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Meaningful curriculum development comes about when there is an increased awareness about the Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy.

# The leadership hierarchy in school-based curriculum development

by  
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Activities involving curriculum development have never been greater than at the present time. Many school districts have intensified their efforts in becoming more efficient and effective in producing quality students. Two things are vital for dynamic curriculum development: (1) knowledge of specific steps involved in curriculum development and (2) understanding of the leadership roles played by people needed in carrying out the steps of curriculum development.

While there has never been universal agreement on the exact steps of curriculum development, there is general agreement that curriculum development involves goals, scope and sequence charts, curriculum guides, objectives and some form of evaluation. Even when school districts are somewhat familiar with the steps of curriculum development, however, major breakdowns have occurred when school districts attempt to implement some or all of the steps of curriculum development without a leadership model or plan.

The Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy<sup>1</sup> illustrated in Figure 1 is divided into four spheres: Sphere 1 includes superintendent, curriculum director, curriculum steering committee and curriculum subject area committee; Sphere 2 includes consultants; Sphere 3 includes building

level administrators; and Sphere 4 includes school board members, lay citizens and students.

The Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy illustrates (1) who is directly and indirectly involved in curriculum development, (2) the lines of responsibility between and among curriculum leaders and (3) those people affected by curriculum development activities—from superintendent to the patrons in the community. The superintendent, curriculum director, curriculum steering committee and subject area committees have direct leadership responsibilities for curriculum development.

School board members, lay citizens and students play an important but less direct role in the curriculum development processes. The consultants and building level administrators have a special relationship with all of the people involved in the curriculum development hierarchy. Each play a vital role in assisting all curriculum workers become more effective in their jobs.

## Sphere One: The superintendent's role in curriculum development

The role of the superintendent is critical in the total development of school-based curriculum. The entire school looks to the superintendent for leadership. Directly or indirectly, the superintendent establishes an environment which extends or restricts the kind and number of opportunities for participating in curriculum development activities. As a consequence, it is vitally important that the superintendent have: (1) A complete understanding of curriculum leadership hierarchy, (2) the capacity to share and delegate responsibilities and (3) the ability to exhibit leadership when monitoring the various steps of curriculum development.

The superintendent must be able to exhibit strong leadership without dominating or smothering emerging leadership in the curriculum structure. The enthusiasm and excitement shown toward curriculum development by faculty is often in direct proportion to the enthusiasm and excitement shown by curriculum leaders. Support of staff through released time, materials, finance and personal encouragement will significantly affect the efficiency and effectiveness of curriculum workers.

If the superintendent perceives curriculum development as **change**—change in terms of positive student growth, then that top administrator must be an agent who fosters and channels that change in an orderly and meaningful fashion. This orderly and meaningful change comes about when the superintendent exercises the skill of shared decision making among those people affected by the curriculum. Curriculum development becomes most effective when those affected by the curriculum share in the creation of that curriculum. Without shared decision making, curriculum development remains in the hands of the superintendent or a small number of faculty members. The administrator's ability to orchestrate all other components in the cooperative decision-making process is vitally important.

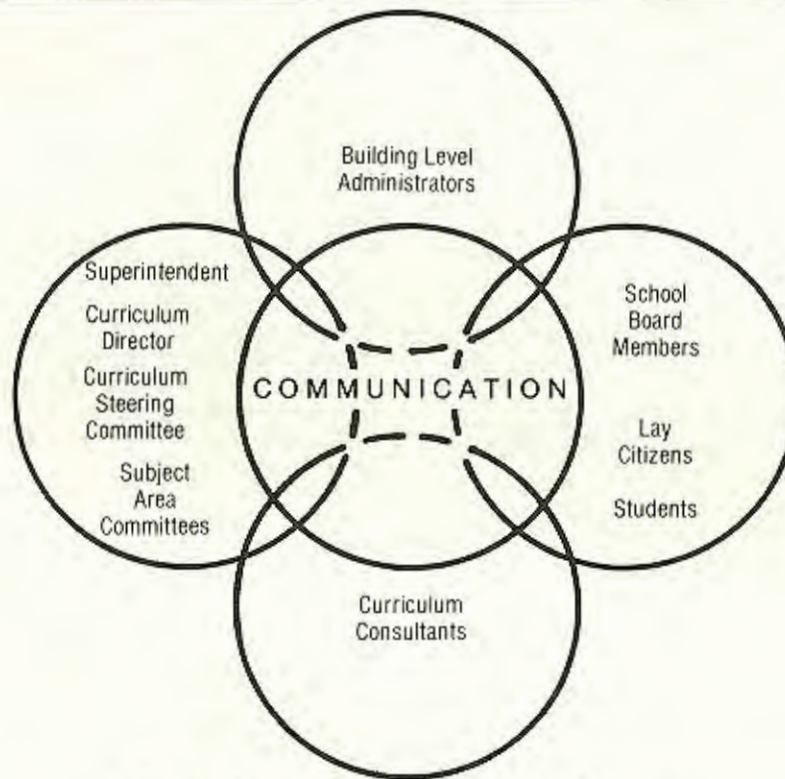
## The curriculum director's role in curriculum development

The curriculum director is designated as the individual who is responsible for coordinating curriculum development activities. While this person is ultimately responsible to the superintendent, the major leadership responsibilities call for implementing and monitoring the major steps of curriculum development.

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Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy Spheres  
Figure 1

In small or rural schools, the superintendent of a school district may often serve two roles—that of a superintendent and that of a curriculum director. In this situation, it is extremely important for the superintendent to recognize this dual responsibility.

Major responsibilities assumed by the curriculum director include:

1. Scheduling those activities which deal with the basic steps of curriculum development.
2. Serving as curriculum resource person to teachers who need assistance in specific subject matter areas, or in locating resources for use by teachers.
3. Interacting with teachers on curriculum issues. The curriculum director should be responsible for alerting faculty to issues which address current problems in the curriculum.
4. Insuring that the curriculum is being implemented according to the basic curriculum plans developed by the school district.
5. Keeping records of the actions and/or decisions of the various curriculum study groups.
6. Insuring that curriculum guides are being utilized in the total curriculum process. This responsibility includes regular evaluation activities aimed at determining the value of the curriculum guide and how the guide can be improved.
7. Implementing evaluation activities which assess the curriculum's total effectiveness. The development of evaluation tools may be part of this responsibility.

8. Securing the services of consultants when necessary to assist other curriculum workers in dealing with curriculum problems and work.
9. Reporting directly and regularly to the superintendent about the progress being made in curriculum development activities.
10. Serving as liaison to building-level administrators, parents, school board, lay people and students. The role of a curriculum liaison allows the curriculum director to identify issues and problems which can be acted upon.

In many respects, the curriculum director must possess characteristics similar to the superintendent. This person must be committed to shared decision making which allows curriculum workers to provide input when decisions are made about the curriculum. The curriculum director must have ability to (1) communicate well without dominating or alienating other curriculum workers, (2) stimulate others in the importance of curriculum work by both word and deed and (3) assume direct and indirect leadership roles as the curriculum development situation demands.

If the superintendent holds dual positions—administrator and curriculum director, then an equal amount of professional workload must be allocated to the function of the curriculum director as well as that of superintendent. This "juggling act" is extremely difficult for rural and small school administrators. However, the role of the curriculum director is as important as the role of the superintendent in the Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy.



### **The Curriculum Steering Committee's role in curriculum development**

These K-12 committee members are either elected or selected representatives of the total faculty and deal directly with curriculum issues. The Curriculum Steering Committee is usually responsible to the curriculum director who establishes the curriculum agenda.

The cooperation between the curriculum director and curriculum steering committee is extremely important. The combined leadership skills of the curriculum director and curriculum steering committee affect the total curriculum structure of the school district. Responsibilities and tasks of the curriculum steering committee are jointly determined by the curriculum director and committee members. They include the following:

1. Serving as a sounding board for faculty members who identify curriculum issues which need to be addressed by the school district.
2. Participating and guiding faculty in planning the basic components of the curriculum—goals, competencies, objectives, scope and sequence and curriculum guides.
3. Determining steps which need to be initiated to improve the curriculum.
4. Editing materials written by the faculty and writing documents which relate to the basic components of the curriculum.
5. Collecting information which evaluates how well the curriculum is being implemented (e.g., The use of surveys which include teachers, students, school board members and parents.).
6. Developing and implementing evaluation measures in cooperation with the curriculum director (e.g., follow-up studies which measure how well goals are being achieved by the school.).

The structure of the steering committee is extremely important. The steering committee members should be composed of teachers representing the various grade levels found in the entire school district (K-12). In many instances, we see school districts with two steering committees—one at the elementary level and one at the secondary level. This kind of dual structure often hinders or prevents communication when teachers are trying to solve problems which affect the total school district. A single steering committee structure in the Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy is usually more desirable.

The selection or election of the steering committee is also extremely important to the success of curriculum development. The committee should be composed of teachers who are willing to (1) accept responsibility, (2) demonstrate leadership skills among their peers and (3) exhibit human relation skills which include providing information and listening at critical points in the curriculum communication process. Obviously, the most important qualification is that of professional competence.

### **The Subject Area Committees' role in curriculum development**

The subject area committees, by design, should have a close relationship with the steering committee. The subject area committees are the curriculum workers in the Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy. As was the case in the steering committee, K-12 faculty representation should be

present on each subject committee. Except those subject areas taught solely at the junior/senior high school (e.g. business education). Subject area committee members are actively involved in determination of district goals, subject goals, scope and sequence charts and development of curriculum guides. Each subject committee's success at these tasks is vitally important to the total functioning of the other steps in school curriculum development.

As a consequence, the curriculum director and steering committee must orient subject area committees to their tasks and identify the importance of the subject area committees in the Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy. Two major understandings which must be perceived by the subject area committees are: (1) curriculum change is a deliberate and systematic process; and (2) broad-based or shared decision-making is a major principle in curriculum development.

A major curriculum strategy which insures the effectiveness of subject area committees is the amount of working time made available to them. Regularly scheduled meetings with specific and detailed directions from the curriculum director and steering committee is imperative to insure the success of these committees. However, when these responsibilities are added on to the existing responsibilities without adequate provision of time, the tasks of the subject area committees become burdensome.

### **Sphere Two: The role of the consultant in curriculum development**

Schools which employ an outside curriculum consultant should understand the role of a consultant. Curriculum consultants should provide assistance with the process of curriculum development. They do not produce the products found in the curriculum. Consultants aid the school district participants in making decisions. Decisions are not made by the consultants. Consultants suggest alternative solutions to problems; they do not solve the problems for the district.

Effective, efficient school curriculum leaders make prudent and regular use of consultants. Often the consultant can initiate activities which are difficult or impossible for the administrator or curriculum director. Essentially, the consultants can play two vital roles in the total Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy: They can (1) provide orientation to faculty on curriculum development steps and procedures, or suggest alternatives; and (2) orchestrate the school district activities involving one or more of the major steps of the curriculum.

Personal and professional qualities in consultants should be considered when involving them in the curriculum leadership. Curriculum consultants should possess the following competencies or qualities:

1. a philosophical commitment to curriculum development as a long-term process rather than short term or single activity process.
2. credibility as a teacher and leader whose curriculum concerns are student-oriented.
3. human relation skills which permit a harmonious working relationship with the total staff rather than only a working relationship with administration or curriculum director.



### **Sphere Three: building-level administrators**

The role of the building-level administrator has been underestimated in the past. This person serves a key role as both a facilitator and guide to teachers in the building. First, the building-level administrator must provide a support environment for the teachers who are engaged in curriculum development. Teachers often feel uncomfortable with curriculum development since they do not have in-depth knowledge about the specifics of curriculum. The administrator must do everything possible to help the teachers feel secure in their activities. In both action and deed, the administrator must communicate support for their activities. A major method of communicating this support is reinforcement for expended energies. The rewards for curriculum work are not always highly visible to teachers. When an administrator is able to recognize quality work through some form of verbal or written reinforcement, curriculum productivity is likely to be higher.

Second, the building-level administrator must model the enthusiasm needed for curriculum work. If teachers recognize administrator's high interest and enthusiasm, they are more apt to model those same behaviors. Likewise, if indifference and disdain are modeled, teachers are more likely to exhibit those qualities.

Third, the building-level administrator often plays a key role in facilitating the total communication process between elementary and secondary teachers. Often false barriers have been created between these two groups; the building administrator can help bring these two groups of people together in discussions or activities.

Fourth, one of the most important skills exhibited by the building-level administrator is knowledge about the total curriculum development process. Answering questions and discussing curriculum issues with teachers are vitally important. At times, his/her knowledge of the steps of curriculum are as important as those of anyone else in the Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy. Teachers perceive administrators as models. As a consequence, the building-level administrator must show leadership by answering questions or insuring that teachers get their questions answered during curriculum activities.

### **Sphere Four: The role of the school board in curriculum development**

School board participation in the curriculum development process is obviously essential in the school district. Since this governing body makes many decisions which will affect the school district, its involvement and awareness of the Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy as it relates to curriculum development may be as important or more important than any of its other responsibilities. The superintendent and curriculum director are directly responsible for keeping the school board regularly informed about curriculum problems and issues which need to be addressed. School board members should not take a direct leadership role in the curriculum development process, but they should be a functioning, contributing body. Perhaps a major role school board members have is to ask questions about the curriculum and curriculum development processes. Securing answers to questions about the extent to which faculty are involved in curriculum development, the content of the curriculum at various levels, and the resources needed for curriculum improvement would aid them in making decisions about needed support. The financial and moral support and understanding of the school board is the pivotal factor in the success of curriculum development.

### **The role of lay citizens in curriculum development**

Lay citizen participation in curriculum development is paramount for all school districts. The degree of lay citizen participation in the school district, however, is heavily dependent on the financial social-economic make-up of the community. Lay citizens involvement in the curriculum, as in the case of student involvement, should be regular and systematic. Lay citizens should play an important role in determining the "what" of curriculum but not the "how" of curriculum. Their participation in the setting of goals for the district is essential. Their role should not be one of domination or control of the other curriculum committees. Equally important, the role of lay citizens in the curriculum development process should not be one of tokenism. Their orientation to curriculum development and participation on the various subject committees can be invaluable in contributing to the establishment of a quality curriculum.

### **The role of students in curriculum development**

Needless to say, the role of students in the Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy has been historically controversial. In theory, curriculum experts have regularly advocated student involvement in curriculum development. In practice, however, student involvement in curriculum development has been limited. Irrespective of the problems associated with student participation in the curriculum, it is important in broad-based curriculum development.

The degree of student involvement should be monitored carefully. Under normal circumstances, students neither have the experience nor the knowledge to be the primary decision makers in the curriculum. However, students do possess an overwhelming amount of information which can be used in the total curriculum process. Student involvement should be regular and systematic. It is essential that the students should not perceive their involvement or role in curriculum development as one of tokenism. The fear of student involvement often stems from the difficulty of channeling student input in a constructive manner. This does not need to be the case. Carefully channeled student input can lead to a great sense of curriculum involvement and appreciation by those people who are most directly affected by it.

### **Ensuing results of proper implementation of the hierarchy**

Overall, four results are obtained from proper implementation of the Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy in curriculum development:

1. The school district recognizes the importance of specific leadership roles needed in curriculum development.
2. The school recognizes the lines of responsibility between and among the leaders in curriculum development.
3. Curriculum fragmentation or stagnation is isolated at the point at which it is occurring in the curriculum development steps or leadership hierarchy.
4. Improved communication and relationships between among curriculum workers involved in the curriculum results from knowing how curriculum leaders can and should function.

Meaningful curriculum development comes about when there is an increased awareness about the Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy. Those school districts which



spend time identifying, creating and implementing the Curriculum Leadership Hierarchy have found curriculum work much more efficient and enjoyable.

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