MOVING TO MARKET-DRIVEN ESAs

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WHEN YOUR WORLD TURNS

"When you come to a fork in the road, take it." -- Yogi Berra

Economic, educational, and political realities are causing upheaval in educational service agencies. Nationwide, ESAs are being eliminated, downsized, or underfunded. Where this has not happened, threats loom. Few ESAs are impervious to the winds of change.

Pennsylvania is certainly a case in point. Five years ago intermediate units (IUs) were the well fed of the educational infrastructure. Quietly, we did what we do best, and we steered our own course. Financing was adequate because we simply back-charged districts for their basic special education subsidy, and, since that was never enough, we sent the rest of the bill -- called "excess cost" -- to the state. Ah, the good old days.

But August, 1992 changed all that. With immediate effect all state special education funds were directed to local districts. More importantly, excess costs were eliminated so the state could determine just once a year the funding it could or would provide special education. If districts needed more, they could get it the old fashioned way -- raise local taxes, a power that Pennsylvania intermediate units do not possess. The state's financial obligation for soaring special education programs was now capped.

Districts were now encouraged to look to new ways to offer fiscally-capped, quality special needs programming. They were free to pick from at least three providers: themselves, their regional intermediate unit, or any other public or private agency. Across the state all three options were selected in varying plans. Few districts automatically continued intermediate unit programming. Instead they absorbed hundreds of service agency classes across Pennsylvania, convinced that they could somehow do it cheaper. IU teachers, by law, were offered these district jobs, and hundreds accepted them. Meanwhile, teacher aide, supervisor, and support positions at intermediate units were simply lost -- downsized to proportion with what classes remained.

And all this time we thought they loved us. We paid for that arrogance. Virtually overnight intermediate units in Pennsylvania had to compete for our major stock in trade. It was quickly apparent that what had started as a special education crisis really affected every other IU program. Once people have a choice, they make it. Ask the phone company people, American auto makers, or the lawn service people. All our business functions, from data processing to mass purchasing, all our support services, from pupil transportation to staff development, were now in a marketplace; special education choice immediately infected all other district choices.

Against this paradigm shift Pennsylvania's twenty-nine intermediate units set out to save ourselves. Collectively, we have become the state's best example of educational entrepreneurship. We did it by becoming more market-oriented.

NECESSITY IS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

"In this business you have to be first, best, or different." -- Loretta Lynn

What does market-driven mean? For us, although it is a bit embarrassing to admit, a market-driven orientation required a different focus than our historical approach. Our employees and most district staff always sensed and acted as if we had the corner on all the knowledge and power in special education. We had the "specialists," the "gurus," the legal knowledge of the system, and the "total solution" in special education. Over the years there had developed a tacit understanding that we would control the education of any child whom we identified as needing us. Once the student was "ours," we decided what to provide, cost be damned. While we held all the appropriate conferences, including parents and school district personnel, there was little question about who reigned. The message was clear: We know what we are doing; we are trained professionals; do not try this at home.

To survive in our new circumstances we had to do three things. First, we had to offer more effective and efficient programs. Second, we had to satisfy people with our services. Third, we had to market these services in ways that made them the choice of our local districts.

Marketing is a philosophy and a management process that says, quite simply, "The client is king." Yes, the client. Whether or not some originally found the term distasteful, we now accept that, as in any other business, we are in a marketplace, a bazaar in which items are bartered over, transactions completed, and customer satisfaction the goal. We had to operationalize the "provision of excellence." No longer just a phrase in a dusty old mission statement, the provision of excellence became our watchword. We had to determine what our clients -- students, their families, and their districts of residence -- really wanted. We had to identify, develop, advertise, and provide a value added to our programs that made us the vendor of choice. We had to learn sales techniques, marketplace conditions, and listening skills.

We had to find our marketplace niches. We had to decide if we wanted to feature the lowest price, the best program, or the total solution in every one of our offerings. We had to determine the qualitative floor for each service -- a minimal yet acceptable standard of performance that we were willing to offer. We had to accept that those wanting less than what we would put our professional name on would have to buy elsewhere. We now call this the gentle art of letting go.

We had to learn that quality business is conducted via long term commitment, respect, and accommodation. We had to learn to develop that commitment through effective personal and professional dynamics. But mostly, we had to learn that knowledge of best programming does not automatically translate into the privilege of providing it. Putting aside our own inflated self-worth, we had to learn that customers buy what they perceive they want/need, not what we perceive they want/need.

These components of market-driven services form our definition and application of the term.

THE FINE LINE BETWEEN OPPORTUNITY AND THREAT

The new Golden Rule: He who has the gold makes the rules.

So how does one address the new paradigm? My own organization is typical of most other Pennsylvania IUs. We started with a little knowledge (that is all we had) and a great deal of attitude adjustment for every employee.

In August, 1992 I faced more than 500 employees on opening day, all trembling in unison because they knew that until very recently we employed over 600 people. With a fixed stare they sent me the message of the damned: "You're the boss, you fix it." Well, I stared back, and proclaimed that the only people who could stop the bleeding were looking at me. I pronounced that we had to reinvent ourselves into an organization that focused on customer satisfaction. I stressed that our success would be a result of attitude and orientation. I offered no expectation that we could somehow return to the old days and ways. (Fear, I have decided, is a great motivator.)

We spent the next year arming every custodian, warehouseman, aide, teacher, supervisor, bus driver, and secretary with the concepts of market-driven enterprises. We scheduled a business administration professor from a local university to provide "Marketing 101" to a large cross-section of our staff . She taught us the rudiments of market analysis, effective promotion, and pricing. She lectured on client satisfaction as a core value. She taught us niche marketing concepts and the roles of price, product, promotion, and place. She helped us identify tiny but very effective client satisfaction techniques -- handling telephone calls, personal attention, notes of thanks, follow-up to the sale, trend analysis, etc.

She taught us to think like the customer. She helped us realize that simply "knowing our stuff" would not save us. Because clients will buy what they want, our job was to steer the client in the right direction. She helped us understand that our future lay in our value- added skills, our expertise, our ability to save time and money, and our ability to service our programs better than districts could do otherwise.

This was enormously helpful information, but by itself would not have turned the tide. We had to internalize and apply this information everywhere. Client satisfaction is a way of life, an outlook, and an approach that required every IU representative to offer service, service, service.

We began to recommend and route appropriate books and articles concerning marketing and effective leadership, most of which dealt with life in the private, corporate world. We formed several discussion groups to identify application of the concepts to us. We asked our supervisors to learn more about a service orientation and to share these concepts with their departments. From activities identified in both our strategic and our staff development plans, we emphasized client satisfaction with anyone who received a paycheck from us. I used my bully pulpit to extol its possibilities, preaching that the difference between opportunity and threat is one of perception. We shared useful examples from the general marketplace -- good advertising, quality service, effective niche marketing, and personal experiences, both positive and negative.

These activities seemed to work. Our successes over the recent past are directly attributable to staff in every corner of our operation who have accepted, learned, and practiced a client orientation.

Meanwhile, we reorganized our elaborate "silo-shaped" organization. Our objective was to improve communication both internally and with our clients. Rather than continuing isolated, specialized departments,

we flattened the organization into four areas: central leadership, educational services, business functions, and a "hot house" for new ventures. The latter division is akin to the Saturn Division of General Motors. Few CAIU rules govern new ideas and initiatives; a cross-section of employees leads each effort in the hot house. New ideas are treated with the care given to a new tomato sprout rather than the attention we might give a mature, fruit-bearing plant.

We also went to our customers. I visited every one of our 24 superintendents. Our business manager visited all his district counterparts. Supervisors met with building principals. Classroom teachers -- hundreds of them -- attempted to build strong relationships between their rented school space and the regular education classroom teachers. We presented a customized, district-specific program about our services to the dozen local boards from whom we could wrest an invitation. In all these venues we asked the same closing questions: "What do we currently do well for you?" "What improvements in our service can you suggest?" "How can we help you serve you students and staff more effectively?"

These visits paid huge dividends. We learned much about ourselves and them. We discerned pockets of displeasure and long-standing jealousy. We identified brand new areas of opportunity for us, possible marketplaces that might never have occurred to us.

And they learned something about us. They learned that we cared deeply about the quality of our work. They learned that we were dedicated to service. They recognized our new entrepreneurial spirit and found it refreshing. Our clients saw our intent to remain players in the educational service market. Finally, they began to value what we have long held to be true in regional service agencies -- the strength and quality of concerted and cooperative efforts when districts form consortia.

This is not mostly about fact. This is about attitude change -- attitude change on the parts of both the provider and the recipient. This is about recognizing that the customer owns the right of identifying the "what." The provider gets to identify the "how" and the "how much." That recognition changes everything.

We also embraced the spirit of entrepreneurialism. The supervisor of a defunct program was transformed into our Director of Development. He is charged with identifying new ventures, new markets, and new programs for us. This investment in possible futures was a somewhat controversial move when people expect efforts to control overall overhead costs. But two years later few question the decision. Thus far his leadership has resulted in a drivers education program that saves districts money. He has written numerous grants and had several funded, all of which offer free and direct services to our clients that otherwise would have been unlikely. He heads our regional School-to-Work grant, helping us recreate school curriculum. He has forged partnerships with several local businesses, universities, and agencies.

Local business and arts community involvement in an a regional arts magnet school effort has helped us create a program that will be centered in the local community college. Several area businesses are now providing employee time, financial resources, and educational opportunities for students in their worksites as a result of projects spearheaded by the IU. Other local businesses are now partners in a Gold Star Program that encourages at-risk students to stay in school and to strive for higher grades. These are only a few examples beyond the community ties our School-to-Work initiative is forging. All told, our Director of Development is working in at least ten new arenas; he is just getting started on several more.

For several years I had toyed with the idea of an intermediate unit foundation that could use non-budget dollars to provide humanitarian services to special education youth -- our clients. What better time than

when we needed the visibility and impact such a project could provide? We now promote our ***Champions for Children*** foundation shamelessly. This hot house project features fund-raisers, golf tournaments, and oldies dances. We receive support from local businesses and civic groups around the tri-county area. And best of all, we give money away. We give it to the best projects, the most needy children, and the latest flood or fire victims. We buy computers, assistive devices, eyeglasses, winter coats, and anything else that improves the quality of life of one of our kids. We are known across the community for this opportunity snatched from the jaws of threat.

While all of these ventures must already exist across America, they are new to us. They represent our willingness to try just about anything.

Sometimes we fail. We contracted with a local home for the aged to provide 365 day a year residential occupational and physical therapy. We found that didn't work with 260-day employees. Work during Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter breaks? You have to be kidding! There went a $50,000 pay day. We wanted to store electronically districts' old special education records. They expressed interest. We obtained the equipment; they have yet to sign up and, therefore, pay up.

MY COLLEAGUES WEREN'T SITTING ON THEIR HANDS

It's a poor dog that won't wag its own tail.

Across Pennsylvania other physicians were healing themselves. Several of our IU colleagues started where we did. They scheduled trainers of market-driven concepts. They earnestly began programs of client orientation. They began to parcel programs that used to be "total solutions" into a la carte offerings, each priced to move. Clients could now select only what they desired from a service menu.

One IU developed the first-in-the-state regional program for pregnant and parenting teens, encouraging participants to complete school. The program features tutoring, summer school, a camp, and home visitations. Another IU director expanded his special education transportation system into a contract with an urban district to transport all students. This has been met with a lawsuit filed by the private bus contractors association. We will see how far we can stretch the envelope.

Statewide, the IUs agreed to sponsor a technology mentoring program to help every district develop a larger cadre of electronic experts who could train others. As a group we developed and disseminated better, more client-oriented marketing literature about IUs. We are attempting to communicate more effectively with the Department of Education. We want to help them with state initiatives; we will take on their projects as market-driven enterprises. Meanwhile, small clusters of IUs are forming topical consortia in an effort to harvest the benefits of "super regionalization." Examples are joint purchasing, jointly-sponsored training programs, and technology initiatives.

SO DIFFERENT NOW

A bend in the road is not the end of the road unless you fail to make the turn.

We now provide different special education to districts. Most of our speech therapists are gone, as are teachers of mildly challenged youth. Districts now provide most of these themselves. In 1992 the CAIU budget was $36 million, $13 million of which was special education, the largest single block. We numbered

more than 600 employees. In 1996-97 we still have a $36 million budget, $13 million of it still in special education. However, we now have 500 employees, and the other facets of our operation are growing while special education has changed areas of emphasis. If it is no bigger in size or budget, it is more varied. Where we do not provide the classroom teacher, we often contract technical assistance, and testing and psychological services. We are leading inclusion efforts of our districts, in effect helping to work ourselves out of a job. It is the right thing to do, and any effect on the IU has to be secondary. We have established a clinic, a central, one-stop referral service that works not only with districts but with people directly off the street. Incidentally, we are making money on this venture.

Elsewhere, we have dedicated another person to curriculum/staff development. This specialist is our employee, but she works in three small districts that jointly pay her salary for various portions of her time. She leads initiatives important to them, not us. We have offered the same arrangement in business management and legal functions; district dynamics have so far kept that from happening. Last year we hosted more than 44,000 visitors who attended our expanded staff development offerings. The topics are usually identified by our clients, thus ensuring attendance.

And so it goes in all arenas. In some places it is change; in others it is growth. We do not fear competition. We have found that we can lead and compete very nicely. New ideas come to us daily as both employees and customers look at new programs. We offer our districts attractive services and then wait for them to see the benefits. We strive to be in front of the idea development curve. It is all rather exciting. Few of us would now desire a return to "the good old days."

A SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS

Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted.

So, what have we learned from all this? I offer the following :

1. Loretta Lynn speaks volumes for educational service agencies. We now select the stance we will take on any venture: Do we want to be first with the service? That is a good position. Sometimes, however, we cannot be first, so we try to be best. That is good, too. But often we simply do business differently than our clients/customers. This provides us with strategic advantage. As the educational community begins to respond more vigorously to our public's call for school improvement, that difference may be how schools will do business. We will be waiting for them.

2. We value nimbleness. We spin off and market new ideas very quickly. We do not allow our internal organization, the unknown, or the inevitable politics to hamper our rapid response to an identified need. We pull together, and we pull fast.

3. We are no longer holier than thou. Anybody can do just about anything; we ourselves are proof of that. We work closely with our clients to lead them to the right place, whether we get to play or not.

4. Client/customer satisfaction dominates our marketing plan. Client satisfaction is a combination of product, service, sales, and price. Our value added is service. We do whatever it takes to satisfy our clients. This is a guarantee which we always honor, sometimes at considerable expense to us.

5. Market-driven attitudes include continual organizational growth. Seeking constant improvement, quality businesses attempt to become what Senge would term “learning organizations.”

6. Success requires commitment beyond that of the leader. While most of our staff have become adept at finding and developing opportunities, a few simply still don’t “get it.” Invariably, when we fail to make a client happy, these are the employees involved.

7. Life in this business is not without travail. Some efforts will fail. When they do, we like to think that we are failing forward.

8. There is value in holding hands. The IUs in Pennsylvania are unified. We draw strength from the work of our colleagues, and we are constantly seeking ways to collaborate in joint problem-solving. If we hang, we shall certainly hang together.

Perhaps none of this is of importance to my colleagues around the country. Perhaps many have every reason to expect life to go on as usual. But if someone happens to wake up some August morning to find the money stream has dried up, these considerations of market-driven services may be useful.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS… PUBLIC PRIDE: A COUNTY SHOWCASE

by
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On February 2, 1997, more than 60,000 people gathered at today's town square – a shopping mall – in Waterford, Michigan for the largest public show of support for public schools in Oakland County's – and Michigan's – history. What could bring about such an overwhelming statement of a community's support for its schools?

Oakland County public schools, like many other fine public education institutions throughout the country, contribute daily to the quality of life for every citizen in the community. The "Public Schools… Public Pride" (PSPP) event provided 60,000 taxpayers the chance to see, in one place, the many exemplary programs and services provided daily to Oakland County's 200,000 students by the dedicated educators in the 28 local school districts.

"Public Schools… Public Pride" actually began on November 29, 1995 following a standing room only rally in support of public schools at Oakland Schools, the intermediate school district serving the 28 local school districts in Oakland County. In partnership with the Oakland County Superintendents Association and Oakland County School Boards Association, Oakland Schools hosted an invitation-only rally to empower Oakland County's educational community to speak up for their schools. Empowerment kits, including accurate information to debunk commonly held myths about public education, were provided for the more than 3,000 people who packed the ISD's halls. "Public Schools… Michigan's Choice" heightened public awareness of the common goals of equity and excellence for every child in Oakland County.

A series of debriefing sessions and the formation of a Next Steps committee led to the recommendation that a similar event be held again the following year. Realizing the need to expand the scope and find a suitable site to accommodate more participants led to the recommendation that a large shopping mall be used for the next event. With this basic concept in mind, a new planning committee was formed to work with the event's new coordinator.

The committee agreed to build on the suggestions from the previous year's rally to create a unique event that would showcase, in a collaborative manner, the best practices of Oakland County's public schools. Planning meetings began in September, 1996 and included a broad range of participants. To demonstrate how the quality of Oakland County's schools enhances the quality of life for Oakland County residents, the decision was made to involve not only the intermediate school district, superintendents and school boards associations but also the Oakland County government, Oakland Community College, Oakland University, businesses, parent groups, and the Michigan Education Association. Representatives of each of these stakeholders committed to a series of meetings, resources, and personnel, to make "Public Schools… Public Pride" a reality.

Preliminary discussions with a few of the major shopping malls in Oakland County quickly bore fruit and Summit Place in Waterford, a site at the geographic center of the county, agreed to be the host site. Their marketing manager became a key person in developing the concept and handling the logistics of accommodating our early estimate of 10,000 guests.

A major planning concern was finding the best date and time for the event. February 2, Groundhog Day, was chosen after reviewing dates of major sport schedules and other local events. The committee recognized that winter weather in Michigan is always a wild card and collectively decided that February 2, while probably cold, would not be allowed to be otherwise inclement! The event was slated for the hours that the mall is normally open on Sunday, from Noon to 6 PM.

With title, theme, site, and date decided upon, the next steps were to translate the planning into action. The Planning Committee subdivided into teams who were responsible for:

- Exhibits
- Publicity/media
- Student performances
- "Stuffed students" (handmade dolls from every school)
- One-day mall retailer rebate to the 28 school districts
- Parent volunteers
- Afterglow for event workers
- Gala for VIPs following the event
- Infrastructure - wiring, computer hookups, etc.
- Long range planning team for follow-up
- Celebrity letters to special teachers and photos
- Decorations
- Mall involvement.

Each team was coordinated by at least one Oakland Schools staff member and one school district, community college, university, government, or parent volunteer. The team leaders were encouraged to supplement their skills with those of other volunteers.

Following the initial planning meeting, the teams began work on their own: planning, setting goals, making contacts and regularly checking in with the PSPP coordinator to create an effective information flow. Because of the constant flow of information to all stakeholders, ideas blossomed and grew and new ideas were formed that continually improved the event. The following is a brief look at some of the teams' efforts.

EXHIBITS

Once it was decided to fill the mall with exhibits led by students demonstrating selected district best practices, exhibit team leaders created major themes around which to cluster the interactive displays. With guidance from the Oakland County Superintendents Association, they decided against separate exhibits by each of the 28 school districts and instead grouped a few districts together around each of the themes:

- Curriculum and Instruction
- Programs

- At-risk
- Partnerships
- Activities/Clubs
- Beyond K-12
- Community Support
- Technology

The exhibit team worked closely with mall management on setup and traffic flow. The team worked with district contact people to coordinate their display planning. It was expected that booths would be staffed in shifts.

STUFFED STUDENTS

Suggested by district fine arts coordinators, the "stuffed students" were quickly translated from concept to reality. Using donated fabric, Oakland Schools staff cut out more than 400 student "bodies" that were sent, with instructions, to every public school building in Oakland County. Teachers, parents, administrators, support staff, and/or students were asked to sew and stuff these "students," then creatively clothe and decorate them to represent their building. The results were unexpectedly powerful. Individually, each student is a unique work of art. Together, grouped on specially built play structures at Summit Place, the "stuffed students" represented the diversity – and promise – of Oakland County's student population. Safely shipped back to their districts following PSPP, the "stuffed students" are proudly on display in their local schools and board offices.

PUBLICITY/MEDIA

The publicity and media team immediately set to work crafting the event's message, working with local district communications coordinators to get the word out, and building relationships with the media. Valuable partnerships were forged with the Oakland Press, a newspaper serving the bulk of the county, which agreed to run a series of ads for PSPP at no charge. WJR, a popular Detroit radio station, produced a series of public service announcements (PSAs) that aired for weeks before the event. FOX 2 television also produced and ran a series of PSAs promoting the event. The publicity and media team also crafted a one minute video PSA that was produced by Oakland Schools staff, duplicated and sent to every educational access cable station serving Oakland County. The PSA also ran on the Oakland Schools Television Network that sends programming to schools throughout Oakland County. These key media placements ensured major market promotion and coverage of the event.

Local cable stations were also asked to use this PSA as a satellite insert for any otherwise unused airtime on stations such as MTV, CNN, the Family Network, and others. Four of the county's cable companies complied with this request and, as a result, many more television viewers were reached.

Oakland Schools requested special support from the county government that resulted in the County Executive, L. Brooks Patterson, proclaiming the week of February 2 – 8 as "Public Schools and Family Matters" week. Tying together PSPP with the Family Matters Conference, held the following weekend and also sponsored by the Oakland Press, Oakland Schools, Oakland Community College, and other social service agencies, provided effective cross-marketing.

Promotion of PSPP was not limited to traditional print, television and radio. The Internet was used and many home pages that post events throughout Michigan were asked to include PSPP. A special section on the Oakland Schools homepage was created for PSPP press releases, updates, and a note of thanks to everyone who worked on this event.

Other methods of reaching the public were also used. District communications coordinators were asked to "dribble" information about PSPP in their district, community, staff, and school newsletters, cable TV programs, and other communication vehicles for months prior to the event. They worked with school principals to post signs on school marquees for the week leading up to PSPP. This group was integral to the success of communicating the many messages that evolved.

An Oakland Schools graphics intern created the design that eventually graced much of the promotional materials, including the thousands of buttons that were produced by students with mental and physical impairments at Visions Unlimited, a local vocational training center. Thanks to a much-appreciated donation from Delphi Automotive, Inc., the buttons were generously handed out for a month prior to the event. They continue to grace coats and jackets throughout Oakland County today.

Another corporate sponsor, Elias Brothers, covered the costs for printing thousands of placemats that were used at local restaurants. The placemats promoted the event and noted points of pride about our public schools.

We were also fortunate to be able to advertise PSPP at two hockey games at the Palace of Auburn Hills. Thousands of flyers were handed out by Palace staff and PSPP information was boldly displayed on their enormous video screens throughout the games.

A variety of print materials were made available to PSPP guests on February 2. A beautiful, three color program was produced, underwritten by the Chrysler Corporation, that explained PSPP in detail and provided a comprehensive guide to the exhibits, as well as useful contact names and telephone numbers for follow-up information.

STUDENT PERFORMANCES

Educators know that one way to attract people to an event is to have lots of student performances; relatives and friends don't want to miss an opportunity to see their children perform. Student performances also generated great interest among those present who enjoyed a quality vocal, dance, instrumental, or drama performance by creative kids! More than 60 student performances were offered throughout the day that had mall visitors tapping their feet, smiling, and thinking about the excellent performing arts instruction available to Oakland County students.

In addition to the many fine live performances, students also demonstrated other skills in the Student Art Exhibit, featuring hundreds of student works of art in a variety of media and in the Student Video Display that ran student-created videos throughout the day.

CHILD CARE

Much of PSPP's success was attributed to the outstanding free child care in the mall provided by the Waterford School District. Using a large playroom designed for special events for children, licensed child

care workers, preschool teachers and co-op students cared for more than 210 children, ages 2-6, throughout the day. Families were identified by Polaroid photos and matching wrist bracelets were put on the children and their parents to match up everyone efficiently.

SHOPPING INCENTIVES

PSPP not only targeted parents but also the other 81% of our community who do not have children in our public schools. Incentives, other than those that we knew would attract parents, were developed with the Summit Place mall manager. Special sales, prize drawings and a one percent rebate of the day's gross revenues were offered. To return this amount to the 28 districts in an equitable way, a formula that allocated funds in proportion to the number of people identifying themselves as representing a certain district to that district's actual student count was devised. For example, 100 people identified with one of our districts with a smaller student head count could compete favorably with 200 or more people from a larger school district.

The day's profits returned to each of the districts are being compounded by a special back-to-school sale and rebate scheduled for August. Shoppers were also eligible to pick up a free canvas tote bag decorated with the PSPP logo with a minimum purchase of $50 anywhere in the mall. The 500 bags, donated by Summit Place, were gone long before the event ended.

PARENTS

Parents play a key role in their children's education. Bringing together representatives of the many parent groups that support their schools was critical to the event's success. Contact was made with every district's PTA and PTO councils and other parent advisory groups in an effort to attract parent volunteers to act as hosts for the event and to participate in the parent booth set up to offer parents a variety of ways in which to participate in their children's education. Parents for Public Schools, a national organization of grassroots chapters dedicated to recruiting students, involving parents, and improving public schools, was present at the booth.

Parent involvement is an area targeted for future development by the PSPP long-range planning committee. Strategies to mobilize parents on a county-wide level around a number of major educational issues are an outgrowth of the event.

VOLUNTEERS

Parents weren't the only hosts and volunteers on February 2. Many National Honor Society students swelled the ranks of volunteers who included local teachers, college students, staff, administrators and board members. The more than 1,000 volunteers were essential to our efficient setup, greeting the continuous stream of visitors, directing traffic, running errands throughout the day, troubleshooting, and dismantling of the displays.

PARTICIPANTS' ROOM

Using an empty storefront, we created a nerve center for PSPP. Volunteers stopped by to check in and pick up their host ribbons, members of the press were directed there to pick up their press kits, and a key group

of roving troubleshooters checked in regularly with the staff. The Participants' Room was particularly effective for finding key people, replenishing printed materials throughout the mall, and answering questions before they could become problems.

GALA AND AFTERGLOW

A gathering like PSPP provided an excellent opportunity for legislators and government officials to greet their constituents. Many came out during the day and still others attended a special gala held in their honor in the mall's community room just following the event. This provided an opportunity for these VIPs, as well as corporate sponsors, business leaders, school administrators, board members, and community college and university officials, to get together for 30 minutes to discuss the importance of our schools to our communities and American democracy. After a brief welcome and address, invited guests and event volunteers were treated to a delicious dinner donated by Unique Food Corporation and the Summit Place mall.

The afterglow was a time to unwind, relax, and talk about the many successes and few snags of PSPP for those who spent an exhausting but fulfilling day, a day filled with the sharing of what is right about Oakland County's public schools.

LONG RANGE PLANNING

Initially approximately 10,000 people were expected to attend PSPP. When more than 60,000 people come to support and learn more about Oakland County's public schools, an instant measure of success was established. The event itself is only part of a larger effort to underscore the importance of public education's role in supporting American democracy. "Public Schools… Public Pride" reached out to the Oakland County community as a demonstration of the importance of the public education system to the quality of life for everyone who lives and works there.

Oakland Schools was proud to play a central role in coordinating PSPP. An area service agency is in an ideal position to serve as a facilitator for increasing the public awareness of the role of education in the community. The efforts can seem daunting at times but the results are worth the commitment. The PSPP event redefined Oakland County's sense of public education.

The long range planning committee will use PSPP as a springboard to translate ideas into action. Relationships forged by PSPP will be used to build further efforts to bring equity and excellence in education to every student in Oakland County.

USING ESAs AS CATALYSTS FOR INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

by
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America's children are caught in an unprecedented crisis of well-being:

- Too may suffer physical or emotional neglect in dysfunctional and/or impoverished families;
- Too many, for reasons both complex and varied, do poorly in school;
- Too many are diverted into crime, drug use and early pregnancy.

Children who cannot think through their futures, plan ahead with confidence, and acquire the skills in school to become competent and employable adults are likely to lead unhappy, troubled lives and eventually to become burdens, rather than contributors, to society.

New York State is attempting to meet this vital challenge head-on with a massive collaborative effort to change a tragically bleak picture to one of hope and promise for every child. The State Education Department and the Board of Regents, the State Department of Health and the United Way of New York — all operating under the leadership of Education Commissioner Richard Mills — have entered into a joint agreement to promote inter-agency collaboration toward the goal of moving the well-being of young people to the top of community, state and national agendas.

The initial thrust of this commitment will be to ensure the readiness of children to enter school. New York has, for many years, used the Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (popularly known as BOCES) to provide a variety of services to local schools and children. The 38 BOCES are now being asked to serve as lead agencies for local efforts to foster, promote and develop action plans to deliver and support early intervention strategies. This age group — prenatal through age six — has been targeted because these are the critical years when children develop their physical, social, emotional, intellectual, cognitive, spiritual and imaginative skills and attitudes that enable them to reach their maximum potential.

Fortunately, the Orange-Ulster BOCES, located in Goshen, New York — about 65 miles northwest of New York City — has been working on interagency collaboration since 1992. At that time key policy- and decision-makers in the county, representing agencies that deal with children and families, were first brought together by the Orange-Ulster BOCES District Superintendent to discuss how their constituencies might be better served through their collaborative efforts. They decided to form an Orange County Team that would meet regularly to review relevant issues and to agree on specific actions or activities to improve the condition of children and families in the county.

The County Team was made up of the following individuals:

- The District Superintendent of Schools (CEO of BOCES)
- Local school superintendents
- The Commissioner of Social Services
- The Commissioner of Mental Health
- The Commissioner of Health
- A Family Court Judge
- Representatives of
  - –Probation Department
  - –Youth Bureau
  - –County Legislature
  - –State Senator's Office
  - –Boards of Education
  - –Parents

Key to the success of the Orange County Team was a commitment by the policy makers and administrative leaders to attend meetings so that decisions could be made quickly and efficiently. The team, coordinated by the office of the District Superintendent of the Orange-Ulster BOCES, where the initiative was originally conceived, has fostered open communications, the elimination of turf issues and a great deal of trust and good will among the agencies involved.

Through its "action" sub-committee called C.A.S.T. (Committee for Schools and Agencies Together) it has produced an Electronic Data Base of county-wide programs to serve schools, agencies, students and families; a system of Site-based Services at several school districts and the BOCES; and a Network case management system to deal cooperatively with very difficult or complex cases that have not been satisfactorily resolved at the local level.

This successful history together has created an inclusive environment and infrastructure which favorably positioned the Orange-Ulster BOCES and the County Team to welcome the Orange County United Way to the table for the local component of the expanded collaboration on behalf of children.

The New York State early intervention effort is called Partners for Children and in our county we are calling our program Orange County Partners for Children.

Support is coming from many directions. County Executive Joseph Rampe, for example, in his annual State of the County Address in January, for the first time spoke of the critical need to "prepare our children for the future." He pledged to appoint a citizens' panel composed of parents; educational, business, medical and religious leaders; and community service organization representatives to be charged with the development of a plan to prepare children for responsible adulthood.

We come together at local and state level out of our shared perception of the need to improve the lives of our young people, but we also act with confidence that considerable research confirms that need and attests to the effectiveness of early intervention.

We know, for example, that:

- Educational problems of disadvantaged children are perceptible long before formal education begins;
- Twenty years of research on preschool education have proven the efficacy of early intervention in assuring success in school and other future endeavors;
- Preventing early failure through programs for parents and children is, in the long term, less costly to individuals and society than remediating.

Thus our progress toward our immediate goal of assuring readiness for school in the under-six population will be measured by a number of indicators:

- gains in the percentage of completed immunizations
- improvement in the percentage of vision or hearing defects corrected
- the absence of preventable or treatable health problems
- school readiness as observed by teachers

As this article is being written, the New York State Education Department has scheduled a satellite teleconference to launch the state-wide initiative throughout New York.

Education Commissioner Richard Mills has also scheduled appearances at various forums throughout the state to participate in local kick-off ceremonies; the one in Orange County will take place at a joint meeting of our two county-wide chambers of commerce, with the idea of enlisting the backing of the business/ industry community.

Each school or agency partner is prepared to contribute to this massive effort. Information, time, models of successful strategies, publicity and networking are among the immediate resources that have been pledged. Eventually, of course, monetary resources can be redirected and leveraged for even more support.

Our vision is not a modest one. Our long-range goals include:

- healthy births, as evidenced by declining rates of low birth weight babies and births to school-age parents, and reductions in instances of inadequate prenatal care;
- increasing school success, as evidenced by academic achievement measures, improved attendance, higher graduation rates, more transitions to higher education or employment, and lower suspension rates;
- a decline in rates of school-age pregnancy, substance abuse, juvenile delinquency and criminal behavior; and
- family stability, as evidenced by higher rates of safe and supportive living environments; fewer families living below the poverty line; better employment opportunities and reduced instances of child neglect and abuse.

Some tentative conclusions are possible at this launching point:

Having the County Team structure in place for broad-based collaboration was undoubtedly a great advantage to this area when the New York State Commissioner of Education turned to the BOCES units to take leadership roles in the joint state-wide endeavor. But, of course, any state that has ESAs already has a locus of infrastructure for collaboration, leadership and change.

State-level and national support is undoubtedly another advantage. It provides backing for local partners, political clout and various resources, including funds. It strengthens and widens the local reach.

The initial steps toward Interagency Collaboration are not easy. In New York, as everywhere, there are turf issues at each turn and just the coordination of so many players and bureaucracies can seem staggering at the outset. However, with a good faith commitment to improve services, reduce duplication of efforts and boost cost-effectiveness so as to maximize the impact of scarce funding, the idea soon took on a life and momentum of its own.

The rewards of collaboration have been many: a renewed sense of the power of cooperation and a re-doubled dedication to the future of our youth are surely the most satisfying of the early ones, with the promise of more to come as a new generation grows up healthy and ready for responsible, fulfilling lives.

REACHING AGREEMENT: BUILDING CAPACITY IN EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES FOR INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

by
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Service Agencies such as Region XIII Education Service Center in Austin, Texas are called upon to provide coordination, planning and leadership to diverse groups and agencies in the pursuit of collaborative agreement. The increased requirement for collaborative planning to access services and grant funding has encouraged educators, government agencies, social service providers and community members to come together to plan for a wide variety of purposes.

This interest in collaboration does not insure a quality product or experience, however. The time and facilitation skills needed to productively engage a diverse group representing different disciplines and interests are often not available in the public school or public entities developing such collaborations. Service agencies can fill this need with qualified, knowledgeable staff with the organizational and process skills needed to support such collaborative projects. The role of the service agency becomes one of facilitator of the group process as opposed to the traditional trainer or content expert role. In this role, service agencies provide the process expertise and management to allow client groups to problem solve and implement their own initiatives. School districts in many cases prefer to utilize their own staff for content expertise and are often resistive to outside experts who they feel do not know the individual district needs as well as they do. The service agency is in a unique position to cause client agencies and participants to think and problem solve beyond their individual interests and experiences without dictating the outcome or content of the discussions.

In this new relationship with client groups, the leadership role of service agencies changes to one of a mentor model. The mentor model requires a broader focus on the interaction between education issues and community and societal concerns. This focus by the service agency can serve to connect the education client groups more meaningfully to their local constituents. This brings into partnership with school district and education service agencies the valuable community resources and agencies which traditionally have competed for tax revenue, charitable contributions, community support and political influence.

When service agencies support initiatives which the client district wants to lead, opportunities are created to build relationships leading to future services and to gather information which functions as valuable needs assessment data for emerging trends in client districts.

BENEFITS TO CLIENT/EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY RELATIONSHIPS

One example of a key support role played by an education service agency is a project which Education Service Center Region XIII has been facilitating for the past year in Travis County. This county was faced with a state mandate to develop a county wide Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Center (JJAEC). This program would impact the juvenile justice service providers, children's mental health providers and all school districts whose students resided in or committed offenses within the borders of this county. Education Service Center Region XIII staff had established relationships with these school districts and service agencies through participation and leadership in a wide variety of programs and services addressing the needs of students and families in special populations served by multiple agencies. Superintendents of each district attended meetings at Region XIII for districts in this county, but this group did not have a specific focus other than information sharing. Prior to this project, none of the districts involved had identified a need or purpose common to all where resources were shared and all districts, regardless of size or wealth, benefited equally. As a result of this year long collaborative project, which was organized, facilitated and supported by Education Service Center Region XIII, several positive outcomes have occurred.

Despite an extremely short time frame for planning, the Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Center opened on time. It had been developed with full participation of all stake holders. The program recently received an Exemplary Program Award from the Texas Correction Association. All participants from the seven primary school districts and county agencies have remained involved and are currently evaluating the program for revision for the new year. The role of the service center continues to be focused on problem solving and facilitating communication with the leadership of the partners involved addressing their common goals.

As a partner in this collaboration Education Service Center Region XIII was requested to provide an additional service to this collaborative, to serve as contract agent and fiscal agent for the educational and operational aspects of the JJAEC. This activity, in turn, opened the door to the development of additional fiscal and program services for individual partnerships between parties from this group. This allowed the ESC to participate with client districts in a new capacity which had not been developed in any other context. The flexibility and capacity of a service agency to respond to such opportunities is a key part of the value added to clients.

The superintendents in this county-wide group have a comfortable working relationship around this program which is leading to the development of additional mutually beneficial projects and services with the Education Service Center. In these new initiatives Region XIII is again serving as both facilitator and partner. These clients now perceive the greater potential of the Education Service Center for providing services in facilitating problem solving around district issues and collaboratives in the community across multiple areas.

The relationship between the Education Service Center Region XIII Executive Director, the ESC staff and the seven district superintendents, as well as their designees, has been enhanced through this experience.

Additional benefits to some of the client districts have also developed as a result of this partnership with county services. Districts have been able to work with social service agencies to focus distribution of county resources to high need areas with input from the schools. Two districts have accessed First Time

Offender services to support their efforts in developing safe schools. All seven districts will be involved in substance abuse prevention curriculum. Two districts with city and county government agencies are developing neighborhood services to support families and children.
This partnership offers the additional value of connecting professionals who hold common goals and values and pools everyone's funding, industry/technology and human service assets. While these entities previously would have competed for dwindling resources, they now find that an alliance results in more comprehensive planning, more economical services and strategic changes in delivery models.

The school districts have an increased presence now at the table in multiple forums involving funding and programs which support school initiatives. Some of the smaller districts, which previously were underserved by county services, have begun to develop a stronger voice through this partnership where districts do not compete with each other for services but plan for the benefit of all parties over time.

UNDERLYING CONDITIONS/ASSUMPTIONS FOR SUCCESS

For a service agency to be successful in facilitating cooperative endeavors as a multidisciplinary, multi-agency project, several conditions and assumptions must be present at all levels of the organization.

Condition 1: The ESA must model for clients the strategies and structures which foster problem solving, individual leadership, communication skills, collaboration skills and inclusive decision making.

Condition 2: Service agency staff must have a broad base of training and experience in group facilitation, conflict resolution, strategic planning and problem solving models. Successful facilitation which results in achieving the purpose and outcomes of the client group requires the facilitator to create problem solving structures using tools and processes which meets the demands imposed by group dynamics. Staff must be able to design and adapt these planning and process tools to meet the skill level and time constraints of the client participants. The staff must be skillful in the neutral facilitator role while connecting participant beliefs and values to the decision making process.

Condition 3: Leadership in the service agency must allocate resources and staff to participate in interagency partnerships which may not be directly mandated or funded but which lay the ground work for such collaborations. A balance must be maintained between allocating resources to content and program specific activities and providing services which continue to stimulate forums in which new opportunities may develop.

Education Service Center Region XIII works toward these conditions through collaborative planning and independent, multi-department work teams throughout the organization.

BUILDING ON PRIOR COMMITMENTS AND RELATIONSHIPS

For many years, ESC consultants have supported and participated in many social service and community service arenas. ESC XIII has provided leadership and partnership support to efforts through the state Children's Mental Health Plan, Community Resource Coordination Groups, Job Training Partnership Act work force, school boards, business organizations, parent/community organizations, Juvenile Justice agencies, civic/county neighborhood groups, and Education Service Center Region XIII's own focus and user groups. Traditionally, this effort has concentrated on the larger urban communities, but the benefits of such connections and partnerships benefit smaller and more rural communities as well. This increased

coverage will require additional resources, which must be part of the Education Service Center Region XIII strategic plan for client service.

The capacity to build on prior commitments and relationships in new situations requires that service agency staff from different departments and content/program areas work together. A primary focus in these partnerships is the development of relationships with professionals in all fields who have decision making responsibility and can provide key resources and influence in partnerships with clients.

Education Service Center Region XIII has played many different roles in the past twenty years. The newest role, that of facilitator and mentor for systemic change, is both challenging and rewarding for an education service agency and for its clients. Current dynamics in schools and communities caused by state legislation and dwindling resources have forced local education agencies and community agencies to work together. This situation provides an opportunity for education service agencies to look at the long term potential for their involvement in the collaborative development of education, health and human services for children and families through the educational arena.

CLIENT VIEWS OF TEXAS SERVICE CENTERS: RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM THE SERVICE CENTERS 2000 STUDY

by
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THE SERVICE CENTERS 2000 STUDY

Service Centers 2000, a year-long initiative co-sponsored by Texas Regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) and the Commissioner of Education, combines the insights of school district administrators, instructional staff, professional development experts, ESCs, and the commissioner with market analyses to understand the organization, operation, activities, and governance of Texas service centers.

During the spring of 1996, all 1050 Texas school districts were surveyed about their use of ESCs. The questionnaire used in the survey appears at the end of this article. Sixty percent of the 627 districts from all twenty Texas ESC regions returned questionnaires. Responding districts resembled Texas districts overall in size and in geographic distribution: half came from school districts with enrollment under 1,000 and more than two-thirds identified their district as rural. Responding districts enroll approximately 2.5 million Texas students, roughly 69% of the state's total enrollment.

FINDINGS FROM THE STATEWIDE SURVEY

The overwhelming majority of responding districts are using their ESC, with more than 85% using their ESC constantly or quite regularly. Over half of districts reported that their use of ESC programs and services has increased over the past two years. Nearly three-fourths of districts reported that they depend on their ESC often or absolutely need their ESC for training, support, and information.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Districts that use ESC programs and services rated them as better than average or very high in value. Instructional services valued most highly include instructional media and training, and assistance in math, reading, and writing instruction as well as in TAAS (the state testing program) strategies. Non-instructional services valued most highly include administrative data processing, financial accounting, purchasing cooperatives, and bus driver training. Also of great importance to responding school districts is information on laws and rules governing their operation. Services such as job banks, teleconferencing and distance learning, textbook displays, and training and services for parents were less frequently identified as having high value but are still used by many school districts.

QUALITY

Client school districts are highly satisfied with the quality of their ESCs. Three-quarters of respondents reported that their ESC has a strong, responsive organization that provides them with high-quality and

current information. ESCs received high marks from 71% or more of respondents on the quality of their organization, responsiveness, staff, operations, and the degree to which ESCs are up to date regarding school matters.

USE

Forty-one percent of all respondents said they absolutely need their ESC and could not get along without it, while an additional 33% reported that they often depend on the ESC. Small district clients said they are currently using ESC programs and services more often than mid-sized and large districts. The smaller the district size category, the greater the increase in ESC use over the past two years. Small districts depend on ESCs more than larger districts for programs such as reading and math training and assistance, instructional and administrative data processing, financial accounting, and instructional and purchasing cooperatives. Mid-sized districts are more dependent than other districts on ESCs for training and assistance in special education. Larger districts are more dependent than other districts on ESCs for training and assistance in bilingual education, for assistance for low-performing campuses, and for alternative certification programs.

An overwhelming majority of respondents, 82% or more, indicated that their ESC helps districts function more efficiently by providing relatively inexpensive training and services, by facilitating cooperatives, and by providing programs and services that might otherwise be inaccessible to them because of their high capital costs. Over two-thirds of respondents indicated that ESC programs for training and certifying new teachers increase efficiency, while one-third cited distance learning programs offered by ESCs as important for reducing their costs.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The regional advisory committee of superintendents is the communication channel used most frequently by districts for providing feedback and input to ESCs. Surveys conducted by ESCs and visits by field service agents are also common links between districts and ESCs.

CONCERNS

When provided an opportunity to respond to open-ended questions about ESCs, respondents most frequently commend them for efficient and effective service. Respondents already use numerous technology-based services and would like the ESCs to have more expertise with leading edge technology. Several respondents note that ESC staff are most effective when they have direct contact with educators at the campus level. Another concern among school districts is the rising cost of ESC services and programs. Respondents link rising costs to insufficient funding from the state and imposition of underfunded mandates. Some respondents attribute rising costs to efforts by ESCs to become market driven. Many respondents hope that additional state resources to service centers will allow them to hire and retain high-quality staff and keep service fees relatively low.

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

Focus group meetings of school district personnel in six cities across Texas addressed, in depth, critical issues related to services and the role of ESCs. Focus group participants discussed experiences with a variety of service providers and service needs to improve student performance and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of school district operations. Six general topic areas were discussed: mission,

accountability, governance, ESC relations with state and local education entities, experience with services, and strengths and weaknesses.

1. THE MISSION OF THE EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS

Focus group participants see the primary mission of the ESCs as service to school districts. They believe that nothing should compromise or constrain that role. In particular, school district personnel do not want ESCs serving a regulatory or monitoring role. Clients believe that ESC services and expertise should match district needs, requiring flexibility in providing and delivering services. In addition to services, school districts expect ESCs to be facilitators that bring school districts together to solve problems. Participants believe that ESCs have a mission to improve school district efficiency and reduce districts' costs. They see a role for ESCs in providing innovative services for school districts as well as charting the future of change in education.

2. ACCOUNTABILITY

Participants criticized the current state accountability system, which holds each ESC accountable for student performance within its region. Numerous concerns fed this criticism including the fact that school districts do not use services equally and resources are unevenly spread among service centers. Focus group participants prefer an accountability system devised by client school districts. Measuring time spent with districts and appropriate use of feedback from client districts were two approaches suggested by participants to measure ESC accountability. Participants from small districts in particular were not enthusiastic about market mechanisms for ensuring accountability.

3. GOVERNANCE

ESC governance is not an area of concern for their clients. Clients who expressed an opinion were satisfied with how the governing boards function. Governance was linked to management in the minds of many focus group participants, and they expressed their belief that input to ESCs is an important element for efficient and responsive operation. Most participants knew of many avenues for input to the ESC and expressed a desire to keep lines of communication open. Participants viewed the current composition of the ESC board as appropriate.

4. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ESCS, SCHOOL DISTRICTS, AND THE TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

The relationship between ESCs and school districts is healthy and well understood in most regions. Districts want to provide feedback and discuss their needs with the ESCs and most have many opportunities to do so. ESCs are using multiple forms of communication which allow for different input from various individuals. Communication problems that exist are attributed in equal part to ESC staff and local district staff. The relationship between ESCs and Texas Education Agency appears to school personnel to be less well defined than it used to be. Many participants simply do not understand the relationship very well. The process of moving TEA functions to ESCs has caused some confusion because school districts are not certain to whom they should turn for information. For example, focus group participants expressed frustration with the uncertainty about and lack of information concerning new laws and rules. They want authoritative answers to questions but seem to have difficulty getting such responses.

5. SCHOOL DISTRICT SERVICE NEEDS AND ESC PARTICIPATION

Most focus group participants have found training and assistance in the ESC core service areas to be of great use. The importance of services and assistance to smaller districts was noted repeatedly by participants. However, participants criticized some services they have received as being of unacceptable quality. The quality of people providing services at the ESC varies among the regions and sometimes within an ESC. School districts are aware of and troubled by these quality differences.

School districts receive a wide variety of services beyond the core from the ESCs. Some participants noted that ESCs should seize the opportunity to be innovative. They noted that some service centers are good at initiating changes within districts while others are good at reacting to changes. What appears to be of greatest importance to school district personnel is the knowledge of local needs and concerns that ESCs bring with them. Because they know the local districts so well, service centers can link districts together, serving as networking agents or even as brokers for services.

Participants at all six focus groups indicated that they use service providers from higher education, non-profit centers, and the private sector. These service vendors generally provide high quality services, but they are usually more expensive and less accountable. Many school districts do not believe they can get more efficient services or lower prices in a fully competitive market. School personnel want to look to a wide variety of organizations and vendors for services, but they do not want to replace ESCs. They are also less than enthusiastic about ESCs competing for "market share" among themselves. School districts want ESCs always to make service to local clients a priority over marketing of their own services.

6. IMPROVING REGIONAL EDUCATION SERVICE CENTERS

Focus group participants want services that are appropriate for their districts. These services need to be innovative, of high quality, and accessible to different types of districts. School district personnel believe that ESCs need more resources to provide ongoing and improved services. The services currently provided are described as cost-efficient for current needs but insufficient for future needs and threatened by difficulties in retaining competent personnel. Participants think that solutions to staffing problems should address turnover, workload, and interaction between ESC staff and the school districts. Participants view ESCs as collegial institutions: they should cooperate, not compete, with each other for programs and resources. Because small districts are highly dependent upon the ESCs, all participants recognize the importance of meeting small district needs. In order to serve all districts in a diverse state, participants favor ESCs that are responsive, flexible, and not constrained by mandates for uniformity.

SUMMARY

ESC clients want and use a wide and expanding range of accessible, high quality cost competitive services that help them achieve their academic and business goals. ESCs need to accommodate changing client needs but cannot let the pressure to expand services lower quality. ESCs serve clients better when performance expectations are clear, but they jeopardize the quality of services when they are expected to do too much. Clients value the local knowledge and presence of the ESCs but want services to be more accessible to classroom teachers. They encourage ESCs to hire, develop, and retain quality staff who remain current with classroom realities. Clients value expertise housed outside ESCs and in some areas, particularly technology, recognize that ESCs are challenged by both competition for expert staff as well as the rapid pace of innovation.

APPENDIX

Service Centers 2000
Survey for Texas School Districts

1. Check the statement that best describes your district's pattern of use of the ESC in the past two years:

___ This district significantly increased its use of ESC programs and services.
___ This district increased somewhat its use of ESC programs and services.
___ This district maintained its level of use of ESC programs and services.
___ This district reduced somewhat its use of ESC services.
___ This district significantly reduced its use of ESC programs and services.

2. Check the statement that best describes your district's current level of use of the ESC.

___ This district constantly uses ESC programs and services.
___ This district quite regularly uses ESC programs and services.
___ This district occasionally uses the ESC.
___ This district infrequently uses the ESC.
___ This district uses the ESC only when it is required to do so.

3. Check the statement that best describes your district's dependency on the ESC for training, support, and information.

___ This district absolutely needs the ESC, and it could not get along without it.
___ This district often depends on the ESC.
___ This district is somewhat dependent on ESC services.
___ This district does not depend on the ESC, but it uses ESC programs and services from time to time.
___ This district does not need the ESC and uses it only when required to do so.

The next question block is set up like a table. Rate your district's level of use and the value to your district of certain ESC services.

For the "level of use" column, use this rating scale:

5 Use frequently
4 Use Regularly
3 Occasional use
2 Seldom use
1 Do not use

For the "value of core services," use this rating scale:

5 Very high value
4 Better than average value
3 Average value
2 Lower than average value
1 Very low value

Level of Use Value

4. Training and assistance in reading and writing instruction

5. Training and assistance in mathematics instruction

6. Training and assistance in science and social studies instruction

7. Training and assistance in special education

8. Training and assistance in bilingual education

9. Training and assistance in compensatory education

10. Training and assistance in gifted and talented education

11. Assistance for low-performing campuses

12. Training and assistance in TAAS strategies

13. Site-based decision-making training

14. Instructional data processing

15. Administrative data processing

16. Financial accounting services

17. Textbook displays

18. Instructional media services

19. Instructional cooperative(s)

20. Purchasing cooperatives

21. Other (describe)

22. On a scale of 7 to 1, where 7 is the highest rating and 1 is the lowest rating, rate the value of the following specific programs and services as provided to your district by your ESC. Circle NA if you are not sure or if the item is not applicable.

a. Alternative certification programs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
b. Educator certification programs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
c. Educator job bank	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
d. Training and services for principals	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
e. Training and programs services for parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

f. Bus driver training	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
g. Teleconferences and distance learning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
h. Coordination and cooperation with other entities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

23. Using a scale of 7 to 1, where 7 is "most important" and 1 is "not important," rate the importance to your district of the ESC's role in providing the following:

a. Training and assistance for instructional personnel	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
b. Support for campus and district planning	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
c. Information about state laws and rules	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
d. A means and a place for meetings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
e. Distance learning activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
f. Support for cooperative services and programs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
g. Support and programs for instructional technology	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
h. Support and programs for administrative technology	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
i. Multi-regional programs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
j. A link with the Texas Education Agency	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

24. What programs and services should be offered by the ESC that are not currently offered?

25. What programs and services should be discontinued because they are not appropriate or they are ineffective?

26. What are the ways that your district provides input and feedback to the ESC? Check all that apply.

___ The ESC has a regional advisory committee of superintendents.
___ There is a system of advisory groups for several of the ESC program areas.
___ The ESC director visits each district and asks for input.
___ The field service director visits each district and asks for input.
___ The ESC sends out surveys to get input.
___ Our district makes input known through TEA.
___ Our district gets input only when we complain.
___ Other (describe) _____

27. What are the ways that ESCs increase the efficiency of the system of public education in Texas? Check all that apply.

___ ESCs provide training and services at below-market prices.
___ The ESCs provide programs and services that have high capital costs that many districts could not afford to initiate by themselves.
___ ESCs offer opportunities for cooperative arrangements that save money.
___ Programs offered through the ESCs reduce the cost of training and certifying new teachers.
___ ESC distance learning programs reduce instructional costs for some classes.
___ Other (describe) _____

28. Use a rating scale of 1 through 7 for the next five questions, where 1 represents the lowest rating and 7 represents the highest rating.

a. Rate the quality of the organization of the ESC in your region.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
b. Rate the responsiveness of the ESC in your region to your district's needs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
c. Rate the degree to which the ESC in your region is up to date and current on matters related to the operation of public schools and the instruction of students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
d. Rate the quality of ESC staff in your region.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA
e. Rate the quality of the overall ESC operation in your region.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	NA

29. In your opinion, what is the best funding arrangement for Texas ESCs? (Please check.)

___ ESCs should be funded through a foundation program, much like school districts.
___ ESCs should be funded by the state on the basis of the number of students in the region.
___ Except for federal funds, ESCs should be totally funded with local revenues from fees or assessments.
___ The current system of financing should be maintained.
___ Other (explain)_____

30. What can ESCs do to better meet the needs of Texas school districts?

31. What is your ESC region number?____

32. What is your district's approximate fall 1995 enrollment?____

33. Check the words that best describe your district's environment.

__rural
__town
__medium-sized city
__suburban
__major city or urban
__other

Thank you for completing this survey.

CONNECTICUT RESC COST EFFECTIVENESS

by
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Trumball, Connecticut

BACKGROUND

A common assumption about Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) is that they are beneficial in large measure because of the ways they support equitable, effective (high quality) educational programs and services delivered in the most efficient (cost-effective) manner (Stephens & Turner, 1991). However ESAs, like many other regional organizations and systems, function within a broader social, political and governmental context where a predisposition toward local control and the tendency for competition to override cooperation can become confounding factors within the equity-efficiency-effectiveness paradigm.

The purpose of this study was to explore cost-effectiveness in the context of Connecticut's six regional educational service centers (RESCs) using Stephens and Harmon's model (1995). The data-gathering and analysis strategies represented an attempt to address as many of Stephens and Harmon's 11 recommended minimal design features as possible. A three step process included an analysis of revenue and expenditure structures across all six RESCs (Stephens & Harmon 1, 2); the review/analysis of one selected service across three RECSs (Stephens & Harmon 3, 4); and, finally, a more detailed analysis of costs associated with one school district's purchase of a particular service through its RESC, compared with other possible providers (Stephens & Harmon 4, 5, 6, 8, 10).

FINDINGS

The annual reports submitted to the State Department of Education and each member board of education by Connecticut's six RESCs for 1994-95 provided the source data about revenue and expenditure structures (Stephens & Harmon, 1) and the scope and costs of programs and services provided on a collaborative basis (Stephens & Harmon, 2). While most contained many of the same elements, there was variation. For example, only four of the six agencies provided detail about projected revenue and expenses. One of the six did not provide any narrative descriptions about programs or services. There was little consistency in the presentation of data by the agencies. While the annual reports did not appear to address the notion of cost-effectiveness *per se*, they did provide "big picture" information about the overall budget size and revenue source by category.

All six RESCs provided similar core programs on an interdistrict or regional basis (e.g. special, early childhood and adult education; professional development; and some types of administrative support services, etc.).

The lack of consistency across the six annual reports prompted questions about their ultimate utility to the statutorily-prescribed intended audience, the State Board of Education. According to a former Deputy Commissioner of Education for Program and Support Services, annual reports from RESCs that were "operating ok," were given only "perfunctory review."

Given the apparent lack of interest on the part of legislators or the State Board of Education, there would appear to be little impetus for rethinking the format and/or content of the annual reports. However, given other states' experiences, Connecticut's RESC leadership might consider using the annual reports as ways of putting forward a more unified and coherent message both to their constituents and to state policy makers.

TRANSPORTATION SERVICES: RESC PERSPECTIVE

Out-of-district special education transportation was identified for more focused application of the Stephens and Harmon cost-efficiency model for the following reasons: (a) it was a service offered by most RESCs (b) it is relatively easy to identify non-RESC providers (c) there is a consistency in operating costs across providers (d) there is a fair presumption that it was purchased on the basis of requests for a quotation or bid, making it, at least at face value, less susceptible to other factors.

The annual reports indicated that transportation represented approximately five to six percent of each RESC's total budget. Three RESCs were selected for closer scrutiny. They served contiguous regions and represented a range from large to small, both in terms of student population and overall size of operation.

All three RESCs were asked to provide additional detail, by customer and volume of business, about the use of transportation services for 1994-95. Each used a different approach to calculating costs and developing quotations. RESC #1 charged either on the basis of mileage or time. Prices included all related fixed and variable costs including driver, vehicle, gas, etc. RESC #2 indicated that a ten year experience base permitted accurately quoting a price per run within distance-based concentric circles, adding a percentage to the base for distances outside the circle. Quotations were based on an assumption that vehicles would be full, either by one district or through ride-sharing among districts. Finally, the cost per vehicle was divided by the number of students to obtain a cost per trip per student, with a surcharge for wheelchair vehicles. RESC #3 developed price quotations on a case by case basis using (a) base vehicle cost per day (b) cost per gallon x miles traveled (c) per mile maintenance fee, and (d) driver's time (salary, fringe x time).

RESC #1 identified a local livery service, a human services agencies' transportation collaborative, and the school bus company as its major competition. RESC #3 also identified the major school bus contractors as well as taxi companies. While many of the major bus companies included out-of-district special education transportation rates as part of their overall bid quotation, there was usually no requirement that a district purchase those services from them. In fact, it appeared that, with some exceptions, there was an assumption that out-of-district special education transportation services did not need to be formally bid. This set the stage for districts to select a vendor on the basis of both financial and non financial considerations. Staff from two of the three RESCs studied described situations where they believed contracts were awarded on the basis of personal friendships and/or political considerations.

RESCs appeared to pride themselves on the fact that their vehicles complied with the highest Department of Transportation (DOT) standards, and that drivers were selected and trained to serve special populations. Most if not all drivers held a commercial license with the "S" designation indicating they met the requirements for transporting school children.

TRANSPORTATION: DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE

One medium-sized urban district was selected for further study based on the fact that in 1994-95 its out-of-district special education transportation services represented nearly 60% of RESC #1's overall transportation business for that year. The transportation coordinator and the finance director indicated that 1994-95 probably represented peak usage since shortly thereafter the situation became much more competitive. Previously, there had been few other vendors willing and interested in providing this service. Even the company which held the local school bus contract had not been interested, citing the challenging and difficult nature of the student population. Beginning in 1995, the district's bus company "...became very aggressive seeking any work they (could) get...." At the same time, an area human services transportation collaborative also began soliciting district business.

While the district did not believe it was required to use a formal bidding process for out-of-town student transportation, it adopted the practice of soliciting quotations. Staff provided qualified vendors with destinations and number of students who needed to be transported, requesting a "per student per day" quotation. It was evident from this set of quotations that both the bus company and the human services collaborative quoted on the basis of larger vehicles than the RESC, and that they had promoted ride sharing solutions. Thus, while the RESC's per vehicle per day charge was less than their two competitors, the overall quotation was higher due to the smaller vehicle size.

With three competing vendors, district officials began making its selection on the basis of lowest cost for comparable quality. They were also able to reassess their options in terms of possible cost-quality trade offs. The finance director indicated that while the RESC product was wonderful, their costs are astronomical, "…like buying a Cadillac when a Chevy will get you there." One "luxury" feature identified by the district was the relatively small (5 passenger) capacity of most RESC vehicles. With the 12 passenger van used by the other two providers, the per student/per vehicle/per day rate is significantly lower, even with fewer than 12 passengers. Also, the larger capacity permitted adding more students over the course of the year without adding vehicles.

District personnel identified several other factors that impacted selection. First, given comparable quotes, the district tended to stay with the same provider, "…if they're providing a good product, … why go to someone new?" Especially the first year, they tried to avoid "putting all their eggs in one basket," given concerns about the ability of a new vendor to match standards and equipment. The district was also inclined, wherever possible, to link transportation services with educational programs . Thus, students going to a RESC program were more likely to be transported by those agencies' vehicles.

TRANSPORTATION: NON-RESC VENDOR PERSPECTIVE

The Human Service Transportation Collaborative (HSTC) was a private non-profit organization identified by both the district and the RESC as a RESC competitor. In an effort to increase the size of his operation, the collaborative's director began to market services to several school districts, including those where he had prior personal and professional relationships with transportation coordinators. Over several years, school contracts grew over to represent about 10% of the agency's total budget.

Rates were quoted on a per hour per vehicle basis, depending on type of vehicle, with a surcharge for aides. While all drivers held commercial licenses, they did not hold the "S" (school bus driver) designation because, according to the director, "this was not required for out-of-district transportation."

Responding to a recent district request for quotations, HSTC was able to suggest ride sharing possibilities which reduced the number of vehicles required, thus lowering the cost. While there was some question whether the newly configured routes would permit staying under the one hour travel limit, the director seemed confident that this effort on his part to save the customer money would contribute to his success in getting the contract.

CONCLUSION

While much of the data required to apply Stephens and Harmon's (1996) ESA cost-efficiency model to Connecticut RESCs was collected over the course of this study, it was not ultimately possible to determine a dollar benefit or savings to clients for out-of-district special education transportation provided by a RESC as compared with other service providers. In spite of some difficulty securing complete and comparable financial data, there did not appear to be any significant differences among providers in terms of the key ingredients used to determine customer costs (e.g. driver and aide salaries).

It would appear difficult if not impossible, based on the results of this exploratory study, to develop a statewide cost-efficiency model applicable across RESCs because of the significant differences in the ways the RESCs approach cost analysis and the difficulty in obtaining comparable information from district and/or third party vendors.

While the focus of this study was cost-effectiveness, it also became apparent that quality and equity were also factors, along with efficiency, in decisions customers made about the purchase of transportation services. The fact that customer decisions were made within a political context, for the most part outside a legally regulated bidding environment, further obscured and confounded attempts to analyze and compare transportation services solely on the basis of cost-efficiency.

There appeared to be significant differences in both type and quality of service provided by the different transportation providers, due in large measure to differing opinions about the need to comply with statutory school transportation regulations related to the licensing of drivers and the vehicles themselves. For example, the per student per day per run cost from a provider who used larger non-school bus type vehicles driven by drivers without the "S" designation on their commercial licenses would inevitably be less expensive than comparable service provided using smaller vehicles which met DOT school transportation standards and drivers holding the "S" commercial license. This would likely be true on even a per unit basis, even when the "costs of doing business" are in fact comparable. Without a common and consistent definition of minimal standards, RESCs (or other service providers) that exceed their customers' needs and/or expectations would have difficulty competing on the basis of efficiency.

A RESC transportation director recently revealed that there was currently a $25 million lawsuit being brought against a district by the parents of special needs student injured while being transported out-of-district to an educational program. The suit contended that the district used a non-complying provider. That district is now in the process of transferring its business to the RESC. Many other districts do not appear to understand or believe that these more stringent school transportation regulations also apply to out-of-district services.

Another quality issue with cost implications relates to ride sharing. As discussed previously, the non-RESC providers appeared to be pro-active in combining runs as a way of saving the district money. However,

combining runs to several sites was not always a good idea for several reasons, according to RESC experts. They suggested that ride sharing frequently led to inappropriate mixing of different age and different needs students on a single vehicle. Thus, a five year old autistic child might be on the same van with a teenager with severe social-emotional problems. Attempts to maximize the use of any one vehicle also increased the likelihood of exceeding the statutorily prescribed one hour travel limit.

The school district seemed to perceive the RESC as different from either the human services collaborative or the bus company in that it was quasi-governmental. District staff seemed somewhat surprised that RESC price quotations were based on the need to cover costs, suggesting perhaps they assumed the RESC had some other revenue source which could/should be used to offset district payments for service.

There was a strong suggestion that political and personal considerations played a part in the selection of vendors in a non-bid environment. Players had the opportunity to build on personal and professional friendships, creating a sense of 'preferred provider' status, as long as costs were kept reasonable, parents were satisfied, and all known and acknowledged regulations were followed.

This study also raised questions about the purpose and operation of the Connecticut RESC Alliance. Within the notion of shared services, such as transportation, there exist vastly different organizational profiles and "ways of doing business" which can appear disparate and confusing to school districts. If the RESCs determine that it is in their individual and collective interests to become more pro-active in terms of putting forward the equity-efficiency-effectiveness agenda, they would likely need to work through these apparent differences. Based on experiences in other states, they might want to anticipate a time when either the State Board of Education or others would consider using the annual reports in the public policy arena. The RESCs would then need to develop ways of showing both quantifiable and non-quantifiable benefits of their continued existence.

This limited study appears to illustrate the subtle yet complex ways efficiency, equity and effectiveness interrelate in terms of programs and services provided through a RESC. While RESC transportation services units were originally created to address an unmet need (equity), they now find themselves being evaluated by districts in terms of efficiency (cost), given competing and contradictory notions of what constitutes quality (effectiveness). There needs to be further study and analysis of other services to better understand how the RESC effectiveness-efficiency-equity paradigm applies to different situations over time.

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EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

Most developed countries in the world provide their school system with an educational support service. However, the ownership and position of these services, their tasks, the levels at which they are financed, their operating procedures and the methods by which they are evaluated differ a lot. This conclusion is drawn largely from the experience of educators and scholars; there is not much research to buttress any conclusions.

The Netherlands is one of a very few countries that "has a rich and elaborated educational support structure which is unique all over the world" (OECD, 1991). It is unique in several ways. It is nationally legislated, it covers the whole country, all schools have the free right to connect to these independent agencies and state and local authorities subsidize them. Also, all levels of government have been involved in evaluating them and the system has been reviewed in a comprehensive way.

Though other countries, states or provinces do organize educational support in other ways than The Netherlands, the assumption is that we can learn a lot from each other. However, that there is no comprehensive study on educational service agencies in any other country; therefore a comparative study is not available.

This article aims to present a model that can be used to describe educational services in different countries. It will be presented by describing Educational Service Agencies in The Netherlands. Perhaps this article will also facilitate more international communications between organizations like AAESA and WPRO and their members.

TOWARDS A DESCRIPTIVE MODEL OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICE

Rationale

"The educational consultant comes (and goes) in many different shapes and sizes" (Fullan, 1991, 215). This means that the work done by educational consultants, both as an individual and as an employee of an institution that provides educational service, is described in a many different ways. In order to clarify the concept and to communicate it clearly in the international arena, the first step is to look for a definition of educational service. We chose to use the one which describes the Dutch concept of "schoolbegeleiding" (Timmer, 1985), which may be translated as school counseling, -consultancy, -service. This definition reads as follows:

> Educational Service is the planning, performing and evaluating of interventions in education, that are based on knowledge and skills and that are operated intentionally by a specific organized supporting system, which is connected to an active participating client system in order to facilitate improvements in the structure, culture and performance of the client system, aiming that the client system can better realize its goals.

The next step was the search for publications for information on theoretical concepts, location, work and results of educational service agencies. This was executed through Dutch overviews (Köllen, 1990) and research publications (reviewed by Slavenburg, 1995), The International Encyclopedia of Education, Second Edition (T. Husén and T.N. Postlethwaite, ed. (1994)) and the ERIC information system.

Theoretical notions had to be taken into account in order to create a model that would be consistent with the definition (Fullan, 1991; Glickman, 1992; Hopkins, 1994; Joyce, 1996; Pajak 1993). The model has been presented to a group of experts. The draft was used to describe four countries (Belgium, Israel, Luxembourg and The Netherlands) by document analysis, interviews, and reports that were sent to an expert correspondent in the respective countries. In another publication (Gorter, 1996) the theoretical background of the description model has been presented in an elaborated way. Four country reports have been included in that publication as well. The model itself has been evaluated and adapted after these four investigations. We will use this revised model to describe the case of The Netherlands in a next section. The search also pointed out in which countries educational service agencies are recognizable.

COUNTRIES WITH EDUCATIONAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

AAESA listed about 400 agencies in 35 states of the USA that provide educational services. Canada has also a variety of institutions at different levels. Europe shows a broad variety as well. The countries in which we see more or less dedicated public and private systems for educational service are Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. From other European countries data are rare or not available yet. The phenomena of educational service agencies is known in Australia as well. For Asia data are not available, except for Singapore. The situation in the Middle East is unknown, except for the State of Israel. No data are available yet from countries in South America and Africa. In other countries a variety of providers can be responsible for the educational service at the same time that they go about their other core business.

Table 1 presents both the revised model and indicates - very briefly - the results of our four country research.

EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

1. *Context*

1.1. *Legitimation in society and education*

Education is a priority on the political agenda in The Netherlands. The cabinet recently finished a public debate on Knowledge for the New Millennium and added substantial structural money to the state education budget, mainly to reduce the class size in primary education.

The consequences of an increasing diversity among the population, the improvement of the conditions for all for lifelong learning and participation, and information technology are most relevant for education.

TABLE 1: DESCRIPTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES IN FOUR COUNTRIES
Belgium (B) Israel (IL), The Netherlands (NL) and Luxembourg (L);
+ means: described in the literature reviewed (Gorter, 1996)

		B	IL	NL	L
1.	**Context for providers**				
1.1.	Legitimation in society and education	+	+	+	1)
1.2.	School system; Ownership of providers	+	+	+	+
1.2.1	Quantative characteristics	+	+	+	
1.2.2	Different kinds, public and private	+	+	+	
2.	**Input at provider's level**				
2.1.	Influential actors on service program	+	+	+	
2.2.	Financial resources	+	+	+	+
2.3.	Policy, vision, and mission of providers	+	+	+	
2.4.	Staff development for ESA personnel	+	+	+	
2.5.	External expertise	+		+	
2.6.	Center of knowledge within ESA			+	
2.7.	Research and development			+	
2.8.	Total Quality Management	+		+	
3.	**Services and Results**				
3.1.	Intake; demand and supply			+	
3.2.	Services provided:				
a	Management of innovation	+	+	+	+
b	Organization development	+	+	+	
c	Student & parent counseling services	+	+	+	+
d	Developing educational materials	+	+	+	
e	Information services for clients	+		+	
f	Advising regional organizations			+	
4.	**Evaluation**			2)	
4.1.	Policy Review			+	
4.2.	Client Satisfaction			+	
4.3.	Inspectorate	+		+	

Remarks: 1) Luxembourg has no legislated system for educational service; non dedicated institutions are providing some educational service.

There is consensus that general education should concentrate at language teaching (reading comprehension), early childhood, diversity, (school) improvement for the disadvantaged, mainstreaming and inclusion of special education, standards and accountability.

1.2. *The school system; ownership of providers*

In 1918 the Dutch liberal government desired a public education system in which all the denominational parties of the country, Protestants, Catholics and Humanists, should be included and would feel comfortable. The religious groups refused, however, and the result was that The Netherlands has an educational system in which all schools of all denominations are financially supported equally for full cost by the National Government. One consequence of this system is that parents are free in their choice for any school. Another is that the school boards have a large freedom in their organization, personnel matters and the curriculum.

Operating in a complex environment, school boards - governing a relatively small number of small schools, especially in primary education - traditionally rely upon external agencies for support. Along with the broad movement of renewal of education in the post Second World War years and with education for the economic, social and culturally disadvantaged in the sixties, local governments and local school boards established local and regional educational service agencies, serving all schools, despite the denominational differences in education. Later on the national government took over the maintenance of this infrastructure by legislating the goals, tasks, governance structure, program, quality and financing of service agencies. The national government approved budgets and plans of the agencies. Local governments could continue their responsibility by subsidizing the support system as well but formally seen, they had little or no say in the programming. In fact, however, the schools determined the plans with the service centers through a demand and supply cycle. In the case of 61 local and regional service agencies, this situation will change dramatically from January 1998 on. Then the national government will fund the local community authorities instead of the service centers. The local community authorities in their turn must fund the agencies with this earmarked money during a four year transition period. Also all local authorities have to make the effort to keep their common budget at the same level as the national government does. Thus, the local communities will be the new owners of educational service agencies and have more influence on their programs. Though this infrastructure has to be maintained by the local authorities, the majority of the centers are independent private entities. Only five centers out of 61 are a part of a public authority.

1.3. *Quantative Characteristics*

The oldest service agencies are the three Pedagogical Centers; they were established as study centers for the main religious denominations. They developed themselves as innovation institutes with projects for long term educational development for all levels and inservice training for secondary school teachers. Other agencies have dedicated tasks to develop curricula, tests and execute research. Universities are among

(Table 2 shows the number of schools, students, agencies, their staff and some ratios)

TABLE 2: NUMBERS AND RATIOS OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICE IN THE NETHERLANDS

	Total	Average per EAC
Number of Educational Service Centres	61	
Number of primary schools (K-6)	7500	123
Number of special ed schools (K-12)	1000	16
Number of students	1,650,000	27,000
Total number of staff	2,600	42
Management staff	100	1.5
Professional staff	1,900	31
Support staff	600	10

Remark: Primary schools include two grades of kindergarten (4- and 5-years old pupils) and 6 grades of elementary education (6-12 years). Education is compulsory from 5 years. Statistics show that 98% of all 4 year olds enroll in primary education.

them. These centers do not literally match the definition of a service center given in section 2. For this reason we will only refer to them parenthetically.

This main group of service agencies includes all 61 local and regional educational service centers which have to be maintained by the local authorities. The number of agencies is slightly decreasing, caused by voluntary mergers, though the legislation requires that each center serve a minimum of 20,000 students. The largest agency serves over 60,000 students.

2. *Input at Providers Level*

2.1. *Influential Actors on the Service Program*

Three main policies determine the work of the ESAs in schools in The Netherlands: the national innovation policy, education policies of local authorities and policies of the school boards. This complex situation requires coordinating mechanisms like a national innovation process management group, negotiations between school boards and local authorities, and planning meetings and account management at the level of the school building.

2.2. *Financial resources*

By the end of 1997 all 61 educational service centers will be subsidized by the national government and by the local community authorities. In 1996 the national government allocated approximately 60 million US dollars for service centers. The local communities together contributed an additional 80 million US dollars. The budget per student for educational services in primary education was approximately 90 US Dollars. Based on this macro budget from which 80% is paid for salaries, and considering the number of staff, the average amount of billable hours per year for a full time staff member (between 1400 and 1600 hrs), it can be concluded that the average cost for one hour of consultancy is about 80 US dollars.

In addition to funding by the national and local governments, there are also third parties that buy services from the educational service centers or sponsor them. The total part of earnings from third parties is between 4 and 20 percent of the regular total budget of each of the educational service centers. (WPRO, 1995).

2.3. *Policy, Vision and Mission of the Service Agencies*

Counseling and advising schools, dissemination of information, development of educational materials, evaluation of programs and activities that promote an optimal school career for children (in primary education) are core activities, prescribed both by current legislation and the law that will go into effect next year. Most educational service centers have included these core tasks in their own strategic plans.

2.4. *Staff*

Legislation requires that education service agencies have to contribute to the maintenance and improvement of quality of education by serving schools in the fields of pedagogy, methodology, subject disciplines, psychology, organizational and educational change and information and communication technology. To carry out these tasks minimum competences are required. All consultants must have been graduated from university or must have a higher vocational education degree with sufficient experience and knowledge.

The consultant profession is changing from a generalist towards a specialized one because of a changing client attitude and by the very broad spectrum of topics. At the same time it is recognized that executing the consultant work must be separated from the planning and evaluation of that work; evaluation is performed at the management level.

In-service training for all the staff working in the educational service centers has been included in the state funded support infrastructure. More and more universities and third parties are taking over that role. Most recently the initiative has been taken to establish a professional organization for all consultants working in the field. In this organization the unions, other professional organizations and the Association of Educational Service Centers (WPRO) will cooperate to ensure opportunities for further professional development. A professional competencies profile, developed by WPRO, lies at the basis of this initiative.

2.5. *External Expertise*

Educational Service Centers do not hire significant numbers of external professionals to serve their clients. There is a frequently exchange of staff expertise between the agencies.

2.6. *Center of Knowledge*

Most of the service agencies maintain their own professional filing system. Some networks of professionals are maintaining an interactive system through e-mail and electronic platforms. WPRO, as an association of all the centers, also maintains data that are available to the individual agencies.

2.7. *Research and Development*

Most agencies are too small to perform research and development on their own. Cooperation between the agencies, between agencies and teacher training colleges and with universities can be seen frequently. WPRO also executes some projects that are for the benefit of all its members.

2.8. *Total Quality Management*

Until 1998 Her Majesty's Inspectorate has the specific task of monitoring the quality of the work of the Educational Service Centers. HMI reviewed the agencies recently on a variety of standards and indicators and reported a quite heterogeneous picture. After 1998 this is the task of the Agencies themselves. On a voluntary basis they agreed with WPRO on a system of external audits and on the development of a uniform system to collect data on satisfaction of schools, results of the service given, and on data that are related to their financial economic management.

3. *Services and Results*

The primary process of providing educational services to schools includes the intake, the service itself, and the evaluation. The latter aspect will be described in paragraph 5.

3.1. *The Intake Stage/Demand and Supply*

Local authorities that are funding the educational service agency offer in this way free access of all the schools in their community to educational services. No contracts are needed between school boards and ESAs. The rules in the Civil Code are applicable between local authority, provider and school boards. Research has demonstrated that the process of matching the needs of schools with the services provided by the centers in itself is of sufficient quality (Van Gennip, 1990), but that elements of the process could be improved (Koster, 1994). Koster referred to the need of improvement in defining actions, time management, the involvement of schools themselves and the definition of required outcomes and output.

3.2. *The Services Provided*

This section will describe the fields in which educational service agencies are operating and the level of satisfaction of the users. Particular focus will be placed on the results of teacher use and on student achievement.

a. *Services in the Field of Innovation and School Improvement*

In the initiation process of an innovation the influence of the work of the centers on the adoption of the educational ideas has been crucial for the development of primary education as a whole. Most research has been concentrated on the implementation stage of the innovation process. From 61 reports the general consensus is that only a combination of training sessions related to clinical supervision and to teacher counseling seems to be the most productive intervention (Slavenburg, 1995, 38, 54). Incorporation of an innovation seems to be the most neglected part of external support. There are no research data available at this point.

b. *Services in the Field of the Development of the School Organization*

At the level of the school system the Dutch agencies have supported the nation wide merge of Kindergarten and Elementary school in 1985 into the Primary School. Support has also been given to improve cooperation between regular and special education schools. Agencies also play an important role in the merger of schools.

The functioning of the school team is another issue the agencies are familiar with. The development of "school work plans" is seen as a positive contribution to the team building in schools (Verhoeff, 1992.) There is no substantial research reported on the results of all these activities.

c. *Student and Parent Counseling Services*

Supporting teachers in solving problems they have with children with learning and emotional disabilities is a priority function. Significant research has been reported and it is suggested that, by these interventions, a decrease of referral to special education schools of 2.1% of all pupils of primary education might be the achieved. (Slavenburg, 1995, p. 91). Less attention is paid to the gifted and talented. Some specific research is carried out; results have not been reported.

Ten out of 61 agencies are counseling in the field of school choice and vocational choice. No reports are available. Dutch agencies are not working in the paramedical or psychiatric field.

d. *Development and Dissemination of Educational Materials*

Only the larger Educational Service Centers have the opportunity to develop textbooks and to disseminate these through educational publishers. Most educational service centers develop materials as instruments for supporting their interventions. Materials that were used as implementation plans were highly appreciated. Some of them were used very frequently in schools. (Van Gennip, 1990)

e. *Information Services*

Almost all Educational Service Center have an Educational Information Center. The aim of this core activity is to inform teachers about new releases of materials of educational publishers (hard copies as well as videos and interactive software) and to help them in the decision making process of selecting materials, and tying this choice to the innovation capacity of the school itself. The Information Centers give also access to a national database which is coordinated by WPRO. Almost 90% of all primary schools make visits to the centers and take information with them. Between 75% and 85% of the schools use the information for discussion and other conceptual activities in school. (Slavenburg, 1995, p. 106)

f. *Advising Regional Organizations*

Most educational service centers give advice not only to schools but also to other organizations. These include networks of school boards, local community authorities and cooperatives of local authorities. Organizations of parents and departments of teacher unions are target groups too. Research reports generally support the conclusion that educational service agencies provide advice to these organizations. (Slavenburg, 1995, p. 109)

4. *Evaluation*

The final section of the descriptive model deals with the evaluation of the infrastructure as a whole, taking into account the data presented in the previous sections of this model. The satisfaction of the clients and the success of the agencies' work as perceived by the public, stakeholders and key persons in society is of great importance too.

Overall the agencies are fully accepted in The Netherlands. Current evaluations show that clients are very satisfied with the services provided by the Dutch educational service centers. This is illustrated by the average score from relevant research and on reports of the Dutch Inspectorate of Education. (Inspectie van het Onderwijs 1992, 1993, 1995)

The next four years will make clear if the local communities are able to maintain this unique infrastructure and if the Dutch ESAs will be able to show that their support makes a difference at the level of student achievement in their regions. This means that all of the elements of the descriptive model that we have introduced in this article will be used to monitor the developments closely.

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DEDICATED STAFF AND GRANT FUNDS ENRICH PROGRAMS FOR AT-RISK YOUTH

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Almost all of the youth enrolled at the Ulster BOCES Alternative School at Tillson in New York State were once potential dropouts in their home schools. The school is currently thriving with 110 students attending the Alternative School at Tillson and 13 more are enrolled in the Parenting Teen Program located nearby at the Ulster BOCES Port Ewen Educational Center. In 1984, the first Alternative School students attended class in a dilapidated former supermarket. Then, in 1989, BOCES went out for a county-wide referendum, the success of which permitted the construction of a new school which housed both the Alternative School and the Alternative Learning Program (part of the Special Education Division.) By 1996, the Alternative School had outgrown its quarters and moved to a leased elementary school which had been renovated for its new use. At first, the school was not a welcome addition to the community of Tillson. However, this resistance was pacified after a series of community informational sessions at which administration, staff and students participated. The community resistance was further conquered since students did not create problems for local residents during the 1996-97 school year. Locating this school in an attractive, newly renovated building and the current separation of the Alternative School from the other BOCES programs has provided administration, staff and students with a more clearly defined sense of identity through which to address their academic and social challenges.

At this time, the students at the Alternative School, many of whom were thrown out of their local schools or were mandated to this program by the court, have achieved an 80% attendance rate. They are working hard to improve their behavior, have a more positive attitude about school and are unquestionably experiencing more academic success than ever before. The percentage of Alternative School students earning a regular high school diploma rose from 47% in 1992 to 83% in 1996. As the number of students earning a regular high school diploma rose, the number of students earning a G.E.D. dropped. In 1992, 53% of the students received a G.E.D., whereas in 1996 this figure fell to 17%. Interestingly, as the number of students earning a regular high school diploma rose, so did the number of students who continued their education after high school. In 1992, only seven percent of students went on to higher education. By contrast, in 1996, 54% were enrolled in colleges and post-secondary training programs. School administrators at BOCES believe the reason for the students' achievements is that school is more interesting because of (1) innovative programs that were made possible through grant funding, and (2) supportive teachers and staff who have created a learning environment tailored to the individual needs of the students. “It all ties in,” said Virginia Murchison, Director of Special and Alternative Education at Ulster BOCES. “The students who are in school more meet higher expectations and develop increased self-esteem.”

Also observing that greater success in school is related to improved attendance, Alternative School principal Steve Chaikin credits a number of factors for the rising numbers. Among the most identifiable are curriculum enrichment programs such as: the ArtsTeach program, Peer Mediation Training, activities at the Center for Symbolic Studies and at Frost Valley Center for Environmental and Wilderness Explorations, abuse awareness and first aid training, Multicultural Days and after-school tutoring. These programs were made

possible through funding from a New York State Youth-At-Risk grant which provided $60,000 for the 1996-97 school year. In addition, the Ulster County Department of Social Services provided funding in the amount of $48,000 for the 1996-97 school year to support an Interagency Collaboration Program designed to provide case management and wraparound services for target students.

Youth-At-Risk funding initially supported the ArtsTeach program, which was introduced at the Alternative School four years ago. The program first brought artists into school to work intensively with students on projects which were loosely curriculum-related. Currently, $27,857 is allotted to the ArtsTeach program. This funding enables this school to contract with the Mill Street Loft, a multi-arts educational center in Poughkeepsie, New York which helps bring artists into community/school settings to work with students. This year the link between artist and teacher has been strengthened. Artists meet with teachers and collaboratively plan lessons that directly relate to the curriculum. Recent ArtsTeach projects have included lantern making related to a unit on Japan, and political poster designing linked to a social studies project about the Holocaust. As part of another highly successful teacher/artist collaboration, students constructed small white boxes into which they placed miniature toys they had sculpted themselves. The boxes were then labeled with vocabulary words referring to emotions such as anger, regret and guilt that students recalled feeling when they put their childhood toys away forever. The vocabulary list emerging from this project was subsequently used as part of an English class discussion about the John Knowles coming-of-age novel, A Separate Peace.

Another Youth-At-Risk funded program that has made important contributions in establishing the school as a place at-risk students wish to be is Peer Mediation Training. In 1996-97, 11 students, or 10% of the school population, participated in the training provided by Ulster/Sullivan BOCES Mediation, Inc., a program which serves both counties. This program is supported by $1,200 from the Youth-At-Risk grant. Since the mission of the Alternative School at Tillson is not only to educate the students academically but to help them to deal with daily conflicts which repeatedly impede accomplishment, peer mediation training instills skills for students to constructively deal with daily conflicts. The peer mediation training is done under the supervision of trained experts who work with students over the course of the entire year. Some students voluntarily sign up for a second year. Chaikin said that the process of student/teacher mediation is impressive and that students who have participated in the training spend less time out of class resolving conflicts. Why is this approach successful? Chaikin explained that having a student lectured to by an adult teacher has its limitations. "We are successful with peer mediation because we are preparing our students to deal with themselves as well as with other people."

Although largely recreational, the Center for Symbolic Studies at the Stone Mountain Farm in New Paltz, New York has proven its worth as yet another creative incentive program sponsored by $9,057 of funds from the Youth-At-Risk grant. Throughout the year, but primarily functioning as an approach to combat spring fever, students are rewarded for good citizenship, academic standing and attendance with time scheduled to participate in activities at the local farm. At this site, students take part in supervised activities such as rock climbing, horseback riding, mountain biking and martial arts. The Youth-At-Risk grant also provides an additional $3,500 to support supervised overnight expeditions for 20 students to the Frost Valley Center for Environmental and Wilderness Explorations. Chaikin said that students enjoy these opportunities enormously and they work hard to earn the reward of participating in the outdoor activities. Along the way they learn skills and responsibilities linked to each activity and build self-esteem as they master a variety of skills.

Youth-At-Risk funds were also made available to help meet the needs of a specific group of students with specialized needs. The Youth-At-Risk grant directed $1,000 to the United Way for abuse awareness training and $1,500 of the funding to provide Red Cross First Aid training to the 13 students enrolled in the Parenting Teen Program. Parenting Teen teacher Sharyn Mansour said that when students who have completed the program were asked about its value, they responded that while they all hoped they would not have to use their new skills, they felt more secure having had this first response training.

Youth-At-Risk funding has also been used for creative programs that make the school a more interesting place to be. Monthly Multicultural Days are now planned to highlight particular cultures. These occasions feature guest speakers and guest artists. "The ultimate goal of these specially designated events is to make students more open minded and tolerant of people who are different from themselves," said Chaikin. Another program, after-school tutoring, is also part of the school support system made possible by the Youth-At-Risk funding. Currently, two to three afternoons a week, teaching assistants tutor students who need to complete work. According to Chaikin, students are aware that enrollment in the Alternative School is a privilege which their home school districts determine and pay for, so extended incompletes are not acceptable. Students are increasingly asking to make arrangements to stay after school to make up missed work in order to remain in good academic standing in their classes. "Constituent districts are helping to paint a brighter future for those students who aren't making it in the traditional school setting. Instead of giving up on them and allowing them to fail or drop out, districts are providing funds to give students a second chance at succeeding," Chaikin said gratefully.

In addition to the funds secured through the Youth-At-Risk grant, the Alternative School at Tillson receives funding from other sources as well. Since August 1994, the Ulster County Department of Social Services has provided funding to support a program for students who have been identified by the Department's Division of Coordinated Children's Services as being at risk of placement in a residential facility. Called the Interagency Collaboration Program, or ICP, the program involves students in after school activities in addition to their case management component. These students can stay after school for tutoring and/or various recreational activities. Students can explore their interests in numerous subjects such as music, drama, arts, crafts, photography, computers or basketball. They can also participate in workshops on employability skills or join the movie club. "The ICP program encourages students to get involved with the activities they enjoy. This keeps the kids coming back for more the next day," said Chaikin. He added, "Parents who work later than 5:00 P.M. no longer have to worry about where their kids are and what they are doing." The funding also enables students and their parents to come into the school for dinners with other program participants and their families.

Innovative programs, of course, do not eliminate poor attendance and other problematic student behavior. The way staff systematically responds to student' behaviors also contributes to students' academic success. A lot has changed since Chaikin took on the job of principal two years ago. The use of out-of-school suspension has dropped dramatically. Often perceived by students as a way of staying home and sleeping late, suspension often served to create a more negative attitude about school and caused students who were already having trouble completing work to miss even more class time. During the 1995-96 school year, 68 students were suspended. By contrast, during the 1996-97 school year, only 42 have been suspended, representing a 38% decrease. Today, relatively short in-school detentions are used for inappropriate behavior. Often the student is assigned to community service projects as a method of instilling respect for property and other people at the school. Cleaning school walls might be assigned to a student who vandalized school property, or scrubbing a school bus may be the punishment for a student who threw a clay project on

the seats.

Everything from curriculum development and mediation policy to grant writing is seen as an evolving process requiring the interaction between administration, staff and students. Staff attend regular site team meetings where broad concepts are reviewed. Immediate concerns are discussed at weekly faculty meetings. The grants, which are so critical to many Alternative School at Tillson programs, have been written by teams of staff and administrators under the oversight of Dr. Donna Moss, Ulster BOCES Coordinator of Research and Development. Students have also participated in the formulation of some grant proposals. For the Interagency Collaboration Program, for example, they provided personal testimony about how the proposed program would benefit young people. Beyond grant writing, participation at agency-wide staff development activities is encouraged and staff members feel they have the support of the administration to develop their own ideas or apply successful models presented at professional conferences. Many of the ideas put into practice have not required external funding.

An excellent example was the effort of a social studies teacher, Michael Brown, to improve curriculum assessment. Inspired by the work that colleagues in another county were doing on portfolio projects, Brown secured a variance in 1996 from the New York State Education Department regarding the Regents Competency Test in 10th grade Global Studies. According to this ruling students work throughout the term on a portfolio project which then counts for the essay portion of the Regents Exam. Virginia Murchision, Director of Special and Alternative Education, said, "not only did more students pass the RCT, but they also did better on the multiple choice questions. I think they just learned the material more thoroughly in the process of putting their portfolios together."

Chaikin said that all teaching at the school is undertaken with the understanding that students have different learning styles. As a long time educator in the field of special education, Chaikin fully appreciates the program's commitment to adequate staffing. Within the past few years the staff at the Alternative School at Tillson has grown to include ten teachers, one guidance counselor, three social workers, one nurse, one case aide and two crisis intervention specialists. This kind of staffing allows for much needed day-to-day processing of problems among students, between students and teachers, or between students and their families. A hope for the future is to have a full-time substance abuse counselor. "We are all working hard to change the cycle of failure and conflict. This is a continuing process," Chaikin said. "We certainly haven't found the answer for everyone, but our attendance rate shows that we are offering something that keeps our students in school and gives them the opportunity to succeed." Chaikin said further that the Alternative School administrators believe the increasing attendance rate at the Alternative School at Tillson will provide a realistic base for determining how the school approaches the goal of complying with the New York State Regents' call for Higher Standards for Teaching and Learning.

Chaikin said that an understanding of the social and psychological background of the students at the Alternative School defines a school philosophy that colors all of its programs. Students who come to the Alternative School have experienced repeated failure both academically and socially. For years, many have been involved with substance abuse, problems at home and even homelessness. Many have a history of running from their problems and some live in unsupervised settings. The Alternative School's philosophy is characterized by acceptance and respect for everyone in the school community. When students have a conflict they are given the opportunity to claim ownership of their behavior and the staff then works with them to understand ways the problem could have been handled differently. Because these students need to feel they have some sort of control, the staff consciously involves students in decision-making situations that allow them to feel that school is not just about being forced into prescribed behavior. "Students know

that their voice will be heard. They are not just a number," said Chaikin.

The goal of the Alternative School at Tillson is to get at-risk students to become interested in school so they will attend. "We are attempting to provide students with what they need to believe in the importance of an education and succeed in school," said Virginia Murchison. With the help of grant funds to support interesting programs for students and the dedication and understanding of a skilled staff, it is no wonder Alternative School students are going to school more and accomplishing so much while they are there. The grant funding has provided an enormous shot in the arm by allowing the school to put creative programs into practice. Experience with innovative programming has in turn infused the staff and administration with the certainty that even if grant funding were to dry up, the key to success with at-risk youth lies in supporting innovative approaches to teaching and learning. The participation of those concerned must direct all decision-making. The reward for this approach is already evident and encouraging for the future. Students are making dramatic shifts as they go about being who they are. They are not so oppositional in their approach toward education, and they are understanding the reasons for processing and resolving their conflicts. This is great news for a program full of students who once thought school was not for them.

SELF-SUPPORTING, SELF-SUSTAINING STUDENT PROGRAMMING

by
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We knew it could be done. It was just a matter of finding the right combination of student programs and marketing strategy. The goal? To provide high quality, direct programming to students and make it be self-supporting.

The State of Washington has nine Educational Service Districts (ESDs) spread out over a geographical area as diverse as any in the United States. Local school districts are found in the mountains, high-country desert, on the ocean seacoast and even on islands which are accessible only by boat or small plane. Northwest ESD 189, located in the northwest corner of the state, is an educational service agency working with thirty-five rural and urban school districts in a five county region. Districts as large Edmonds, Washington with 20,000 students and as small as Shaw Island's eight pupils (yes, eight!) constitute this service area. Overall, the student population of the Northwest ESD service region exceeds 150,000.

Washington, as with many states, has seen a long and steady decline in funding for Gifted and Talented (G/T), or Highly Capable Education. This was money that schools and parents were dependent on for specialized programming for specific high-end academic programming or enrichment-based resource rooms for bright and motivated students. These are the very same students whose parents, often frustrated with the lack of public school programming, may turn to alternative educational delivery systems such as home-schooling and early entrance or "running start" programs at the community college level. With this steady decline in state funding, local school districts are downsizing or even dropping their G/T programs, exacerbating the problem for parents, students and educators.

Enter the Educational Service District. Local districts turned to the ESD for guidance and leadership that would help them support their own local programming. How could highly specialized programs and projects for this small, but important, segment of the student population be maintained? In order to help, Northwest ESD 189 went to the Federal G/T identification guidelines to see who their new clients might be.

> (The gifted and talented are)... children and , whenever applicable, youth who are identified at the preschool, elementary, or secondary level as possessing demonstrated or potential abilities that give evidence of high performance capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, specific academic or leadership ability or in the performing or visual arts, and who by reason thereof require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school. (U.S. Congress, Educational Amendment of 1978 [P.L. 95-561, IX (A)]).

This was the target audience and gave direction as to what was needed: student-oriented programs that dealt with areas and topics that included:

- Leadership
- Creativity
- General intellectual skills, specific academics
- Performing and visual arts

Could the ESD create, plan, and deliver programs that would directly interface with these types of students? Could this programming also enhance or interact with local G/T programming? And just as important, who would pay for such programming and could it provide enough revenue to sustain and maintain itself? It was going to take a lot of planning, surveying of districts, creating marketing strategies and no small amount of hard work to establish viable programs. There was not an ESD in the state that had an office specifically devoted to student programs. A few ESDs had one or two student programming options or academic competitions, but not one had taken it on as a large scale effort.

In 1993 the Northwest ESD's Office of Student Programs was initiated. Its goals were to provide first class, high quality student programming that client districts, individual schools, and even stand-alone students could choose to participate in. In addition, a primary financial goal was for our office to become self sufficient/self maintaining with no federal, state or ESD core funding provided. If it was going to make it, it would have to do it on its own.

Using the federal guidelines as the starting point for the design of its 'end-product' programs and projects, the Office of Student Programs went forward with planning, marketing, and implementing its program concept. What evolved was an eclectic menu of high-end student programming options covering all the areas laid out by the federal G/T identification guidelines: leadership training and conferences for middle school and high school government leaders and club officers; state-wide Scholastic Chess Tournaments and classes in chess instruction for teachers and students; major field trips to multiple state sites for advanced study in physics, aerospace, Shakespeare, and oceanography. Other offerings included Young Authors conferences, summer computer camps, and live county-wide theatrical productions (which attracted paying audiences in the thousands); and various other student workshops and classes with titles that piqued the interest of talented and motivated students.

Four years later the ESD provides solid programming that is financially holding its own while adequately paying the instructors, coordinators, and support personnel necessary to present it. While the fiscal bottom line is healthy, the program results are even more encouraging. The ESD has provided first class, high-end, quality student programming that has positively impacted the local school districts and the communities that they serve. In the 1996-97 school year over 2,500 students will have participated directly in an ESD regional office program, with the ripple effect touching thousands more in the creation of local programs modeled on the ESD example. The community recognizes the service agency contribution through participation as audience for many student presentations.

Local school districts will use the programs provided by the ESD to enhance their own programs, frequently as capstones for their own G/T or advanced placement classes. For example, a high school theater or English department will send top students to the Ashland, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where they will see state-of-the-art theater and work along side some of this country's finest Shakespearean actors. Home

schoolers and parents actively pursue placement on ESD mailing lists, wanting to get involved in the programs that meet the needs of their highly-capable students.

Whether it's to take a part on stage, to help provide a venue for their art work or to play in a nationally ranked chess tournament, the programming is designed to meet student needs and interests, needs and interests that the local district often cannot afford to respond to or does not have the administrative resources to put it together for a single district. The ESD programs all have charges attached to them and whether the school, the parent, or the individual student pays, it is an academic 'pay-to-play' situation. The revenue pays for the programming.

The ESD achieved its goals of providing financially self-sufficient programming and the local districts have received help for their students. This is a real win-win position for the agency, the local districts and, most importantly, the students.

Northwest ESD 189, Office of Student Programs, won the Washington State Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (WSASCD) State Award for Program Excellence for 1997.

SUPPORTING SCHOOLS THROUGH LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

by
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School reform has become an increasingly common topic in educational journals and the popular press. The fourth issue of Volume 25 of School Psychology Review (Knoff & Curtis, 1996) was devoted almost entirely to issues and recommendations related to reform. The theme throughout the issue was that pressure for reform is increasing and that systematic, systemic, and comprehensive efforts will be necessary to fundamentally improve public education.

Heartland Area Education Agency (AEA) 11 is one of 15 legislatively mandated intermediate units in Iowa. AEAs provide support to school districts within their geographic boundaries in a variety of areas including staff development, media and graphic art services, and professional library services. AEAs provide districts with general and special education support personnel as well as leadership in educational systems reform.

The Iowa Department of Education, Iowa's AEAs, and local schools have pursued comprehensive special education reform since 1986 (Grimes & Tilly, 1996; Reschly & Grimes, 1991). Foundation principles guiding these efforts were developed collaboratively and include: (a) integration of special- and general-education services; (b) measuring student performance frequently and changing programs when students are not progressing; (c) early intervention; (d) staff development; (e) parent involvement, and (f) site-based management (Ikeda, Tilly, Stumme, Volmer, & Allison, 1996).

SPECIAL EDUCATION REFORM IN HEARTLAND AEA 11

As a result of these reform initiatives, Heartland AEA 11 has developed a non-traditional, collaborative model for serving children (see Figure 1). The ideas presented herein represent the talents and ideas of individuals and groups from throughout AEA 11, Iowa State University, and the State of Iowa Department of Education. The model presented is sensitive to both meeting children's needs and working within available resources. The model guides all educators through a systematic process for identifying and remediating problems, no matter what the nature of the problem may be. Moreover, the model provides a comprehensive framework for coordinating resource allocation across the many different programs and services available within local schools. Thus, the model assures that resources are used efficiently in that only the resources needed to resolve or improve the problem are allocated, and engagement of more intensive resources is only pursued in cases where lesser resources are not sufficient.

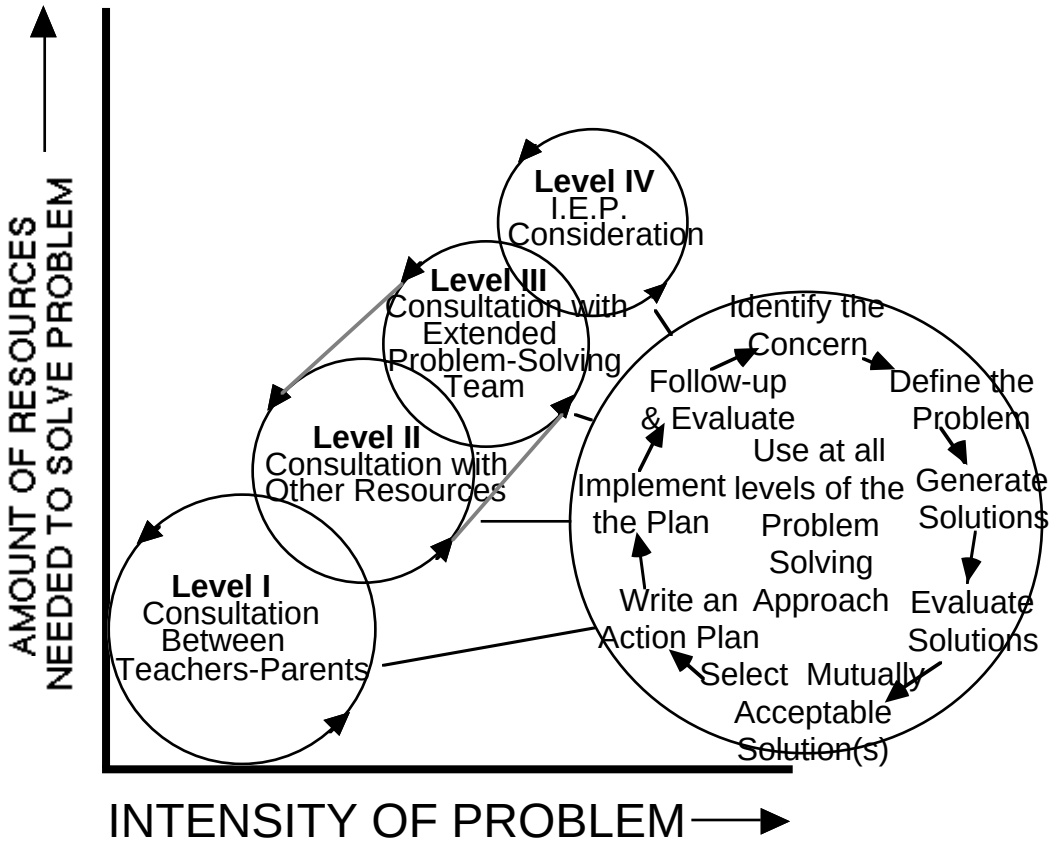

Figure 1. A Four Level Model for Addressing Educational Problems (from Heartland AEA 11, 1996).

In this framework, problems are addressed at four levels corresponding to increasing levels of formality and intensity of service delivery. Students move from one level to another as they demonstrate need either because of escalating problems or of increased need of resources.

The first level in the model involves parent-teacher collaboration. Addressing problems at this level is a relatively common occurrence and results in resolution for a large number of school-related problems.

At the second level, the parent and teacher from Level 1 collaborate with other teachers or resource providers who possess expertise for solving the problem. AEA 11 staff are sometimes involved at Level 2. Evaluations at Level 2 also help the LEA determine if accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are required. The activities at Levels 1 and 2 are site-based in that they are completely controlled by local schools in their design and implementation. Heartland AEA 11 has, however, provided extensive training to LEAs to support problem solving at Levels 1 and 2.

At the third level in Heartland's model, support staff from the Special Education Division become directly involved with problem solving efforts. Support staff help develop, implement, and monitor interventions carried out in general education classrooms. Support staff who are available to assist in problem solving include: adaptive physical education teachers, assistive technology team members, autism resource team members, Early Childhood consultants, Home Intervention teachers, educational trainers, hearing specialists, instructional consultants, Parent/Educator liaisons, physical therapists, occupational therapists, school psychologists, school social workers, speech and language pathologists, vision specialists, work experience coordinators, and Special Education nurse-consultants. At level 3, the role of AEA 11 Special Education

staff is to support interventions in general education that address the problem identified through levels 1 and 2 of the problem solving process. The support staff involved depends on the identified problem and staff expertise.

It is important to note that the role of AEA Special Education support staff at level 3 is not to assist in determining Special Education entitlement. Instead, the focus at this level of the system is the same as the focus at levels 1 and 2; namely, solving the problem in general education. Only when the problem requires intensive resources to manage and/or does not improve through the course of reasonable general education interventions is the question of entitlement for special education explored. At level 4, the problem solving process continues, but at an even more intensive level. The goal is still to identify the nature and type of resources that will be needed to address an educational problem. It is at level 4 that the administrative question of whether special education resources may be necessary to address the problem is examined. At this point, special educators from AEA 11 ensure that provisions for due process and protection in evaluation procedures are followed prior to continuing the assessment and intervention process.

CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF THE PROBLEM SOLVING MODEL

A series of components are critical to a complete understanding of Heartland's problem-solving model. First, the dual directions of the arrows in Figure 1 illustrate that the amount and nature of supports provided can increase or decrease based on the intensity of the problem. Thus, the model is not merely a vehicle for accessing special education resources. Rather, the model illustrates how services are provided to all children with school-related problems. This model is applicable to all learners served within the geographic boundaries of Heartland AEA 11.

A second critical feature of Heartland's model is that problem solving at the various levels is, in fact, the same process. The process becomes more intensive and systematic as the nature of a problem warrants. The largest circle in Figure 1 describes the steps used to define problems, develop interventions and evaluate solutions. Information from a variety of sources (review of records, parent and teacher interviews, classroom observations, and perhaps testing of the child's skills) are used to validate that the child's academic, social, or behavioral performance does not meet the demands of the educational environment. The problem solving steps are designed to collect and analyze information on dimensions of the problems that can be used to develop interventions with a high likelihood of success. This distinction is critical because in a problem solving model, assessment focuses less on attributes of the child (like retardation or ADHD-ness), and more on variables in the classroom and school that can be changed to better support the child. Teachers and AEA support staff are involved only in assessment activities that contribute to a better understanding of the instructional, curricular, environmental, and learner factors that contribute to the problem (Heartland AEA 11, 1996).

A common example of this system would be addressing the needs of a child with a reading problem. A potential question to be answered might be "Does the child read fluently?" since reading fluency is a good overall indicator of reading proficiency (Shinn, Good, Knutson, Tilly & Collins, 1996). Collecting problem-focused information about reading fluency might help answer the question. If the child's reading fluency is adequate, the questions might become "Is the child receiving sufficient opportunity to read in class and at home? Does the child receive appropriate feedback reading performance? Does the child monitor meaning while reading?" and so on.

After the problem is defined and factors that contribute to the problem are identified, solutions are generated. Significant staff development efforts have been sponsored or conducted by Heartland AEA 11 to help AEA and LEA staff develop skills in using assessment techniques that link solutions and problems. Staff development is ongoing and addresses areas like collaboration, site-based teaming, and monitoring student progress (Ikeda et al., 1996). After solutions are evaluated, the person responsible for implementing the intervention chooses an intervention method that has a reasonable probability of success based on professional expertise and knowledge of effective practice. Depending on the solution, the interventionist could be one person or a combination of general education teacher, a support person (like a speech and language pathologist or school psychologist), an administrator, or even a parent. Solutions must be feasible and acceptable to the teacher. Evidence is gathered that solutions are implemented with integrity. Implementation of intervention plans require on-going support, technical assistance, resource linking, design review, trouble shooting, reinforcement for the implementors, and monitoring of student progress. Progress monitoring includes frequent data collection gathered under standardized conditions. Data are regularly analyzed so that modifications to the plan are implemented as needed based on progress toward pre-established goals.

SUMMARY

Implementation of a problem-solving service delivery system throughout the past six years has been a challenging though rewarding initiative. The intent of this initiative has been to improve services and outcomes for all children and youth with significant educational problems. This initiative has refocused service delivery from that of determining administrative solutions (e.g., special education placement) to that of determining **educational** solutions.

In the traditional model, students often did not receive services until they were formally entitled to special education. Typically, special education services were delivered in a "pull-out" fashion. In a problem solving model, students receive support and services early on and usually in the general education classroom. Information is gathered on-going, and all information gathered is relevant and geared toward solving the identified problem.

As a result of implementing all aspects of the problem solving model, outcomes of services provided to children are becoming more measurable. Heartland AEA 11 has taken a leadership role by collaborating with LEAs and state agencies to develop the four level problem solving model to work out potential barriers to implementation and to develop an ongoing program of system evaluation.

While significant progress has been made to date, there is a long way yet to go. It has been our experience that systemic school improvement is possible and that intermediate education agencies can provide significant leadership in the reform process. Helping LEAs understand the rationale for reform and providing ongoing staff development are two areas in which leadership can be provided. In addition, intermediate agencies are critical for facilitating collaboration between state agencies and local agencies. Through these collaborative efforts in promoting system reform, intermediate agencies improve services to the most important beneficiaries: the children in the schools and communities in which we work.

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FACILITATING SPECIALIZED INTERVENTION AND INTEGRATION: A COLLABORATIVE SCHOOL-WIDE TEAM ASSISTANCE PROJECT

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BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

Thirteen Western New York public school districts receiving special education services and support from a New York State Regional Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) are redesigning instructional and related service delivery for students with disabilities. Collaboration among general educators, special educators and related service personnel in urban, suburban and rural school districts has been facilitated with modest yet encouraging outcomes.

A survey of school districts receiving special education services from BOCES indicated that student study/ teacher assistance team models were inefficient, non-functional, or virtually non-existent. Provisions for pre-referral service options, special education student integration and inclusion were viewed as largely insufficient. Administrators from BOCES and member districts responded to these findings responsibly. Authorization was granted to the Assistant Superintendent for Special Education of BOCES to initiate a professional development project designed to train specialized personnel to facilitate school-wide collaborative intervention, integration/ inclusion service and support assistance for students with learning difficulties and identified disabilities.

It is perhaps interesting to note that the Facilitating Specialized Intervention and Integration (FSII) Project was developed cooperatively by the BOCES Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and a member of Buffalo State College's Department of Exceptional Education. Over many years both have shared a vision of quality education and equity for students with disabilities. This vision has served as the foundation for several collaborative projects and activities to date. Their ongoing discussions and work concerning contemporary issues of school reform and field based problem solving proved timely and contributed to the evolution of this project. The project subsequently planned incorporated "interactive teaming" principles from the work of Morsink, Thomas & Correa (1991) and Thousand (1988).

Following discussions with several faculty members of the Departments of Exceptional and Elementary Education at Buffalo State College a partnership was formed to conduct additional planning and carry out full implementation of the project.

The project's intent was to prepare a highly competent cohort of special educators to serve as facilitators of school-wide collaboration among general and special education teachers, related service personnel, parents, and community stakeholders. In effect, a facilitator assists general and special education teachers who provide instructional and management interventions for students with learning and behavior problems or disabilities. A facilitator identifies and procures services and resources that enhance teacher or staff utilization of instructional and behavioral interventions with students presenting learning and behavioral difficulties or disabilities. Moreover, the FSII professional development project served to reflect BOCES's direct response to the problems and needs of its constituent school districts.

Essentially, the FSII project provided interactive training activities and experiences for a carefully selected cohort of special education teachers. Workshops were designed to focus on FSII competencies; i.e., knowledge and skills needed to function effectively in a facilitation capacity within school settings. The outcomes targeted for project trainees focused on the organization and enhancement of school-wide teacher/student assistance team collaboration and effectiveness. Additionally, FSII trainees would refine and expand their repertoire of adaptive instructional and management strategies for learners either at-risk for referral to the Committee of Special Education or already receiving services or support within general education settings. Furthermore, trainees would be expected to demonstrate competence in initiating staff development and technical assistance opportunities for general and special educators, paraprofessionals, community members, parents, and peers of learners with special educational needs.

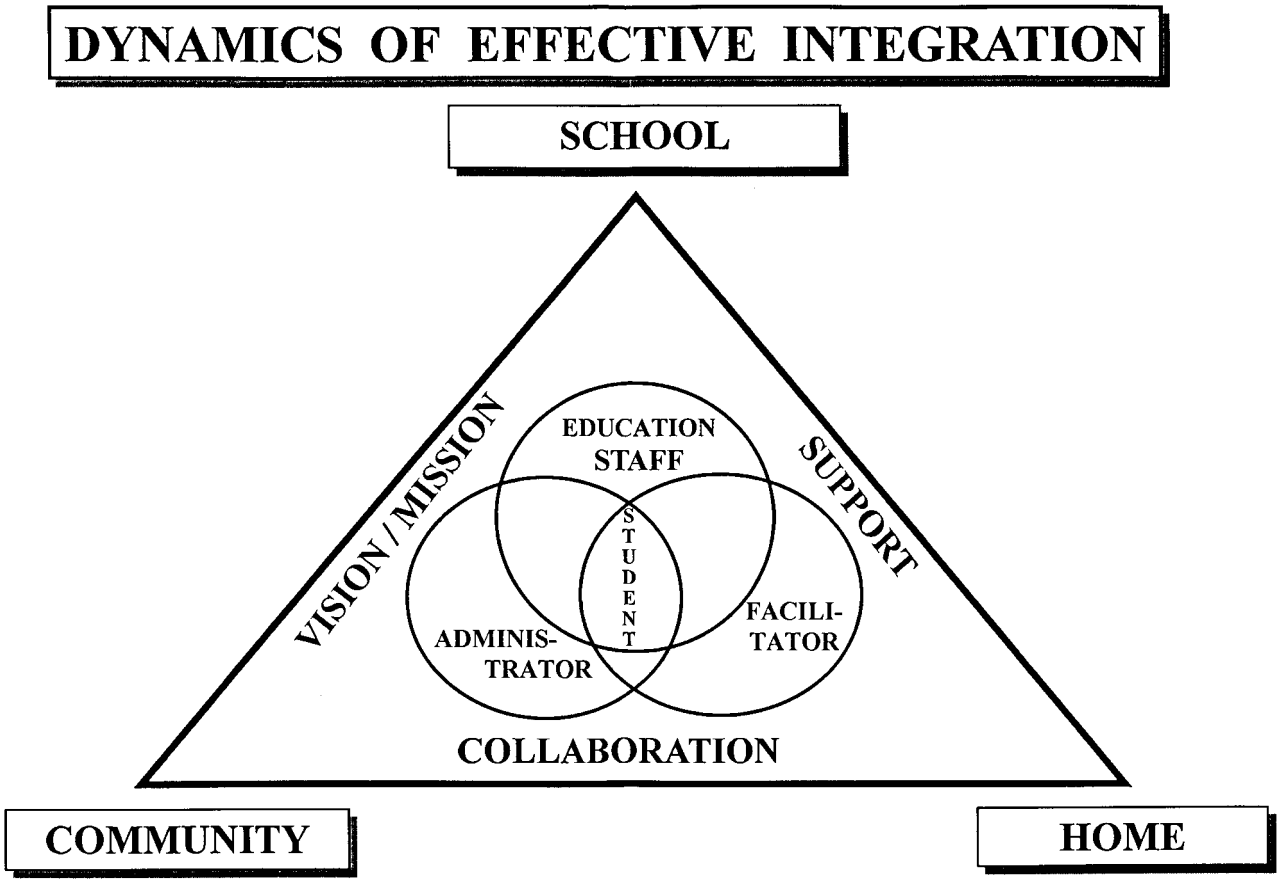

Figure 1. Dynamics of Effective Integration

THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR OF SPECIALIZED INTERVENTION AND INTEGRATION

In delineating the role of the FSII it is helpful to understand the context within which the FSII is expected to function. There are a host of dynamics which are vital to effective educational integration of students presenting learning and behavioral disabilities (see Figure 1). Home, school and community form critical bases which drive the collaboration, vision/mission and support of the administrator, educational staff and facilitator on behalf of the student.

The role functions within the FSII project are quite diverse (see Figure 2). They include broadly defined roles and those more specific such as administrative liaison and team builder in conjunction with organizing, developing and facilitating collaborative school-wide teacher assistance/student study teams. The FSII participant is expected to function as a leader in designing and implementing instructional programs, transition plans, home-school communication and support strategies, and program evaluation. This individual knows about and accesses a variety of instructional materials and resources and initiates staff development and technical assistance opportunities for teachers, aides, peers, community members and parents. Ultimately, this will enhance management and instruction of learners receiving instructional and behavioral intervention at pre-referral or integration stages (Thousand, 1988).

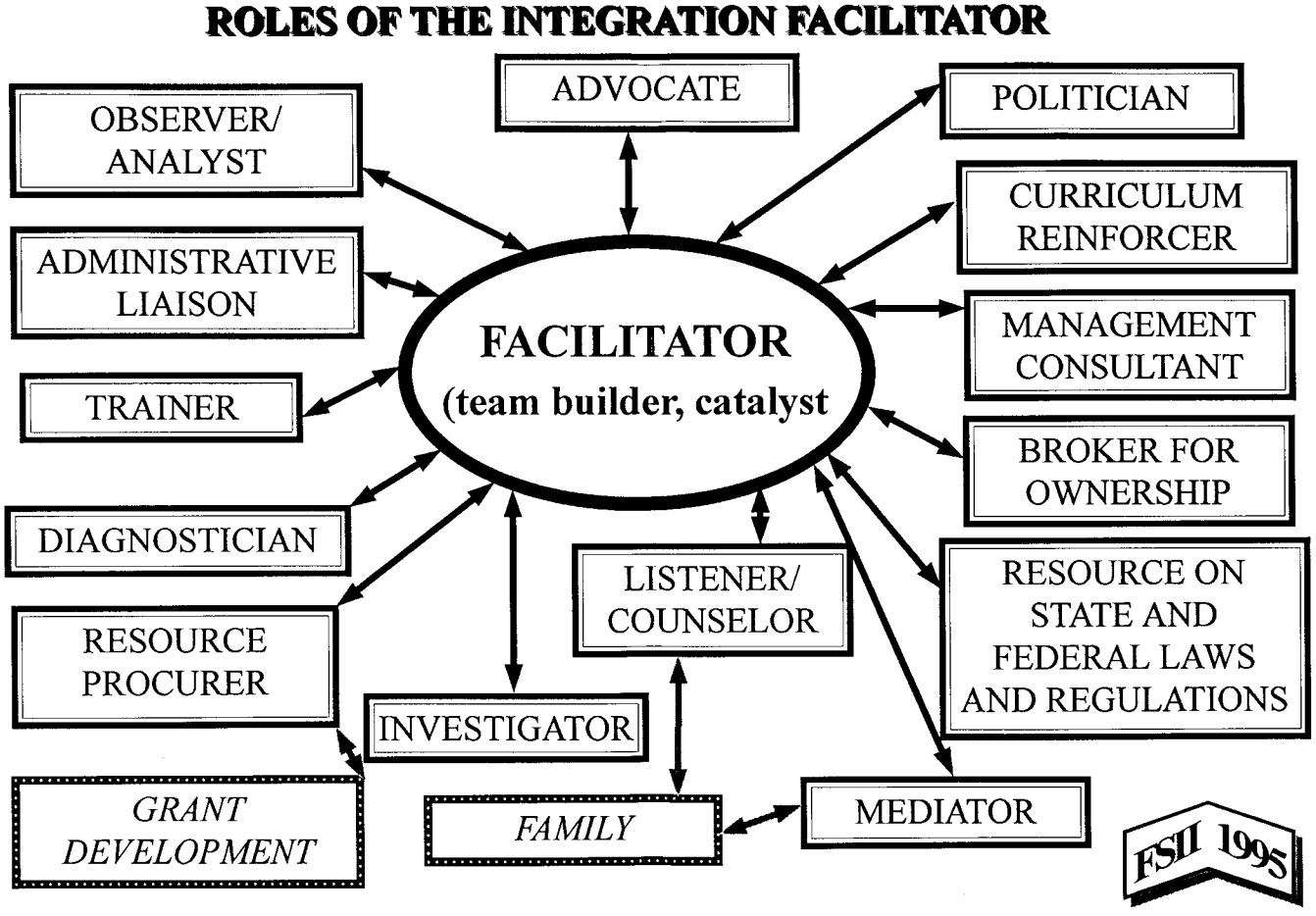

Figure 2. Roles of the Intervention-Integration Facilitator

Those who complete the FSII training can be expected to expedite the process of accessing services needed by special and general education teachers engaged in collaborative pre-referral intervention and integration. It is, therefore, vitally important to establish a clear role definition and dependable working relationships with building administrators, teachers, and staff members. To this end, consistent and open communication styles are essential for timely attention and response to student problems and teacher concerns. Accordingly, it is largely the responsibility of FSII to monitor intervention effects and recommend subsequent action to the student study/teacher assistance team and/or the school's Committee on Special Education.

PROJECT DESIGN

The special education teachers who participated in the FSII project took part in a wide variety of interactive activities. Models of school-wide collaborative team building and professional development targeting special and general education teachers, related service personnel, and parents were examined. Specific foci were directed to assessment, management, adaptive instruction, and evaluation strategies. Other activities engaged project trainees in identifying and accessing appropriate instructional and management resources to augment interventions with students experiencing learning and behavioral difficulties; i.e., students at risk for subsequent referral to the school's Committee for Special Education, or students with disabilities receiving services/support in general education classrooms.

Basically, six competency clusters provided the foci for all FSII Project instructional sessions and workshops (Center for Developmental Disabilities, 1990). Project trainees attended 12 three-hour instructional sessions (36 total hours) and participated in approximately 24 hours of field based follow-up activities. While the competencies were organized as discrete instructional units and activities, they were addressed as integral to one another. By and large, the workshop sessions and field experiences yielded rich and provocative discourse which contributed to genuinely effective networking and interactive team building among the trainees. FSII competency clusters addressed in the project include the following:

1. Staff Development

Facilitators prepare others, i.e., members of building child study or teacher assistance teams, general and special educators, teacher aides, students without handicaps, parents and family members, and school and community members to implement effective instructional programs for learners with mild, moderate or severe disabilities, to demonstrate collaborative teaming skills, and to articulate an understanding of effective educational practices.

2. Technical Assistance

Facilitators provide technical assistance to general and special educators, administrators, and community agency personnel to implement effective educational practices and improve the education of learners with mild to severe handicaps within their local schools and communities.

3. Effective Educational Practices and Adaptive Instruction Strategies

Facilitators articulate the benefits of effective educational practices for learners with mild to severe disabilities. They assist in clarifying issues associated with least restrictive environment, integrated delivery of educational and related services, social integration, community-based instruction, functional curriculum, systematic data-based instruction, home-school partnership, and program evaluation. Facilitators also model

utilization of adaptive instructional strategies including peer tutoring, cooperative group learning, outcomes based instruction, activity selection, computer assisted instruction, multi-aged groupings, and cognitive and cognitive-behavioral learning applications.

4. Consultation, Communication, and Small Group Skills

Facilitators model the utilization of trust-building strategies and techniques to increase effective communication, give and receive positive and critical feedback, and provide appropriate leadership and conflict resolution strategies to school-wide student study and teacher assistance teams, including others responsible for managing and instructing learners with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities.

5. Collaborative Team Building

Facilitators collaborate with school-wide study and assistance teams of parents, general and special educators, and administrators to plan, implement, and evaluate strategies for educating students within their respective school settings.

6. Organizational Skills (Self and Others)

Facilitators formulate and carry out meeting agendas, manage their time, and plan, schedule, and document their professional activities. They also evaluate their efficiency and effectiveness in achieving desired goals and objectives.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION FACTORS

Determining a high quality site for workshop sessions was viewed as most essential. The site obtained for the FSII project was housed in a recently constructed Northern Western New York Regional BOCES educational center which was equidistant for project trainees. Generous support was provided throughout the project. For example, communication was consistent and efficient, alternate meeting sites were readily obtained, instructional resources and materials were abundant, administrators were always available to assist with or participate in workshop sessions, and the overall comfort of project consultants and trainees was enhanced through sufficient nutritional enrichment at each session.

Seven special education teachers were selected to participate in the FSII Professional Development Project. BOCES and participating districts supported half-day releases for participants for each three-hour workshop session. The criteria used to select participants were as follows:

1 Special education teachers in existing program services in BOCES or related school districts;
2. A stated commitment to educating learners with disabilities within least restrictive educational environments;
3. Evidence of three or more years of teaching experience with learners with mild, moderate, and/or severe disabilities;
4. Evidence of leadership and collaborative abilities, including well developed speaking and writing skills;
5. Evidence of successful consultation with professional colleagues;
6. Master's degree in special education or its equivalent in advanced course work, inservice training, and direct service experience;

7. Successful interview with Selection Committee; and
8. Recommendation of Program Supervisor

As indicated earlier, the FSII Project consultants were professors at Buffalo State College in Western New York. They included a specialist in elementary education mathematics and science instruction who also held expertise in adapting instruction for students with mild disabilities in integrated in general education settings. Three additional consultants were special educators with expertise in school leadership and reform, team building, interpersonal communication, program design, educational assessment, curriculum and instructional adaptation, and classroom organization and management.

Project workshop sessions were guided by an agenda that ensured full use of allotted time and maximum interaction among the participants and consultants. Initial sessions clarified the purpose and focus of the project and constructed a foundation for team building and collaborative networking among participants and consultants. Trainee needs were identified through the administration of a survey designed for the FSII Project. This helped to refine the focus of the project and promote ownership of the project by the trainees and consultants. Each workshop session agenda was finalized during regularly scheduled meetings held by the project consultants and BOCES Assistant Superintendent of Special Education. Project objectives and expressed needs and interests of the trainees were carefully analyzed in planning and organizing future sessions.

Each workshop session incorporated interactive and hands-on activities. These included creative problem solving exercises, brainstorming, chart building, and contextualized tasks that nurtured group reflection and decision making. Several workshops that proved highly effective were: 1.) A question and answer session with a regional special education supervisor from the New York State Department of Education. This session focused on future special education priorities proposed by the New York State Education Department and implications for the FSII role and function; 2.) Field visits to school sites implementing intervention/integration programs. For example, an elementary school employing the FSII model in a pilot program was visited. Trainees and project consultants observed integrated classrooms and discussed their observations and role functions of the facilitator with administrative staff, a facilitator, assistance team members and teachers; 3.) Technology workshops presented by instructional technology specialists. Trainees examined technology, multi media applications and other resources needed for “state of the art" technical assistance and planned presentations for teachers, staff, parents and community groups; and 4.) Adaptive instruction and development of a comprehensive FSII reference guide. During workshops trainees examined a variety of adaptive instruction and management strategies and organized source information related to the role and function of the FSII and associated competency clusters.

PROJECT EVALUATION AND FOLLOW-UP

Several evaluative approaches were used throughout the project to assess knowledge and skill acquisition of project trainees. As mentioned earlier, a survey was conducted at the outset of the project to assess the knowledge status and needs of project trainees. Written comments reflecting trainee perceptions of each session's value were elicited as a regular activity concluding each session. Written comments also were solicited and submitted anonymously by a secretarial assistant to the project and forwarded to the project consultants for analysis. Generally, trainee comments reflected continuing and consistent growth in achieving project objectives, content and competencies.

Another approach was designed to assess trainee use of facilitation strategies. Through scenarios depicting integration and pre-referral intervention problems, trainees were required to select or formulate and justify resolution strategies. These were formulated by the trainees and based upon actual school-wide realities. This proved effective in providing trainees with the opportunity to demonstrate competence in identifying and analyzing problems as well as applying concepts and principles acquired during previous workshop sessions.

Project trainees also generalized and documented technical assistance strategies, interventions or other FSII functions designed and carried out in their home schools. These included administering a human exceptionality knowledge inventory to general education elementary teachers and surveying general education teacher management and instruction needs for further analysis and professional development. The comprehensive technical assistance guidebook described earlier reflected the informational expertise developed by the trainees in sections addressing school-wide assistance team building, communication strategies and conflict resolution, nature and needs of students with exceptionality, student assessment approaches, classroom organization and management strategies, and adaptive instruction principles including the implementation of cooperative classroom learning.

In a culminating final workshop session trainees presented detailed reports to the BOCES Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of Special Education delineating the role and functions of the FSII including logistical considerations associated with case loads and placement of a FSII-trained facilitator within the school's formal organization. Finally, trainees were awarded certificates of recognition for their achievement and contributions to the project.

In the months since the completion of the project, consultants and former trainees have disseminated information about the FSII Professional Development Project through panel presentations at conferences held by the New York State Association of Vocational Educators and the New York State Council for Exceptional Children. Currently, three former trainees are serving in FSII roles. Two are facilitating elementary and middle school level integration programs. Much of their initial effort has been devoted to shaping the identity of the FSII within their respective school settings; e.g., developing school-wide trust and opening avenues for communication and collaboration among special and general education staff and teachers, forming and strengthening teacher assistance and student study teams at the middle school level, and assisting special and general education teachers and staff in developing guidelines and procedures for further integration of students. The third former trainee is functioning as a facilitator at the secondary education level. Increasing access to vocational education programs and developing a transition articulation agreement with a regional community college for students with emotional disabilities have served as targeted goals.

It is genuinely encouraging to find that students with behavior and learning needs and disabilities are experiencing fundamental educational benefits as a result of the leadership and collaborative skills developed by special educators who participated in FSII Professional Development Project.

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FROM WOODSHED TO STATE CAPITOL

by
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His hero is a German immigrant father who only completed the second grade. His inspiration comes from a former student on the verge of dropping out of school but who is now a college president. He also takes heart from a teacher who "took me to the woodshed" and the late U.S. Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson of Washington, whose statesmanship was a national model.

The man whose life and values were shaped in part by these individuals is Senator Al Bauer, the veteran Washington State legislator who in December was awarded the 1996 Walter G. Turner Award from the American Association of Educational Service Agencies.

This former elementary, junior high, and high school teacher is regarded as the father of educational service agencies in Washington. He was elected to the State Legislature in 1971 and continues today to influence the growth and effectiveness of ESAs, most recently in the changing milieu of telecommunications.

Senator Bauer exemplifies traditional American values in step with the changing everyday needs of its people. Even though his German immigrant father moved half way across the country so his children could get a better education, Bauer dropped out of high school at age 17. He considered a job in a cannery where he made 80-cents an hour a step up from working the family farm for free and going to school.

After a year at the cannery, however, his perceptions changed, and Bauer took advantage of community college classes and the American School of the Air, an early correspondence school available in the Northwest. He then joined the Navy, where he found fellow sailors who couldn't read their training manuals. Helping them set him on a course that's spanned almost a half century and has enriched education on local, state, and national levels.

Senator Bauer offered insights on education and the future of ESAs during an interview at the new Washington State University Vancouver campus, where Bauer Hall honors his contributions to teaching and learning.

Q. You mention the influence on your life of individual teachers. What message would you share with others interested in teaching today's youth?

A. I personally believe that there is no other profession in which I could be so involved in peoples' lives. The rewards are so great when teachers form those relationships of mutual respect and companionship as youth learn how to be good citizens.

New teachers coming in the field today have to be cognizant of the ever-changing attitudes and societal forces affecting students, not to mention TV and home environment. They need fresh ideas and different strategies to relate to this diverse student population.

Q. Teacher preparation programs offer many opportunities for educational service agencies, thanks to legislation you've authored. How can other ESAs be active partners in teacher training?

A. When I first went into the legislature, I felt a great need for giving teachers not only a do-able task, as to class size and curriculum, but also in dealing with students of diverse backgrounds and needs. I did my student teaching at Jefferson High in Portland (an ethnically diverse urban district), but my first job was teaching 5-8 graders in a very rural, small district.

Student teaching programs coordinated by ESAs can ensure that teacher candidates have exposure to varied districts and classroom experiences. (The Senator has also supported ESD/University Professional Development Schools in which teacher training professors can interact with students in local classrooms to keep current with classroom management and instructional strategies.)

ESAs need to be proactive in developing partnerships with community colleges, universities, and technical schools in the wide range of teacher preparation programs and for ongoing professional development activities for practicing teachers. Technology is a key tool to these partnerships.

Q. Speaking of technology, as last year's Chairman of the Senate Higher Education Committee, you developed and spearheaded successful legislation that establishes a K-20 (kindergarten through 20-university doctoral program level) Telecommunications System for the State of Washington. This network will ultimately link families in their homes with their local schools, which in turn will be linked with other schools, universities, libraries, and information bases nationally and internationally. What is your vision for educational telecommunications?

A. Washington's universities and ESDs over the years have been using telecommunications effectively for their individual needs, but collaboration and interfacing were disjointed. The new system will unify all levels of education, libraries, and government to positively impact curriculum, teaching strategies, and access to and application of information. This comprehensive, collaborative approach lends itself to providing a seamless system which can add quality and cost effectiveness to telecommunications applications.

Q. Among the major pieces of legislation and educational laws you have developed in your 26 years in the state legislature have been the rewrite of the Intermediate School District Act of 1969 (Washington's founding educational service agency act), the Basic Education Act of 1977 for full funding of public schools, and legislation that allowed regional service agencies to create pools and trusts for Workers' Compensation, Unemployment and Property-Casualty Risk insurance and provide special education transportation and cooperative purchasing. In what one or two pieces of state legislation do you take most pride?

A. I'd probably have to classify these into two categories: Early Intervention Services and Restructuring of Institutions. I take great pride in the implementation of lower class sizes and funding for teachers in kindergarten through third grade because I am convinced that the early years set the tone for a child's educational future. I am also proud of legislation that required testing of all fourth graders and the remediation and learning assistance programs that provided funding to pick up and provide extra help to those children that test below grade level, especially in reading and math.

Legislation affecting ESDs and regional services falls into the category of the restructuring legislation of which I'm particularly proud. We beefed up ESDs so they can reach out and give a broader range of

services and ensure that children in smaller and rural schools have the same opportunities as students in wealthier districts. ESDs allow students a broader educational picture and do it at cost savings that are measurable. I'm also especially proud of the establishment of a (two-year) teacher probationary period and design of Washington's Basic Education Act to give equity among districts and students. House Bill 1209 (Washington's 1993 School Improvement Act) also fits in here. It makes higher education a partner in teacher preparation, which is a vital part of the equation of school reform and improved student performance.

Q. You have been a strong proponent of partnerships between schools and colleges and with private businesses and other governmental agencies. What advice would you give to regional service agencies in seeking and cementing such partnerships for the future? And what areas do you see as "ripe" for partnering opportunities?

A. Because ESDs are spread across multiple districts, they provide a base from which to generate these services and partnerships. A university can link with an ESD, rather than make arrangements with 30 local school districts, to design and deliver inservices.

I think ESAs need to promote that linkage role and work with the institutions and agencies in their regions and state to blend services and dollars to get the most value from their resources. Areas "ripe" for future growth include teacher training and recruitment, development of strategies for more effective classroom management, use of classrooms as university clinics, and application of electronic and telecommunications hookups. I think the demand for re-training our teacher work force is perhaps the greatest area for ESA involvement.

Q. Why is the existence of ESAs so often questioned in one state or another?

A. Most legislators, when looking at bottom line budgets, are accustomed to funding K-12 education, community colleges, and higher education. They generally have not had experience with an intermediary level of service that stretches over a larger geographic setting. Most, even if they came from small schools, have not experienced the services provided by an ESA, such as special education or teacher training, and they need to be shown the value of cooperative and cost effective regional programs. ESAs have brought positive aspects of curriculum development and teaching to small schools and collectively kept the costs down. In effect, ESAs allow the consolidation of services, without the consolidation of schools or children, and that's a message that is born out in higher rural test scores, which should sell well to legislators representing the country's communities.

Q. What advice would you give ESAs to strengthen the value and governance of regional support agencies in our nation's public education system?

A. Public education is being challenged on many fronts. People look at test scores, relevance of new courses, acquisition of computers and new technologies, and qualifications of teachers. Then, they look at the bottom line. Money. Both our children and financial resources are the most important things in people's lives. We need to do a better job as a nation in putting children first.

ESAs can play a big role as an effective advocate of children and schools. Regionally, they can provide support to smaller and rural schools, bringing their communities equal educational opportunities. ESAs

can serve as a link between each individual school building and the state department of education. You can research and clarify issues and concerns and become a powerful voice on behalf of education to the legislature and Congress. By designing programs and responding to local school and community needs, you can help solve some of the problems that face our nation's schools.

It's not always easy, but ESAs are in the unique position of being close to their customers and able to anticipate and resolve emerging needs. And, when you can do that across your state and the nation, that strength is recognized and reinforced.