

A State-wide Approach to Curriculum Research

A working council sparks curriculum research throughout a state in an over-all approach to school improvement.

THE PROBLEM OF INITIATING and following through on curriculum study at the state level has always been a challenging one. Over the years various types of procedures have been followed. This is a description of how one state is making an approach which is different from previous procedures used in that state.

For some time educational leaders throughout the State of Florida had felt that there should be provided, in some way, an opportunity for a cross-section of educators to come together at intervals to study problems of secondary education in the state and to suggest solutions. Prior to 1953 there had been no opportunities for a rather sizable group representing superintendents, supervisors, principals, teachers, State Department of Education and teacher training staff members, and representatives of both races to come together to consider problems of mutual concern.

To consider this problem, State Superintendent Thomas D. Bailey called

a meeting in the State Capitol of representatives from these groups to identify some of the pressing needs in secondary education in Florida and to propose ways of initiating state-wide study of these problems. In response some fifty persons met and identified a number of significant problems facing the secondary schools of Florida. The group requested that a committee be set up for the purpose of proposing some sort of state-wide machinery for studying problems of secondary education. A committee on structure and function was appointed immediately. This group went to work and early in 1953 sent out for consideration and criticism to those who attended the Tallahassee meeting a proposal on structure, function and personnel of a Florida Council on Secondary Education.

With some modifications the proposal was accepted and the first meeting of the Council was held in Tampa in October 1953. At this meeting the group examined some of the problems proposed earlier and made recommendations regarding studies which should be initiated.

A Steering Committee was formed to recommend a procedure for completing membership on the Council and to give consideration to the studies

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which were recommended. During the fall of 1954 the Steering Committee began its study through correspondence among its members and with those who had attended the Tampa meeting. In late 1954 the Steering Committee met and made specific plans for completing the membership of the Council and appointed a committee of persons in the South Florida area, with William M. Alexander of the University of Miami as chairman, to make specific proposals regarding studies which should be initiated, and suggest procedures for carrying out such studies. This committee was composed of Council members in the Miami area. They were requested to call in as many additional people as needed to do this job.

A Council Begins Its Studies

The membership of the Council was completed and the first full meeting was held for a day and a half in Tampa early in February 1955. At this meeting the Alexander committee proposed ten studies which might be initiated, and suggested procedures. Some of these studies were recommended by the committee for early initiation and others for later study. The proposed studies were described and explained to the total group and opportunity was provided to suggest additional studies. The total group chose four of the ten proposed studies for further exploration and elaboration. The four were: (a) curriculum improvement in the individual secondary school (primarily aimed at discovering effective techniques for effecting curriculum improvement); (b) general education

in Florida secondary schools; (c) reading and study habits in the secondary school curriculum; and (d) junior high school organization and program. The total group was then divided, according to interest, into four small groups to examine and discuss these four proposed studies and to prepare specific recommendations. At the end of the group meetings the chairmen and recorders of each group met with the chairman and secretary of the Council to examine the recommendations which would be presented by each group and to see what possibilities they offered.

When the total group reassembled at the final meeting, the recommendations of the various groups were presented and discussed. After a period of "creative bargaining" it was decided that all of these studies could be brought under one over-all plan by incorporating, as a part of each study accepted, the emphasis on discovering effective techniques for effecting curriculum change. Essentially members of the Council interested in this study would have an opportunity to conduct it in cooperation with schools engaged in one or more of the other studies suggested. Four studies which were recommended were: (a) general education in Florida secondary schools, (b) reading and study habits in the secondary school curriculum, (c) junior high school organization and program, (d) senior high school organization and program.

An over-all program which would embrace each of these was devised. The plan finally evolved and accepted for sponsorship by the Council included these preliminary steps:

1. Identification of secondary schools in the state which are already engaging in programs of curriculum improvement involving the entire faculty on one of these four problems.

2. Asking these schools to describe briefly what they are doing.

3. Requesting school officials in each administrative unit of the state to identify other secondary schools which might be interested in developing total faculty curriculum study in one of these four areas.

4. Inviting these schools to participate as pilot schools in cooperative curriculum research under the sponsorship of the Florida Council on Secondary Education.

The Council set up criteria for each of the cooperating schools:

1. Approval of the study must be given by the faculty, the principal, the superintendent of schools and the board of education.

2. The school must be willing to have representatives attend regional and/or state-wide conferences of cooperating schools.

3. The schools must express willingness to participate for a minimum of three years.

4. Schools participating must be willing to share any materials which they develop and to arrange intervisitation with other schools.

At the close of the meeting the chairman was directed to form a committee to initiate immediately the steps outlined above. Each member of the Council was asked to be responsible for interpreting the project to school people in his area of the state.

Organization

In order to present a more specific picture of the organization of the Florida Council on Secondary Education the following detailed description is given:

Purposes of the Council

1. To speak professionally for secondary education in Florida.

2. To review, coordinate and implement in secondary education the recommendations deemed advisable by individuals or groups.

3. To initiate studies in secondary education.

4. To disseminate information about secondary education.

5. To suggest standards for accrediting secondary education.

6. To assist in the articulation of education, grades K-12.

7. To propose legislation affecting secondary education.

8. To clarify thinking throughout the state with respect to secondary education.

9. To provide appropriate publicity on secondary education.

10. To make recommendations concerning the education of secondary teachers.

11. To ascertain ways and means of giving status to various parts of the secondary program and to various groups of secondary personnel.

12. To defend secondary education in the face of unfair attacks.

13. To propose definite recommendations each year to all administrative and instructional personnel through the State Department of Education.

14. To critically evaluate the philosophy and practices in secondary edu-

cation in light of present pressures and possible conflicts and trends—social, economic, spiritual and political—in local, state, national and world affairs.

15. To act as a screen to determine the worth-whileness of various recommendations which come from institutions desiring careful consideration of problems concerning the welfare of children.

16. To study problems of teacher welfare as they affect legal responsibilities.

17. To interpret secondary education to all educational and non-educational groups for specific purposes.

Structure and Personnel

1. The Council will consist of approximately 60 members to be appointed by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, one-third to serve 4 years, one-third 3 years, and one-third 2 years. After initial appointment all appointments would be for 4 years. Members may not succeed themselves directly. State Department representatives shall be ex-officio.

2. The Council will consist of representatives from the following:

State Department of Education	4 members (ex-officio)
Teacher Education Institutions	15 members
County Superintendents	3 members
Supervisors	5 members
Principals	15 members
Teachers	20 members
FEA and FSTA	2 members

In selecting representatives, consideration will be given to geographical distribution and to securing representation from all special areas.

3. Steering Committee. A steering committee will be selected, consisting of one representative from each of the groups listed above.

4. Working Committees. Working committees consisting of a nucleus from the State Council plus an appropriate number of other persons needed to make the study will be set up from time to time to carry out studies and report to the Council. Any Florida educator is eligible to serve on interim working committees as his services are needed.

5. Meetings of the entire Council should be held at least once annually.

6. The officers of the Council will serve two years and will not succeed themselves.

7. The Council shall select its own officers which shall be a minimum of a president and a secretary.

Further Comments

The following observations may shed further light on the operation of the Council:

1. It is experimental in nature and may continue, merge with some other group, or disband to the extent that its value is demonstrated through experience.

2. The Council is primarily an action research group, advisory in nature, and has no legal status.

3. Recommendations for action will be channelled through appropriate legally constituted groups or individuals.

4. The Council is a cross-section group representing various geographical areas of the state, subject areas, levels, and varieties of educational personnel both white and Negro.

5. The Council complements rather

than supplements other educational groups such as secondary principals associations, classroom teachers associations, supervisors associations, superintendents associations, and the like.

6. Coordination and liaison with other groups will be accomplished primarily through the State Department of Education, university staff members who work with other groups and through representatives from each of the groups named above.

Certain policies have been evolved by the steering committee which, it is felt, are extremely important to the effectiveness of the Council. In order that other organized groups throughout the state such as the associations of the secondary principals, superintendents, classroom teachers, and supervisors would feel some degree of responsibility for the success of the Council and some part in its operation, each group represented on the Council has been requested to nominate persons for invitation to membership on the Council. In each case nominations for membership have been cleared with their immediate superiors in order to be certain that they would like to have these persons on the Council and would make it possible for them to attend meetings and engage in activ-

ities of the Council. Invitations to membership on the Council coming from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction lend dignity and prestige to the Council.

In order to coordinate the work of the Council with activities sponsored by the Secondary Commission of the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, members of the Florida Committee of the Southern Association are ex-officio members of the Council and attend its meetings. The Executive Secretary of the Secondary Commission of the Southern Association attended the February meeting of the Council and explained to the Council how its work could tie in with projects for improvement of secondary schools under the sponsorship of the Southern Association. He also served as a consultant to the working groups.

The Council has no operating funds and depends upon individuals and groups to bear their own expenses for attending meetings. The Council will serve primarily as a planning group with probably one meeting a year of the total group. The Steering Committee serves as the executive group to put into action plans made by the Council at its annual meetings.



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