, Academic Gaming in Mathematics in Detroit, and Language Arts in Norfolk. Districts such as Milwaukee, Denver, and Dallas are giving increased emphasis to career and vocational experiences for older youth. In many systems, Detroit, Dade County, and Atlanta, for example, there are creative efforts to improve the management of schools and programs.

These efforts incorporated extensive staff and curriculum development and use of community resources. Many of the districts, such as Oakland, Dade County, Denver, Detroit, and New York, have established teacher centers, staff and management academies.

Several systems, like New York, Denver, and Dade County, received considerable community input. Community agencies, businesses, and industries are active participants in school affairs in New York, Dade County, Dallas, Denver, and Philadelphia, to cite a few.

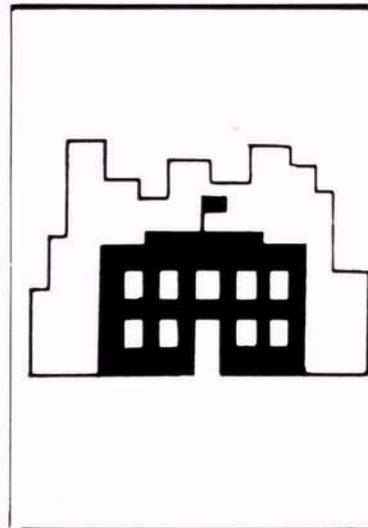
These programmatic and management improvements reflect redirected energies in several different and key areas. While all programs were not operating as smoothly or as extensively as might be desired, there was evidence the efforts are resulting in improved student achievement, holding power, and increased opportunities.³

It is important and significant to show that our nation's large urban school systems are investing resources to create effective schools. In the fall of 1980, Urban Education Studies released a report on many aspects of such renewal.⁴ It is equally important to describe major components appearing to contribute to the promise of the programs studied.

Results of theoretical and empirical work in leadership clearly indicate effective leaders are those who use task, instrumental, or structuring behaviors as well as behaviors showing consideration and concern for employees.⁵ Both kinds of leader behaviors appear to be necessary for effective program operation. Conceptual leadership and risk taking are equally important.

Vigorous leadership was evident at all levels of the school systems studied, central and regional offices, and local schools.

They were also well-versed in program content. Leaders of the more promising programs took a variety of approaches and had a relatively complete and extensive conceptualization of the content and methodology of their programs. Their thorough understanding of the program enabled them to use formal and informal feedback more effectively and to adjust, modify, and otherwise improve program implementation.



Risk taking was evident in several situations, much of it responding to court-ordered desegregation. In many situations, school officials, in the face of substantial opposition, told the public that schools should contribute to social integration.

In Milwaukee, the school board adopted a "Statement on Education and Human Rights." School program leaders successfully articulated and implemented policies resulting in new programs, role changes, different organization, and improved relations with constituents.

They spent considerable effort in securing more favorable state and federal policy interpretations and actions. Milwaukee's voluntary cross-district busing and Dade County's Extended School Program exemplify these efforts.

Leaders exerted an appropriate amount of pressure to perform by keeping the purposes, goals, and ob-

jectives before school personnel at all times. In Detroit, for example, the superintendent's achievement program directed improvements effectively. While the words and phrases differed from person to person, the program's major intent was clear. Subordinates, to a large degree, accepted program goals, objectives, and basic assumptions.

Successful program implementation requires more than risk taking, conceptualizing, and initiating a program. People in the programs need support.⁶

New programs typically create new role expectations for people implementing them.⁷ Role expectations, personality, and need dispositions often create conflict and stress.⁸ Such conflict is particularly evident when people accustomed to one set of behaviors and rewards have to adopt new behaviors. Learning new behaviors requires time, the opportunity to learn new skills and understandings and technical assistance. Very often the problem in new program implementation is to create rewarding work.

The intrinsic reward of work can be increased by reducing barriers, being supportive in stress, and being sensitive to worker needs.⁹ One important barrier is lack of time to implement a new program. Personalizing role requirements¹⁰ reduces stress. One summary of the literature on curriculum and instruction implementation said, "If there is one finding that stands out . . . , it is that effective implementation . . . requires time, personal interaction and contacts, inservice training, and other forms of people-based support."¹¹

In most cases observed in the studies, program directors knew a relatively full and complete implementation of the program would occur over a period of years. This realization allowed them to manage and coordinate resources to reach the desired level of implementation. It also meant system support for additional implementation expenses would not be withdrawn prematurely. Programs with the greatest degree of implementation, such as the Detroit Objective-Referenced Test (DORT) program in reading and Norfolk's Designated Gifted Alternative Program, had been operating long

enough to permit modification and distribution within their school districts.

Program users must have a thorough understanding of the program's conceptual basis, a mastery of its technical skills and knowledge to implement it. Initial and follow-up institutes and workshops systemwide and at school levels provide the opportunity to acquire and reinforce understandings and skills. School district specialists and consultants conducted these sessions, complemented by daily or weekly technical assistance. Teachers and principals were especially appreciative of this support. Denver's Instructional Improvement Project and Atlanta's Research Associates illustrate these approaches.

On-the-spot assistance helped with daily program operations and also provided a way to monitor implementation informally. Such technical assistance is being provided increasingly by specialists and resource teachers. They serve more than one school weekly, providing important communication between schools and transmitting practical knowledge. These specialists exchange information, too, when they meet for inservice training and planning sessions, improving their practical knowledge even more.

Paradoxically, such day-to-day service is going on in spite of a general reduction of supervisory personnel. Aggressively seeking and securing external funding for specific programs has contributed to these districts' ability to provide such support. Another contributing factor is the increased responsibility for educational and instructional programs taken by school building administrators. As a result, technical assistance is targeted to new and/or mandated efforts, rather than the "regular" program. These role changes have been supported and encouraged by top leaders. They consistently have supported the principals and directed former supervisors to support them.

Another important stress-reducing kind of support was available by virtue of personalized role expectations. Program leaders and principals understood not all people have the same levels of desire, understanding, and ability to implement a program, and they allowed for these differ-

ences. While expectations of the programs' implementation remained constant, the time taken to realize them varied.

Large urban schools for several decades have had a relatively large curriculum supervision division or department. This organizational arrangement has been modified in several of the districts, studied and disbanded in others. Principals have been given increased responsibility in these areas. Supervisors are being assigned as facilitators, resource teachers, and specialists.

In Detroit, Denver, Atlanta, and Dade County, principals are responsible and accountable for curriculum and instructional leadership. New York City's School Improvement Project encourages principals to create effective schools.

A combination of new roles for former supervisors and increased curriculum and instructional responsibilities for principals creates a potential for conflict and confusion. Principals in the most promising programs readily accepted the increased accountability. People in new roles understood and accepted their responsibilities to provide assistance and help obtain resources.

State and local initiatives in response to pressures for greater accountability led many large urban school systems to implement various forms of school-based management. This technique and its processes require all systemwide and site-specific goals and objectives to be included in action plans for an academic year. Test scores, as well as other data, and judgments by the professional staff are the basis for such plans. Regular meetings provide for monitoring school progress during the year.

It is common for such building-level planning to be conducted by teams, as in Detroit, Atlanta, and New York. Plans are developed by principals, teachers, parents, and, sometimes, students. An important benefit is increased communication and knowledge about performance.

More impetus is provided when professionals meet regularly and interact on substantive matters.¹²

Such planning structures provide personal and informal coordination and evaluation, thus reducing the more bureaucratic aspects of administering a large organization.

School districts also have given school level personnel more authority. Schools must attend to systemwide goals, but they also may address their own needs. Local adaptation is encouraged by permitting school staffs to establish their own means for realizing goals. Some of the "ends" are districtwide, but the schools establish their own "means."

Where systemwide programs were implemented, such as reading or middle schooling, staffs were given options within certain guidelines. Efforts were made to help schools understand the conceptual basis of the program, thus allowing local adaptation with greater understanding. Such practices encourage local involvement and "ownership" in the program.¹³

The visiting teams found several factors contributing to promising school district efforts. Risk-taking leadership conceptualizing new directions and emphasizing performance is one. Increasing support for programs through inservice training and technical assistance is another. Recognition of the time required to implement new programs fully and giving professionals, particularly principals, increased responsibility also were key factors.

These actions brought changes in role relationships, improved school-based planning, and increased discretion or authority for local adaptation.

It is important to recognize that the program studies did not constitute all programming in the districts, although some involved hundreds of staff and nearly all of the schools. There was unevenness in program implementation from school to school. Some programs were more promising than others and some had greater official approval than others. There was evidence of more extensive evaluation than was expected and typically has been the case, but it was clear that formative and summative evaluation, using various techniques, was not as extensive as desirable.

Considerable energy was expended in spite of these shortcomings to create effective schooling in urban settings. The large urban school districts are making serious and frequently successful efforts to improve their performance, often under ad-

verse circumstances.

Their successes are a tribute to the leaders, other staff, students, parents, and communities involved in this vital effort. ■

¹ Francis S. Chase, *Urban Education Studies: 1977-78 Report* (Dallas: Urban Education Studies, 1978); and Francis S. Chase, "The Regeneration of Public Education on Our Cities," *Phi Delta Kappan* (January 1979): 353-356.

² The districts are: Atlanta, Chicago, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dade County, Denver, Detroit, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, New York, Norfolk, Oakland, Philadelphia, Portland, and Toledo.

³ "Inner City Schools Show Signs of Progress," *The New York Times*, 6 January 1980, sec. 13.

⁴ Francis S. Chase, *Educational Quaranties Opportunities: 1977-1980 Report, Urban Education Studies* (Dallas: Urban Education Studies, 1980).

⁵ See: James M. Lipham and James A. Hoeh, Jr., Chapter 8 in *The Principals: Foundations and Functions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Allan C. Filley and Robert J. House, *Managerial Process and Organizational Behavior* (Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company, 1969), and Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources*, 3d ed. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1977).

⁶ Ann Lieberman, "Linking Processes in Educational Change," in N. Nash and J. Culbertson, eds., *Linking Processes in Educational Improvement* (Ohio: University Council for Educational Administration, 1977).

⁷ Michael Fullan and Alan Profret, "Research on Curriculum and Instruction Implementation," *Review of Educational Research* 47 (1977): 335-397.

⁸ Jacob Getzels and Egon G. Guba, "Social Behavior and the Administration Process," *School Review* 65 (1957): 433.

⁹ Robert J. House, "A Path-Goal Theory of Leader Effectiveness," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 16 (1971): 321-338.

¹⁰ James M. Lipham and James A. Hoeh, Jr., 1974.

¹¹ Michael Fullan and Alan Profret, "Research on Curriculum and Instruction Implementation," p. 391.

¹² James E. Walter and James M. Lipham, "Implementing the Multiunit Organization," in J. Lipham and M. Fruth, eds., *The Principal and Individually Guided Education* (Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1976).

¹³ Paul Berman and Milbrey McLaughlin, *Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change, Vol. IV: The Findings in Review* (California: Rand, 1975).

URBAN SUCCESSES INCLUDE MAGNET SCHOOLS, COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Several school systems investigated in the Urban Education Studies program provide alternatives to traditional education by varying instructional methods, course content, or both. Many of these "magnet" schools are designed to increase voluntary attendance as part of a school district desegregation plan.

Milwaukee offers its students the most extensive alternative school program among the urban systems studied. Milwaukee has schools specializing in creative arts, foreign languages, and "open education," as well as Montessori schools and schools for gifted and talented students.

At the secondary level, students go to regular classes half the day and specialized classes the other half. Available courses include visual and performing arts; law enforcement; medical, dental, and other health services; transportation; diesel mechanics; agriculture as a business; marketing; word processing; tourism; recreation; and food preparation and handling.

Students in Milwaukee's creative arts schools score higher on achievement tests than those in conventional schools. Administrators attribute this to higher motivation and greater energy. Two deputy superintendents in key positions say schools now called "unusual" will become usual in Milwaukee.

Detroit offers open education programs in elementary and middle schools. Its Burton International School is multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual, and students get a mix of food, clothing styles, education, and ideas as a result.

The Indianola School in Columbus, Ohio, caters to learners' interests with an informal approach, while the Douglass School bases its organization and course content on Piagetian theory. Columbus also offers traditional schooling and basic subjects in a highly structured, teacher-directed environment.

There are three Montessori programs in the Cincinnati public schools,

along with fundamentals-oriented academies; schools featuring Spanish, French, and German; and those emphasizing college preparation.

In most cities studied, the investigators observed parents, other citizens, students, and representatives of business, industry, and labor involved in school affairs. In Dade County (Miami), Florida, for example, large numbers of people are involved in the system's extensive, three-level advisory committee structure. Committee members are trained to work in groups, to be leaders, to function in group situations, and to make proposals to the school board.

In Detroit, parents and other citizens sit on school-level planning committees and in Denver, Project Focus surveys the community annually to help set goals for the coming school year.

Businesses in Denver adopt schools and work with their students. Junior high students, for example, learn banking procedures and prospects for a career by working in a bank that has adopted their school.

Still another variation on the community involvement theme is played in Philadelphia, where businesses invest materials, tools, and equipment to train "high risk" students (those most likely to fail or drop out) in education facilities run like businesses.

In one academy factory students punch a time clock after regular class hours and work on an assembly line repairing electrical appliances. Students seek and then work on contracts to rehabilitate electrical components.

Research shows higher attendance rates and fewer dropouts at such schools compared to more traditional facilities.

The three-year study concludes that alternative schools serve several purposes successfully. They improve academic achievement, reduce racial isolation, provide a way to desegregate schools voluntarily, and increase social integration. They also respond to and fulfill community desires and interests. ■

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