

A Working Model for the External Audit of Instructional Programs

A periodic curriculum review by citizens and educators helps Jefferson County Schools assess and improve programs.

To assess what skills, concepts, and attitudes students need to learn today in order to function, prosper, and excel in tomorrow's world, the Jefferson County Public Schools in Lakewood, Colorado, designed and implemented an external review and update process for its instructional programs. Periodically an external audit committee systematically reviews the desired program in each curriculum area, compares the content and structure of the current curriculum to the desired program, investigates how teachers deliver the curriculum to students, and decides on program improvement.

After a citizen's advisory council originated the idea for the system, the Board of Education requested that council members, along with the Ex-

ecutive Directors of Elementary and Secondary Instruction and the Assistant Superintendent for Instructional Services, create and test an external audit process. The Board of Education sought to ensure that:

- Instructional programs would be evaluated to determine if they were appropriate to the changing needs of students and society.

- The strengths, weaknesses, and needs of current programs would be assessed and reported.

- At least two curriculum areas would be reviewed thoroughly every year, and each curriculum area would be reviewed once every five years.

- The roles of the district's elementary, junior, and senior high curriculum councils would be redefined to involve them as important parts of the

total audit process.

A year of research followed, and the experimental process was then tested on the district's science program. In 1982, a report was made to the Board. The working committee then became the Committee for the External Audit of Instructional Programs, chaired by a citizen, and charged with implementing the external audit process. Figure 1 summarizes the five steps in the process.

A distinctive feature of our external audit is participation in the review process by citizens as well as educators from inside and outside the school system. Other curriculum reviews—such as the accreditation processes of the North Central Association and that developed by Bulach¹—include educators exclusively. The ex-

Steps	Task	Responsible Party	Product
1. Determined a desired program	Develop goals and an overview of desired program	Program Manager and a team of citizens, educators, academicians, and practitioners	Report to Committee for the External Audit of Instructional Programs
2. Collect opinions/viewpoints	Use a questionnaire to solicit opinions and viewpoints regarding the desired and current program	The office of program evaluation asks teachers, administrators, students, parents and community members	Questionnaire results for Committee for the External Audit of Instructional Programs
3. Conduct a self-study	Analyze current program and compare it with desired program	Program Manager	Self-Study results to Committee for the External Audit of Instructional Programs
4. Audit current program and compare with desired program	Visit schools to review current program Review goals and overview, self-study, questionnaire Determine discrepancies between desired programs and current programs	Team of 15 including: teachers administrators academicians practitioners community members regional/national authorities	Exit oral summary by audit team chairperson for district administrators Final written report includes recommendations for the discrepancies between desired and the current program
5. Develop an improvement plan	Prepare responses to audit team's recommendations Write a prospectus for program improvement	Program Manager	The Board of Education examines the improvement plan, which includes: goals and overview, questionnaire results, self-study, final report

Table 1. Steps in the External Audit of an Instructional Program

ternal audit described by English² uses predetermined standards to judge the quality of an instructional program. By contrast, Jefferson County involves the community, uses research by national and international authorities, and considers the viewpoints of authorities in other academic settings and in business and industry to complete a comprehensive review. Its external audit also includes use of the discrepancy model developed by Malcolm Provus³ as modified for a National Science Foundation education project at the University of Colorado.⁴

Three major gains have resulted from the external audit of individual instructional programs:

1. Teachers know that their ideas are used to improve instructional programs.

2. Program managers broaden their perspectives of their curricular area and re-establish contact with authorities in their respective disciplines. Processes of change become familiar, not an ill-defined threat.

3. Areas in need of program improvement are identified objectively, and procedures for improvement are provided.

This discrepancy model's strength is in its in-depth appraisal of an individual instructional program and not in cross-program comparisons. During times of limited resources, achieving the desired program for every discipline is not always possible. The Committee for the External Audit of Instructional Programs now faces the

difficult task of finding ways to achieve a comprehensive analysis of instructional programs and their relationships to one another.□

¹Cletus R. Bulach, "An Organizational Plan for Curriculum Development," *Educational Leadership* 35, 4 (January 1978): 308.

²Fenwick W. English, "An Educational Performance Audit," in *Improving Curriculum Management in Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education, 1980).

³Malcolm Provus, *Discrepancy Evaluation for Improving Program Improvement and Assessment* (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutcheon Publishing Corporation, 1971).

⁴Norris Harms and Robert Yager, eds., *What Research Says to the Science Teacher* (Washington, D.C.: National Science Teachers Association, 1981).

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