MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING: A LEGISLATIVE VIEW
by James McDermott

The quality of a state's educational system has traditionally been measured in terms of "inputs" to the course offerings and dollars spent per student. The learning "outcomes" expected as the result of education have not received the same attention. Now, however, that situation is changing and, during the last two years, increasing local, state, and national consideration has been given to competency-based education and, most particularly, to minimal competency testing (MCT)—that is, testing students at regular, periodic intervals throughout their elementary and secondary school years to measure the degree of competency they have attained in fundamental skills and subjects.

Concern that our schools are not adequately preparing our children to function satisfactorily in our society has become increasingly widespread, and the problem of "uneducated kids" emerging from the public schools is now regarded as one of national proportions. Competency-based education, and the periodic testing it employs, is rapidly gaining board support among educators as a realistic solution to the dilemma.

It is, I think, important to note here that MCT is not intended to gauge students' achievements in every possible area of learning; rather, MCT is an effort to determine the success or failure of the testing school district to teach its students the basic and essential skills and information they will need to survive as adults in society.

We want to be sure that a student graduating from 12 years of public school education will be, at the very least, minimally competent to pursue a productive and satisfying life.

Basic Education as "Input"

In the state of Washington, we have continually tried to provide our school system with "inputs" sufficient to educate our children well, and these efforts culminated, just this past year, in the Basic Education Act of 1977. In adopting this landmark legislation, we intended that the state ensure all of its public school students the opportunity to obtain a basic education, and the minimum amounts of instructional time and the types of courses to be offered were defined by law. Perhaps most importantly, basic education will be fully funded at the state level by 1981, thereby eliminating the "special levy roulette" upon which individual school districts have been forced to rely for large portions of their operations and maintenance monies.

The Basic Education Act, however, requires only that school districts offer the subjects which constitute basic education; it does not require that students enroll in them. It is here that the notions of competency-based education and minimal testing come into play.

Competency-Based Education As "Outcome"

When we speak of competency-based education, we are talking about setting instructional goals for use in helping students meet learning objectives. Minimal competency testing is one way to evaluate a student's ability to attain those objectives.

The Washington State Legislature has already passed a learning objectives statute. This law requires each school district in the state to develop specific learning objectives for each of the elementary grades (1 through 8) by September 1, 1978. Learning objectives for the secondary grades (9 through 12) must follow by 1981. Each student's ability to meet the objectives will be evaluated each year and, if a student is having difficulty with some part of the curriculum, his or her problem(s) can be identified promptly and the appropriate assistance offered.

Minimal Competency Testing in Washington

The use of minimal competency testing to augment learning objectives is gaining acceptance in school districts throughout Washington State. Typically, MCT is done toward the end of a student's public school career, although the value of administering minimal competency tests at several stages throughout the elementary and secondary school years (for example, at the 4th grade, 8th grade, and 12th grade) is quickly becoming evident. Such periodic testing will enable a school district to measure the academic achievement of groups of students (classes or grades), much as the learning objectives evaluation will assess levels of individual achievement annually.
A LEGISLATIVE VIEW, Cont'd.

At least five districts in Washington are presently administering MCT programs (Bellevue, Franklin Pierce, Lake Washington, Seattle, and Spokane), and many others are initiating such programs this year. Common char-

acteristics among the testing programs now in use are beginning to appear and include the facts that districts generally begin testing math and language arts competencies in the 11th grade, that passing such tests is a graduation requirement, and that the test items are usually designed to reflect an 8th grade achievement level. Results to date have demonstrated that the number of students who initially fail the test is high: 50% and above. But, the testing programs are so new that only one district has graduated a class required to meet MCT standards. Clearly, it is too early to draw firm conclusions about the effectiveness of minimal testing, as a number of serious questions about the testing program remain unanswered at this time. But we are optimistic that MCT, in conjunction with learning objectives, will help to make “basic education” a reality.

Minimal Competency Testing Nationwide

The idea of minimal competency testing is being favorably received in many other states, and legislation on the subject is being enacted so rapidly that the number of new laws changes from day to day. At last count, 24 states required minimal competency testing, 13 states required passing a minimal competency test as a graduation requisite, and three states required passing such an examination for grade-to-grade promotion.

Again, MCT is so recent a development that reliable test results and evaluations are not yet available. Several trends can be identified, however:
1. Minimal competency testing legislation generally emphasizes that the test should examine only those skills that are essential to enable a person to survive in today’s environment.
2. No scientific method of setting test standards has been developed.
3. Tests are usually developed by individual school districts.
4. Tests are usually criterion referenced.
5. The minimum competency test seems to have the greatest effect on the middle range of students.
6. Most states test competencies at more than one grade.
7. As a result of the tests, the number of electives offered in a curriculum generally drops, and the number of remedial programs offered increases.

Legislation mandating the development of minimal competency testing programs has not been left to the several states. A number of competency testing measures have been introduced to the Congress, and one, HR 6088, sponsored by Representative Hooton (D-Ohio), would require that states establish minimal proficiency standards and would provide federal financial assistance to enable them to do so. However, action on this and other MCT bills is not expected until the Congress reconvenes in January.

Can We Expect a Washington State Minimal Competency Testing Law?

That we want our children to receive the best education possible is certain. Unfortunately, there are many disturbing indications that they are not learning well enough. Re-emphasis on basic education is probably the best starting point from which to remedy the current deficiencies, but even that will serve no purpose unless it "works"—that is, unless we are sure that students will acquire basic skills and will be able to use them. Minimal competency testing seems a logical approach to the problem, but testing is far more complex than it initially appears and can raise as many questions as it answers. Following are some of the questions that need to be answered before we implement a minimal competency testing law.

1. How can minimal competency testing be coordinated with other measures of educational quality such as basic education requirements, learning objectives and accreditation?
2. Will the learning objectives law in the long run take care of the minimal competency testing question? Are additional short term solutions necessary?
3. Will minimal competency testing lower curriculum standards?
4. Which competencies would be measured?
5. What types of compensatory programs should be measured?
6. Will the state or local school districts develop and administer the tests?
7. Should graduation be based on passing the test?
8. Should grade-to-grade promotion be based on passing the test?
9. How can a nondiscriminatory test be prepared to allow for handicapped children, minority children and non-English speaking children?
10. How would the testing program and compensatory education be funded?
11. What level of competency would be required?
12. Would children who pass the test be eligible for early graduation from high school?
13. What effects would such a program have on evaluating the effectiveness of teachers? It is my hope that we will be able to begin supplying answers to these and similar questions by the next legislative session, so that the appropriate role of competency testing in our educational system might be ascertained.

Mr. McDermott is a Senator from Washington's 43rd District. He serves as Chairman of the Senate Education Committee and Vice Chairman of the Senate Ways and Means Committee.
EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Planning to go to the WS ASCD Conference in February? "Impossible," I responded, when faced with that question this time last year. With what I suppose is typical graduate student single-mindedness, my highest priorities were pulling my dissertation topic together and studying for my preliminary exams. Taking three days out of my schedule and paying the costs involved to attend a conference at SeaTac seemed downright frivolous.

As associate editor of this journal, however, I was constantly confronted with the conference theme, the names of the speakers who were scheduled, the topics to be discussed -- and I had to admit, it did have the makings of a pretty good conference. Eventually, with persuasion from faculty members, senior editors and fellow graduate students, I decided to go, although not without some reservation.

I was not disappointed. In fact, I was impressed. Among other things, I met John Goodlad, put familiar names with previously unknown faces, and got involved with issues of vital and current concern to Washington education. Not only that, I found I was "studying" for prelims--current issues in education, curriculum evaluation, curriculum development, inservice and preservice education--not only were the topics pertinent, but the resources were timely, and the method of studying sure beat spending time in the library.

(The social aspects of the conference may not be relevant here, but nevertheless they cannot be ignored.)

I came, I saw, and I was convinced. I'm just as busy now as I was last year, but I'll be at the Washington Plaza in Seattle on February 10 and 11. How about you?

Muriel Oaks
Associate Editor

WHAT IS WS ASCD?

WS ASCD is a professional organization whose membership is dedicated to the promotion of excellence in education. The membership includes school administrators, teachers, curriculum developers, supervisors, college and university professors and interested citizens from the Pacific Northwest who...

...strive for a balanced curriculum for all youth--one that offers an overview of the meaningful concepts developed in each discipline...

...encourage development and dissemination of educational research and practice in curriculum and instruction...

...study and evaluate significant issues in curriculum, instruction, supervision and staff development...

...support programs that hold promise for educational improvement...

...facilitate cooperation between all persons involved in the educational process...

...work with other professional education associations toward the achievement of common goals...

...respond to the concerns of various publics involved or interested in education...

...stimulate efforts toward demonstrating that educational investments make a tangible difference.

WS ASCD is looking to you for help. Join us as we attempt to meet the challenges ahead. Through WS ASCD we will work together to promote excellence in education.

COMING UP IN THE SPRING ISSUE OF CONTEXT AND CONFLICT:
Teaching Controversial Issues
Deadline for manuscripts is March 15, 1978.
MINIMAL COMPETENCY TESTING: BOON OR BOODAGGLE?

by William McDougall

Numerous state legislatures have now mandated minimal competency tests to appraise mastery of basic skills in the schools. (Such tests are often referred to in the context of mastery of minimums, survival literacy or performance standards.) The movement, expanding at a dizzying rate, appears to be linked in the minds of legislators and the general public to the need for educational accountability. It's a hot issue among educators who view tests with mixed emotion. Some welcome the testing as a revival of standards, while others see it as an undesirable intrusion into their professional domain. Required testing is usually regarded as annoying by teachers and school officials since it requires them to "give objective evidence" that they are doing their job at some predetermined level.

It cannot be denied that youth in a modern culture need high levels of skill in the basics—in reading, writing, arithmetic and other communication skills. In fact, being an informed consumer and meeting the demands of the job market require increasingly higher levels to function adequately in modern society. However, overzealous advocates of minimal tests may be contributing more to achieving higher basic skills levels, and actually may be producing a kind of tunnel vision and a false sense of security by turning so blindly to such testing as the solution. There are many reasons that minimal competency testing could turn out to be an over-simplified answer to a complex problem. Among these are:

1. Achievement is linked to expectations of the learner and their teachers. The research now clearly shows this. To give great emphasis to the singular importance of minimum standards will probably guarantee minimum levels of achievement for many students. It would seem folly to play into the hands of those learners who may already be experts at negotiating minimum levels of performance. Perhaps we are starting from the wrong end. Perhaps we should be negotiating for the highest possible levels of competency and challenge learning with high expectations. Expected high achievement should also be in all subjects and areas of learning and not limited to those few basic skills we are presently focusing on with the tests we have available.

2. The basic skills required to function in a modern society are inadequately defined. The present identification of such skills is largely a matter of custom and tradition, and the scientific analysis of what it takes to perform in a modern world is only in the first stages of exploration. It cannot be assumed that basic skills have been defined "once and for all." The fields of psychology, learning and testing are incapable at present of giving any definitive answers as to what a pupil must know to succeed in life.

3. Presently available standardized tests have severe limitations as basic skill measures. Careful analysis of such tests reveal major problems including questionable test validity; poor overlap between objectives, program and test content; limitations in test designs and format; and often confusing directions and instructions for responding. Test technology is as yet in its infancy. The type of standard tests currently being used in most minimal testing programs are at best measuring simple and incomplete aspects of basic skills and communication. The higher level and more complex skills require long term assessment and evidence from a variety of evaluation techniques. Drawing conclusions about basic skill competencies on existing standard tests alone will lead to crippling generalizations.

4. In the event that tests are used and minimums are set, what will be the appropriate level of competence? Will a passing score be the consensus of experts—70, 75 or 80 percent correct answers? Or are the "right levels" to be arrived at through some form of norm or consensus? At what level does a high school graduate or a citizen become functionally literate? For example, should all citizens be able to read at the 10th grade level or will the 6th or even 4th grade level be adequate? In arithmetic is it necessary to be able to do a simple interest problem or is compound interest computation required? Any arbitrary level will certainly be questioned as being too high by some and too low by others. The concept of individual differences dictates different expected levels for students with different abilities and background experiences.

The benefits of minimal competency testing may have positive effects if viewed as an opportunity to reexamine the curriculum and identify some of the basic skill areas that require remediation. Individual item mastery levels as well as clusters of items designed to measure district objectives should be studied and related in context to curriculum planning. A broad view of the curriculum is necessary to maintain balance and relevance for students. Statewide tests are only helpful in certain aspects of "the process" and, if overemphasized and curriculum analysis, can certainly lead to a distorted and incomplete picture. Of signal importance is the simultaneous consideration of the higher level and complex skills, cognitive styles and motivational components of performance including ethical and moral behavior, responsibility, and value orientation. Minimal competency tests should not be trusted as the ultimate solution to all our educational aegies.

The present trend in minimal competency testing appears to be more political than academic. It appears that such tests are being used to "whip the schools into shape" by instituting the standards of "the good old days." It takes us back to a page in history where tests alone were used as instruments of social control, and behavior was motivated by the threat of failure or flunking. We should be concerned that the minimal testing movement is now being organized and institutionalized into expensive state operated programs, and that educators are being required to perform rit-

Continued on page 13
The specific form that competency-based education usually takes is the requirement that at some point students pass a proficiency test in the basic skills in order to receive a high school diploma. A recent Gallup Poll shows that at least 65 percent of the American public favor just such requirements for graduating seniors. (I believe that this sentiment is one manifestation of the nebulous "back to basics" movement.)

In response to the public concern, political answers are beginning to take shape. On the federal level, legislation has been proposed which would require states to adopt minimal competencies in order to qualify for ESERA funds. Already twenty some states have adopted or are developing minimal competencies (perhaps most notably, our neighbor to the south Oregon) and many others are in the process. Even within our own state, there is considerable activity. To date, there has been no state-wide legislation, but local districts are, in increasing numbers, taking advantage of WAC 180-036 which allows local boards to adopt competency requirements for graduation. In fact, it is estimated that at least 20 percent of Washington's students live in districts which have or are developing proficiency standards relating to graduation.

Now the legislature has become involved. The Senate Education Committee, under the capable leadership of Senator James McDermod, has held hearings on the hearing issue. The House Education Committee has also been examining competency-based education since the adoption of House Floor Resolution 77-50. HFR 77-50 directs the Education Committee to study the feasibility and desirability of establishing minimum competency requirements for students graduating from the common school system and to report to the next session of the legislature. The Subcommittee on Curriculum and Instruction has already conducted several hearings. Members of the staff, Chairman Art Clemente and I have traveled to Salem to talk with Oregon officials regarding their competency program as well as having attended an Education Commission of the State's conference on the subject.

I suspect that all this activity presages the arrival of competency-based education, as the major education issue in Washington. I confidently predict that the debate that ensues will be lengthy, controversial, contain the customary number of platitudes and cliches, and be tainted by the usual paranoia regarding territorial encroachment.

The following is an incomplete list of the questions along which lines of disagreement will undoubtedly form:

- Who sets the Minimums? Should the minimums apply state-wide or be adopted at the local level?
- Form of the Tests. Shall the tests be norm-referenced? Criterion-referenced? Objective-referenced? Should we test "applied life role" competencies such as filling out income tax and job application forms?
- Level of the Minimums. Should the competencies be very minimal and require only functional literacy, for example, or should the standards be set higher?
- Consequences of Failure. A critical question is: What are the consequences of a student failing a minimal competency test? They don't graduate? They get a black mark on their diploma? They retake the test? If so, how many times? Must they take remedial courses? Should their parents' be required to meet with school officials? If a student attains the minimal competencies before their senior year, should that entitle them to an early exit from high school?

Last and foremost is the fundamental question of whether or not there should be standards at all. Should minimal competency be established? And that, of course, is what the legislative activity is all about. I personally think there are a variety of reasons in addition to public demand for continuing to explore this topic. To begin with, competency-based education programs could have a positive effect on curriculum. They could result in more individualization. They could make public some of the "intents" of education. They could, in general, result in more emphasis on learning and programs.

It is this last reason that appeals to me. It seems as though the focus of education policy issues for the last ten years has necessarily been finance, employer-employee relations and the like. These issues appear to have begun to stabilize (we all hope). Now, maybe it is time to begin getting back to discussing learning and programs.

I think the legislature can be involved in this discussion (without becoming the "great school board in the sky") in such a way as to make a positive contribution. Perhaps the legislature could take part in sponsoring a state-wide conference on minimal competencies which would bring together educators to begin to unravel the myriad of complex issues associated with the subject. Perhaps the legislature could provide funds for technical assistance for individual districts that desire to move into minimal competencies. Who knows?

Only one thing seems certain. The issue of competency-based educational programs is before us locally and nationally. It is obviously better that we begin to establish our own direction rather than have a program mandated externally or before a current, legitimate public concern becomes public frenzy.

Mr. Heck is a Representative of Washington's 17th Legislative District, Vice-Chairman of the Education Committee and Chairman of the Subcommittee on Curriculum and Instruction.
During the past several years about half the states, by legislative or administrative action, have moved toward the imposition of statewide pupil minimum competency standards in their elementary and secondary schools. Indeed, bills now before Congress would make such standards applicable to all states. Impetus for these developments seems to come from a general concern that many students are not being educated adequately, particularly in the basic skills. Colleges and universities, prospective employers, and parents, among others have all expressed these concerns. A frequent response to these concerns has been the development of "minimum competency testing."

Minimum competency testing appears to be the most recent development in the "accountability" or "competency based education" movements. A minimum competency testing program usually includes: (a) a focus on basic school skills (reading, writing, arithmetic), (b) a commonly agreed upon set of objectives (competencies), (c) the assumption that programs exist or can be developed that will assure all or nearly all students will achieve the competencies, (d) a test that determines when the competencies have been achieved, and (e) promotion or high school graduation predicated upon achieving the minimum competencies.

Minimum competency testing also has origins in the "school reform" movement. Minimum competency testing is focused on two major concerns. One concern is the presumed "devaluation" of the high school diploma because some students who receive high school diplomas lack adequate skills in reading, writing, or arithmetic. The presumption is that minimum competency testing will assure that students who receive diplomas do, in fact, have (or did have) specific basic skills. The second major concern or problem focuses on those students who fail to acquire basic skills and/or those teachers who fail to teach adequately the skills. The assumption appears to be that minimum competency testing will somehow help poor students learn more and poor teachers teach better.

An important question underlying both of these concerns is whether they involve technical considerations and therefore require further research and program development. There is reason, if the past is indeed prologue, to believe that the responses to these concerns may well occur with inadequate consideration of the implications of the decisions. If responses, whether legislative or programmatic, are to be informed and beneficial, then important questions about performance or competency standards must be raised. And the various possible answers must be previewed.

Dr. Henry Brickell, Director of Policy Studies in Education has raised seven critical questions that need to be answered in the course of developing any program of minimum competency testing. Each of these basic questions in turn raises a variety of other questions. The questions are worth careful consideration.

1. What competencies will be required? Will the focus be exclusively on basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic) or will other academic areas be included (history, art, science)? Or will life skills (citizenship, family, consumer) be included? Some choices must be made since schools cannot possibly test all things.

2. How will the competencies be measured? Will the competencies be measured in actual performance settings (very expensive and considerably after the fact); simulated settings (not altogether realistic and limited tests available); analysis of school products or performances (difficult to score and lacks motivating pressure of test or maximum performance situation); or, paper and pencil tests which are cheap and quick but far removed from actual performance situations?

3. When will the competencies be measured? Will the competencies be measured continuously during school, at specified intervals or will they be measured at the end of school as a terminal assessment? Will some combination of testing for both grade to grade promotion and graduation be developed?

4. How many minimums will be established? Will there be a uniform minimum standard for all students or will several standards be established based on student ability, special talents or family backgrounds? Will there be a single minimum standard for all students with additional graduated standards for students with more talent or special interests? (How will the student's talent or special interest be determined?)

5. How high will the minimum standard be? Will the standard for graduation be set at 12th grade work, 10th grade work or 8th grade work? Will 20%, 10%, or 5% of the students be denied diplomas? How will the "level" of the minimum competency standard be determined? Who will determine the "level"?

6. Will the minimum standards be for students or schools? Will students or schools be examined? Will students or schools be labeled minimally competent? Will student by student or school by school results be reported?

7. What will be done about the incompetents (students or schools)? Will several chances be offered? Will remedial programs be offered? Will graduation or accreditation be withheld? Will special or restricted graduation or accreditation status be provided? Will the standards be changed to allow a higher percentage of graduates or accredited programs?

It should be obvious that the choice of answers for any one of these questions is dependent in large part on the choice of an-
A TRIBUTE TO HARRY O. FINNEGAN

by Olive Lowry

Washington State ASCD lost a knowledgeable colleague and a true supporter on October 29, 1977 with the untimely death of Dr. Harry Finnegan, Program Development Specialist, Basic Education Division, Spokane Public Schools.

Dr. Finnegan served ASCD nationally and state-wide in many capacities: NS ASCD Annual Conference Chairman on two occasions, 1974 and 1976; President, NE ASCD; sectional leader at national 1969, speaker 1976, and contributor to both Context & Conflict and Educational Leadership.

Harry Finnegan was truly a Washington educated educator; he attended high school in Tacoma, spent college days at College of Puget Sound, did graduate work at Eastern Washington University and the University of Washington and received his doctoral degree from Washington State University.

Dr. Finnegan joined the staff of the Spokane Public Schools in 1949 as an English teacher at North Central High School. In the following years, Dr. Finnegan taught at Libby Junior High School and Lewis and Clark High School, and in 1957 was appointed Dean of Boys at Shadle Park High School. In 1963, he was promoted to Vice-Principal at Ferris High School. From 1967-1970, he was director of Projects 81—a program which received international attention for field testing innovative practices in an exemplary school setting and disseminating programs and information. In 1972 he joined the staff of the Program Development Division where he gave leadership to the development of new projects, curriculum change and program evaluation.

Much of Dr. Finnegan's career with the Spokane Public Schools was spent in the development of innovative programs and new teaching techniques. While Vice-Principal at Ferris, he planned and helped to implement the school's program in team teaching, individualized instruction and modular scheduling. Projects 81 was an exemplary Title III program which brought leading educators to Spokane for seminars and teacher workshops, and which was given special attention by Dr. Finnegan. Then while a member of the Program Development staff, he assisted in the development of new programs in health, secondary physical education, industrial arts, trade and industry, and career education. His most recent responsibilities were the Spokane Student Discipline Study and the development of grant proposals for a staff development center.

"Both personally and professionally my path crossed with Harry's many times," Dr. Walter Hitchcock said in a tribute to Dr. Finnegan. "We were both working on our doctorates at Washington State University in the early '60's, and professionally I have had the pleasure of being associated with him the past eight years here in Spokane. I don't know of a person who was more dedicated to his work or more knowledgeable on the techniques of teaching than was Harry. We've not only lost a true friend but a real guide in our schools."
OREGON MINIMUM STANDARDS: ONE BIASED VIEW

By Robert D. Luchsiniger and Roger Bishop

If a poll was conducted among Oregon educators, soliciting their opinions of the Oregon Minimum Standards, the results would range across the board. Some consider the standards to be another example of state interference with local control and advocate their elimination. Others feel the standards are an excellent vehicle to bring quality education to all students throughout the state. Obviously, the jury is still out. The standards are not yet perfected, but if given a fair try, we believe the Minimum Standards will be a very positive influence on the schools of Oregon.

One must understand the standards before a judgment can be made. It is important to consider what they are and what they are not. The standards speak to 11 areas of the educational program with major emphasis on educational goals, instructional planning, the instructional program, and assessment procedures. Since we consider the curricular aspects to be the foundation of the standards, we will focus on this area and on the implementation process.

Oregon has been identified as one of the leaders in the competency-based education movement and its efforts have attracted national attention. However, to focus only on the competencies to the exclusion of the remainder of the Minimum Standards, as some are doing, can result in a myopic perspective. The standards require the local school board to "...adapt and make available to every student competency (the minimum competency it is willing to accept as evidence students are equipped to function in the society in which they live.) Although competencies must be written in ten specified areas, the specific competencies and performance levels are determined at the local level. Oregon recognizes that the competencies are only one indication that the students can function at a minimal level in society and are not the equivalent of a complete high school education. Students cannot graduate by attaining competency verification alone. They must earn a minimum of 21 units of credit and meet district attendance requirements.

In reality, the standards require that every district should have been doing all along. Within general guidelines, the districts have been told, "Get your act together." Each district must inform its patrons of its expectations for the students as they progress through the system; develop a process of ongoing instructional planning and program implementation; utilize a process of assessing and monitoring the total plan.

"Resistance to Minimum Standards arises when the district faces the quantum leap from theory to practice."

Resistance to the Minimum Standards arises when the district faces the quantum leap from theory to practice. The caption on the poster in many teachers' rooms—"Nobody ever said it was going to be easy!"—applies to the standards. Full compliance is an involved and time-consuming process. Some districts have been unwilling to make a concentrated effort or have been unsure about where to begin.

Two external factors have contributed to this lack of action. As any project develops, mistakes are made and improved ways are discovered to arrive at the end product. Increased understanding and knowledge on the part of the Oregon Department of Education has led to changes in the guidelines and the standards of acceptability for the final products.

More than a few districts throughout the state took a wait-and-see attitude, preferring to move slowly until the guidelines were finalized. They did not desire to be forced into a revision of their finished product as have several districts who completed their work at an early date. Also, rumors of potential political intervention created uncertainty as to whether the standards would even exist after the 1977 legislative session.

As of this date, the guidelines have been established and no additional major changes are anticipated. The legislature, although maintaining a watchful eye, has chosen not to interfere with the standards as they now stand. The Standardization Section of the Department of Education has been strengthened and almost all districts will undergo standardization visits within the next two years. The districts are convinced that the standards are reality and are moving positively toward implementation.

In Clackamas County, the IED has made a major commitment to assist the 28 local districts implement the standards. These districts range in size from a 14,000 student suburban unified district to a 50 student rural elementary district. The abilities of the districts to comply with the Minimum Standards and the problems encountered vary with the size of the districts. The districts, typically the larger ones with curriculum specialists, tend to be progressing toward full compliance. Districts lacking the personnel to assume leadership roles have been slower to address the issue and, in a few cases, have barely begun.

"The effort necessary to comply with the standards does not differ greatly with the size of the district."

The effort necessary to comply with the standards does not differ greatly with the size of the district. The need to conduct committee meetings; to write district, program, and course goals; to organize scope and sequence in a minimum of eight program areas; to implement a recording and assessment system; to generate public involvement; to revise district policy; and to perform the hundreds of other necessary tasks involves a major commitment of time and resources.

A top priority has to be increasing the understanding and involvement of the classroom teacher in the total process. Many teachers know little about the standards and until they come to believe in the logic and worth of implementation, the minimum standards will have little impact in the classroom.
Still, if the tasks required to bring the standards into full operation are addressed with a belief that the educational program of Oregon will be improved, we are convinced the students and society will be the winners in the long run. Positive influences are already evident. The importance of the curriculum worker is recognized more than it has been in many years. The Minimum Standards are resulting in an increased attention to what is being taught, why it is taught, and what outcomes are expected. These issues have been debated for years, but the Minimum Standards require more than words.

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Mr. Luchinger is Curriculum Coordinator, Clackamas County Intermediate Education District, Oregon. Mr. Bishop is Developmental Specialist in the same district.

WS ASCD 1978 EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

The annual presentation of the Educator of the Year Award of the Washington State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development provides opportunity for recognition of outstanding educators in the field of supervision and curriculum development who promote quality education in the State of Washington via their contributions toward the improvement of instruction. The 1978 award will be received by the selected nominee at WS ASCD's annual conference, February 10, 11, 1977, at the Washington Plaza, Seattle, Washington. Last year's recipient was Ted Knutsen, assistant superintendent of the Oak Harbor school district.

Eligible for receipt of the award are all full-time educators currently employed and employable for the next school year in the area of supervision and curriculum development. Nominees should have: skill in human relations; professional and intellectual integrity; genuine concern for students and fellow educators; demonstrated leadership in the pursuit of efficient and effective instructional programs.

Entry forms for nominees will be available through ESD superintendents, district superintendents and the heads of schools of education no later than the week of November 28, 1977, and must be received no later than January 20, 1978.

EVENTS

National Meetings

February 14 ATE, Chicago, IL
February 10-15 NASSP National Convention, Anaheim, CA
February 17-20 AASA National Convention, Atlanta, GA
March 4-8 ASCD Annual Conference, San Francisco, CA
April 1-4 NSBA National Convention, Anaheim, CA
April 1-5 Elem. School Principal's Nat'l Conv., Dallas, TX

State and Regional Meetings

February 3-4 Oregon ASCD, The Dunes, Lincoln City, OR
February 10-11 WS ASCD, WASHINGTON PLAZA, SEATTLE
March 16-17 State Board of Education Meeting, Olympia
March 17 Statewide In-Service Day, SRI

PLAN NOW TO ATTEND THE WS ASCD CONFERENCE!
February 10 and 11, 1978
Washington Plaza Hotel, Seattle
Providing for Competency Attainment

By Richard L. Stiles

Rather than running for the cover of the nearest testing catalogue when the first shots of minimum competency are fired, educators and their communities should thoughtfully develop a functional rationale for the attainment of basic skill competencies. From an apprehensible rationale statement, reasonable basic skill definitions can be developed; instructional tactics can be identified, means for verifying skill attainment can be developed, and consensus on performance expectations can be attained. The resulting context will hopefully allow schools to function more effectively.

Communities and educators must guard against inadequate basic skill definitions and in expectations. Expectations based on personal standards and/or employment procedures that can promote tracking systems where a pupil's educational development may become stunted and warped. Even without the renewed focus on basic skills competency, both formal and informal tracking systems currently exist that warp many learners' educational development and discourage them from continuing their education with the result that such pupils will no longer value learning as an important life purpose. In addition, counter productive punitive mechanisms can evolve which discourage some learners from continuing their education and encourage the development of self-defeating behaviors. A focus on only "minimal" basic skills can lead to mediocrity and/or nonadaptive educational development.

An important element in any community's educational planning is the consideration of the variety of expectations people have for graduates of the public schools. These people and their expectations include: pupils whose expectations are based on personal aspirations and values which play a major role in affecting whether or not they actually attain the desired competencies; parents whose expectations are based in part on their own extended personal aspirations and the desire to prepare their children for the "best possible" life including a fair return on their investment; employers who want assurance that future employees have acquired the necessary skills for effective job performance and educators themselves whose expectations range from the personal concern for the "well being" of each pupil to a stance of upholding the standards of educational excellence and protecting their institutions of education from further abuse. After considering the expectations held for education, the community must then clearly define priorities that give lucid purpose and direction to the public schools. These priorities, purposes and directions must be carefully examined and validated against identified pupil and societal needs, the schools' legal authority and responsibility as well as the institution's capabilities in attaining the priorities. From this vantage point the nature of the curriculum can be examined and effective nurture or instructional processes identified and/or developed that provide all learners with authentic opportunities for the skills, confidence and knowledge necessary for them to function effectively in our society.

Contemporary schools serve a diverse pupil population. They serve pupils with differing rates of development who learn through differing modes and respond to instruction in a variety of ways. Educators must examine local educational philosophy and curriculum as well as pupil performance and relate their findings to current and future learner needs. Planning should follow the examination and integration of local purposes of instruction, identified learner needs and the curriculum. School and community resources should be identified, screened for value and usability in the instructional process, and matched with desired learning outcomes. By matching available potential instructional resources to desired competencies, educators may be better able to determine more appropriate and more effective means for instructing learners.

After any instructional process, verification should be made to measure what was taught, namely the major learning outcomes. The intent should be to measure the process each learner is making in developing basic skills or to verify attainment of basic skills rather than to measure each learner's performance relative to the performance of other learners. The task of competency based measurement is to provide accurate and reliable data that can be used as evidence or documentation of skill development and/or attainment of each individual pupil.

The assessment process must begin early in a learner's educational career. Data gathered from the assessments must be appropriate to the skill or learning outcome and its level of development as well as the particular instructional context of each learner. Therefore, assessments might well include such procedures as: paper and pencil tests like multiple-choice, true/false, math story problems, formula problems, etc.; documentation of products and/or performances made in the context of the school; and/or structured observations of simulated applied performance situations like job or work situations, 4-H projects, Boy or Girl Scouts activities, math problems and the like. The main thing to keep in focus is to verify skill development or skill attainment rather than place the learner's accomplishments on some interval or ratio scale of competency. For some pupils on some skills, only one measure may be needed to verify skill development or attainment but for other pupils, different measures of the same skills may be necessary to verify development or attainment.

The assessment process will be more useful if it can furnish information on the development or attainment of major learning outcomes and measure them within the actual instructional process incorporating the materials, formats, and modes of presentation used in instruction and scales for measurement. Just as the instructional process should adapt to accommodate learner needs and ways of learning, so should the assessment process change to better observe the pupils' true development and attainment of learning outcomes.
Providing for Competency Attainment, Cont'd.

Before, during and after war is declared over competency attainment, schools must conscientiously attempt to do the best they can with the resources available, and yet on a personal basis, convey to each learner a positive expectation for the future. The responsibility for learning resides with the learner and if they are to attain functional competency, they must accept the responsibility for learning. Others can train or condition learners to respond with some acceptable basic skill behaviors. However, to have basic skill competencies that are truly functional, each learner must pursue the attainment of competencies with his or her own internalized set of values and abilities. Parents must help learners by demonstrating a value for learning and encouraging their children to develop competency. Schools and teachers not only can, but must provide a variety of opportunities that take into account differential rates and styles of learning as well as create educational environments that make learning attractive and worth pursuing by the learner and still provide accurate depictions of learner growth. The war over competency attainment may rage on but hopefully learners will emerge from the battlefield more articulate, more knowledgeable, more skillful and more sensitive to their own needs and the needs of others than we who precede them.

References


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safe traffic attitudes and behaviors in young children, they will become safer and more defensive drivers as they grow older. Recent statistics have indicated that high school driver-traffic education programs are not as effective as hoped. I believe that beginning traffic education at an early age would reverse that trend.

The children at M.L. King Early Childhood Education Center have a positive attitude toward traffic safety. They are excited about the Traffic Awareness Awards and Safety Bug buttons, and they know what the traffic signs mean.

“Parents appreciate the extra effort we... give to educate their children in the area of traffic safety.”

A youngster reported to me that he and his mother had discussed the meaning of the “yield” sign. Others have been “small traffic officers” in their parents’ cars.” A stop sign means you have to stop completely and look both ways and let everyone else go first!” Parents report to me have been positive; they appreciate the extra effort we at M.L. King give to educate their children in the area of traffic safety.

Curriculum is being developed and a pilot program for Elementary Traffic Safety education is in progress at M.L. King ECEC. To be included will be classroom learning activity packages to familiarize students with traffic safety concepts and laws, craft projects, and physical activities which will reinforce traffic safety education and defensive driving concepts.

Welcome to M.L. King City, but please "drive" safely. The life you save may be one of our bright young future stars!

Miss Bleige is an Elementary Physical Education Specialist and Traffic Education Instructor at the Martin Luther King Early Childhood Education Center, Seattle

WS ASCD CONFERENCE, 1978


Dates: February 10-11, 1978

Place: Washington Plaza Hotel, Seattle

Registration: 7:30-8:30 a.m., February 10

Major Speakers: Dr. Arthur Combs
Dr. Kate Bell
Senator James McDermott
Dr. Gordon Cawelti

THE SEATTLE PLAN: AN EDUCATIONALLY SOUND APPROACH TO DESEGREGATION/INTEGRATION

Recent Supreme Court decisions (e.g., Dayton and Detroit) have indicated a new interest in the nature of desegregation strategies as they affect children. It appears that the Court is now interested in the use of strategies which are designed to meet the educational needs of children than just desegregating the district.

This new position of the Court is supportive of and consistent with the philosophical base and the desegregation planning assumptions of the Seattle Public Schools. The Seattle School District is one of the first districts in the nation to develop and implement a desegregation plan without Court order, an effort designed to integrate the schools, but to provide for the educational needs of all children. The tasks of the district, in its desegregation effort, are two-fold: quality education and integration for all children. Seattle's thrust is to provide and improve education opportunities, with desegregation as one component of that thrust. The desegregation program in Seattle is not, and will not be, designed to merely "move students." The district's major concern is "What happens educationally to our children after they arrive at their new school?"

Desegregation Strategies Continuum

School districts throughout the United States have implemented a variety of strategies for desegregation. These strategies range from mandatory random reassignment of students to total open enrollment within the district. Nearly all of our nation's major cities have undertaken the task of desegregation under court order. Thus "forced" has often been a major component in their plans.

Seattle, however, is a unique city. The Seattle School District has voluntarily undertaken the task of desegregation. With great concern for the effects of desegregation on the children of Seattle, the School Board, in Resolution 1977-8, directed that "educationally sound" strategies be utilized in developing the Seattle plan to eliminate racial imbalance in Seattle schools.

One way of illustrating the range of strategies employed by other school districts is through the use of a continuum. Placement on the continuum indicates the amount of choice parents and students have regarding the school the student wishes to attend as well as the kind of educational program parents and students desire. Given two end points, the continuum appears as follows: at one end of the continuum is the most restrictive choice strategy, "mandatory random reassignment;" at the other end is the least restrictive choice, "total open enrollment."

A strategy appearing within the "limited choice" range is one which presents students and parents with the choice of a specified number of schools, but the neighborhood school may not be one of the choices. Given this range of strategies and the direction from the School Board, the task in developing desegregation plans for the Seattle School District is to select from
those strategies that are "educationally sound." Before this can be done, however, the term "educationally sound" must be defined and understood.

1. Equal educational opportunities
2. Provisions for safety needs
3. Educational options based upon:
   a. teaching strategies and student learning styles
   b. curricula content
   c. special needs of students
4. Curricula which include:
   a. basic skills emphasis
   b. multi-ethnic/multi-cultural education
   c. career readiness education
   d. sex equity education
5. Provisions for the maintenance of ethnic identity for both white and non-white students
6. High academic achievement expectations for each student
7. Assurance that every child can succeed in school.

Summary
An educationally sound desegregation strategy then is one which can be used in such a way as to meet the educational needs of all students and at the same time achieve the goals set by the Board for eliminating racial imbalance. A comprehensive desegregation plan must be designed not only to provide for the integration of schools, but also to provide for the educational needs of children.

Dr. Maynard is Director of the Desegregation Planning Office, Seattle Public Schools.

What Does An "Educationally Sound" Strategy Mean?
An educationally sound strategy for desegregation is one which contributes to, and has a positive effect on, the educational outcomes parents, guardians and students expect from the educational system. Educational outcomes may be described as those attitudes, values, and skills children need in order to live and work successfully in our society. Many, although not all, of these necessary attitudes, values and skills are learned in school.

Elements For Educationally Sound Strategies
Educationally sound desegregation strategies include provisions for the educational needs of all children; the strategies include the following elements:

Dr. McDougall is Professor of Education at Washington State University

What can you guarantee about an education? If a person learns something as a freshman, what can you guarantee about that when he graduates? I can see the headlines now: "Dartmouth College recalls 350 graduates with defective parts."
Harold Hodgkinson, director, N.I.E.

The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare recently completed a $23,000 research project to discover why children fall off tricycles. The result was a fascinating determination that tots fall off their trikes either because they run into things or because they lose their balance. NIEA Review
In Washington State, enthusiastic advocates of social studies contend that young people need deep insights into their national and state heritage and firm loyalty to both values. These people further contend that we in Washington State who acquire information about man’s continuing struggle for freedom will develop a sense of personal dedication and loyalty to free institutions. Such young people will obtain an abiding faith in their American heritage and will accept responsibility for preserving and improving the ideals represented. Truly, these noble sentiments should be inherent in the 1977 Washington State social studies program. Unfortunately, many educators and community people do not believe that the social studies program in our state's public schools is serving these goals and ideals. Thus for the first time in many years we are beginning to hear concerns about social studies and what should be the goals of this program; concerns which seem to be a spinoff of the "Back to Basics" movement locally and nationally.

With the above in mind, Dr. Les Cummins of the Bethel School District and ESD 121 conducted a survey in November in King and Pierce counties of elementary social studies programs. The reason for this survey was closely aligned with the question of whether social studies teachers in these two counties at the primary and intermediate levels are using their respective social studies district guides in relation to their instructional strategies and methodologies in the classroom.

The content of the survey covered three topics. The first was the textbook/guide being used, the second was whether or not visitors were allowed and/or welcome in their respective social studies classroom, and the third was the inservice processes being used by the teachers. A breakdown of survey results is as follows:

1. Use of a district social studies guide at the primary level.
   Response: Yes - 25
   No - 27
   No Response - 13

   Of the 25 primary teachers who responded "Yes," the guides in use were: Holt (6), Silver Burdett (5), and Allyn & Bacon (3). Other guides which received one response each were:
   Macmillan
   Auburn School District
   SRA
   Highline School District
   Carnation Company
   Addison Wesley
   Seattle Public Schools.

2. Use of a district social studies guide at the intermediate level.
   Response: Yes - 22
   No - 24
   No Response - 19

   Of the 22 intermediate teachers who responded "Yes," the guides in use were:
   Holt, Rinehart and Winston (5), Follett (4), Silver Burdett (3). Two districts reported the use of more than one guide and one response each was reported for the following guides:
   Holt
   Auburn School District
   Highline School District
   Allyn & Bacon
   Nystrom - Carnation Company
   Macmillan
   SRA

3. Welcome of visitors in the social studies classroom.
   Response: Yes - 36
   No - 13
   No Response - 16

4. Inservice processes used for social studies teachers.
   Response: Twenty-five respondents indicated that they used some time of process, including consultants hired by the publisher, inservice meeting with author, district level grade meetings and limited inservice with social studies data bank materials.

Of the 36 school districts in Educational Service District 121, 16 districts were represented by those who responded.

The primary object of this survey was to open the door to the attention of the curriculum needs and concerns in Washington State's social studies curriculum. In the area of scope and sequence which will be of major concern to future social studies curriculum committees, outdated content and interpretations will be discarded. This will mean breaking with traditions that have no pertinence to modern problems. Solutions which will resolve in new social studies curriculum rests heavily on the willingness of the instructional staffs to adopt new social studies conceptualizations and to experiment with new curriculum structures. This survey, by giving random sample data dealing with district guides, visitors to the classroom and inservice processes used, plus current materials and textbooks is a big step in achieving new and current attitudes, values, and concepts in social studies that are relevant to today's youth and the society in which they will be leaders.

In conclusion, this recent social studies survey provided a broad perspective of the various curriculum activities in this important instructional area. It can be assumed that future programs in Washington State will be identified by new approaches to citizenship and principles of local, state and federal government.

For copies of the complete elementary social studies survey, please contact Dr. James J. Kiefert, Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Service District 121, 1410 South 22nd St., Seattle, WA 98148. Phone 206-2429400.

Dr. Kiefert is the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Service District No. 121. Mr. Keus is the Administrative Assistant for Instruction in the same office.
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