

Communicating with the Staff and Public About Curriculum

Regularly scheduled meetings are held between administrators and citizens solely to discuss what the schools in New Haven are teaching.

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One of the top priorities of the New Haven public school system is to communicate with school staffs and the public about our curriculum. Principals and supervisors in the district start with two basic and positive premises: (1) all parents are interested in the academic achievement of their youngsters and (2) staff members can upgrade their competencies by keeping abreast of the latest developments in all aspects of the curriculum.

There are four ways in which New Haven supervisors and administrators keep citizens and other school people informed about what the schools are teaching. Their major emphasis is on reaching the public since members of the school staff are more easily informed through a variety of programs and activities.

• *Citywide Curriculum Forums.* During the course of some school years, three evening Curriculum Forums are held at schools in different parts of the city. The meetings are conducted by the Chairperson of the Curriculum Evaluation Committee of the Board of Education. The public is invited and all supervisors are required to attend. These forums are unstructured; there's no agenda. Supervisors are there to handle questions in their particular subject areas.

Occasionally, parents get up to complain about the quality of food service in a particular cafeteria or some other topic unrelated to curriculum. These matters are not discussed but referred to appropriate staff members for future action.

The forums are fairly well attended and offer a good opportunity for public and staff interaction. They also clear up misunderstandings and inaccurate information or perceptions the public may have about particular subject areas.

• *Curriculum Advisory Councils.* Each curriculum supervisor must form an Advisory Council composed of parents, teachers, and members of the community. For example, in addition to parents, the Reading Advisory Council

includes a bank manager and a manager of a local supermarket. Supervisors select their own members and must submit the list to the Central Office. They call their own meetings to discuss issues, problems, and other matters related to the curriculum. Questions, comments, and suggestions offered by Council members are thought-provoking and insightful.

Minutes of these meetings are kept and a copy sent to the Director of Curriculum. Part of the supervisor's yearly evaluation is based on adequacy of the Curriculum Advisory Board—an indication of the importance of these councils in our district.

• *Parents' Center.* An old house near Yale University, donated by the Redevelopment Agency, serves as a Parents' Center. It's a comfortable, nonthreatening place where parents can meet informally by themselves to discuss areas of interest. This facility also offers supervisors a unique opportunity to meet with parents to make informal presentations on their respective curricular areas. Brochures, pamphlets, and other materials produced by the supervisory staff are distributed at the Parents' Center, and extra copies are left there for future meetings.

• *Curriculum Monday.* For staff, the third Monday of each month is designated as Curriculum Monday. On this day, subject-matter supervisors visit the schools to discuss curriculum issues with faculty members. A master plan is coordinated carefully and disseminated beforehand to make sure that each supervisor visits a different school. At these faculty meetings, issues and trends in a given subject area are discussed and the principal, and teachers are given an opportunity to ask questions.

The severe cutbacks in education budgets underscore the tremendous need for school officials to get the message across to the public that good teachers interested in new curriculum developments are constantly seeking ways to upgrade the curriculum. Now more than ever, public education needs public support. To earn that support, principals and supervisors must communicate. **EL**

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