



Standards For School Library Services at the District Level

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THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY of school libraries, the work of state and district supervisors has been one of the most important and effective elements in the development and improvement of school libraries. It is generally true that places having the benefits of supervisory services show a greater degree of achievement, both in number and quality of school library programs, than do those without them. In upgrading library conditions in school buildings, supervisors have been assisted by state, regional, and national standards, quantitative as well as qualitative, but they have not had this full spectrum of support for their own offices. Statements of policy and standards pertaining to supervision have been almost entirely qualitative in nature. Qualitative principles, representing programs and services as they do, are more significant than quantitative measures, but the means to the ends are also essential. Hopefully, the day may come when quantitative standards do not have to be formulated for school library programs at any operational level, but that day is not within the immediate future. It is somewhat ironic that supervisors who have contributed so successfully to the development of school libraries and to the formulation of state, regional, and other standards for libraries in schools have usually had to work under very trying conditions in their own headquarters, with insufficient staff, funds, resources and facilities.

It would indeed be useful to present quantitative standards for district centers that could help in implementing qualitative principles which already exist, but unfortunately this cannot be done at this time. The plans first outlined for the current revision of the national standards for school media programs included the formulation of quantitative standards for library services at the district level, but

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the original intent was tabled for several reasons. The many variables affecting the provision and nature of district supervisory services make it difficult to interpret with confidence the facts currently available about supervisory offices; nor can these facts be translated into standards or formulas applicable to all situations. Furthermore, this is a period of great flux and activity in state, regional, and multidistrict planning, much of it motivated by Federal legislation, which will affect conditions at the district level and the facilities needed for district services. The results, especially those coming from demonstration and innovative programs, will conceivably provide evidence for a series of recommendations for quantitative standards for district centers, grouped by size of audience served or by type of organizational plan. The treatment of the data obtained from these developments will involve a research design requiring considerable time and effort in order to provide reliable guidelines and to establish valid quantitative standards. The data needed go beyond the facts obtained through normative surveys of the status quo.

The Joint Standards Committee made the decision to delay quantitative recommendations for district supervisory services with less reluctance than might otherwise have been the case because of two policies that have met with the general approval of the Committee. The first is the proposal that a series of publications dealing with national standards be issued, with the first document emphasizing the library (media center) in the school building and later ones concentrating on larger organizational units and on special aspects of media programs, such as computerized instructional assistance.

The second policy recognizes the quick obsolescence of many standards and the need for continuous revision. Although any of the innumerable social, educational, economic, and demographic changes occurring in society affect school library services in varying degrees, some that have the most immediate bearing on the need for revising standards include the imminent appearance of new media forms and processes, shifts in patterns of school district organization, emerging philosophies about learning processes, the new role of the teacher in the environment of learning, and changes in instructional methods and resources. Standards must thus be continuously revised to reflect the changes and to meet the educational needs of the times. So vast and complex have become the services, resources and facilities related to the evaluation, selection, implementation, production and utilization of the resources of teaching and learning that a permanent office

of standards, staffed by specialists, could profitably be established. Functions of this office would include the revision of national standards on an annual or biennial basis, the undertaking of research needed for the formulation of standards, the implementation of standards, and the preparation of releases reporting developments affecting, interpreting, or supplementing standards.

The immediate and prospective changes that have been indicated have particular relevance for library services at the district level. In any discussion of district supervision, one is immediately confronted by a serious dilemma: the necessity to provide for the immediate situation and the equally imperative need to recognize the new patterns of organizational planning that are currently emerging and will become increasingly more common. The commentary that follows first notes current trends relating to the subject of standards for district services, and then continues with a consideration of possible future trends stemming from projected plans for regional development.

The most common base of organization for supervisory services is the school district. The size of these single districts varies in student population and in geographical area and frequently shapes the scope and organizational plan for supervision, as in the case of large cities or county systems. Situations where supervisory offices serve more than one school district represent different arrangements: the intermediate unit, the county unit, boards of cooperative services, projects funded by state and Federal grants, and others. All have objectives in common. The activities and services of school library supervision are treated elsewhere in this publication and will not be repeated here; it is important, however, to recognize that they represent qualitative standards for district services.

Among the current trends affecting or involving standards for district library services are the following:

1. National standards have long stressed the importance of and necessity for district services. There has been a commendable growth in the number of districts providing these services, and the increase steadily continues. Nevertheless, the number is quite small in the total school picture, and many of the established district centers have only a partial program of service. The trend is positive, but slow.

2. The 1960 standards recommended that systems having "five to seven or more schools with enrollments of 200 or more students" will

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find it "advantageous for the schools to have the services and facilities of school library supervision."¹ The principle of this standard—the desirability and value of supervisory services—is still sound. Responses to inquiry in the field have indicated that quantitative recommendations would be more useful if expressed solely in terms of student populations or if geared in some way to enrollment. (The suggestion has been made that it will be possible in the future to report standards for all types of school library services in terms of 100,000 students.)

The problem of the extremely small school district still remains a critical one. Local arrangements for some form of cooperative educational services involving two or more school districts would seem to be the most feasible procedure to follow; instances of these have grown within the last few years. Schools in the very small school districts are frequently the ones most in need of supervisory services. They have been and will continue to be helped in those states providing supervisory services at the state levels, but helpful though this type of assistance is, it does not take the place of functional and continuous district supervision.

3. The move toward a unified program, covering both print and audio-visual resources and services and with a single administrative head, has been accelerating at the district level. The rationale for the unified program is both obvious and well-known and needs no elaboration. Future developments will see an increasing number of district programs now having separate audio-visual and school library departments moving into the unified program. All new programs of media services at a district level should begin with this type of administrative organization. The economy and efficiency of the unified program are important factors, but even more significant are the services and their outcomes that implement and accelerate the cross-media approach in the use of resources of teaching and learning. Although unified programs at the state level are not as firmly entrenched as at the district level, such an organizational plan is highly commendable and desirable.

4. That district supervision is a full-time occupation is recognized in principle, if not always in practice. It is to be hoped that one tendency all too commonly found today will soon disappear: that of having the supervisor of school libraries (usually of elementary school libraries) assume supervisory responsibilities in addition to serving as the school librarian in one or more schools. This may be

one way to get either elementary school libraries or the office of supervision (or both) started, but it is poor educational practice.

The full-time district supervisor, no matter what the size of his district may be, needs professional, clerical, and technical assistance. The many kinds of services described in this volume require competent staff in adequate number so that an optimum educational program is assured. The director of the district center needs one or more professional staff members in the following categories: advisory services, materials (selection, evaluation, and utilization of printed and audio-visual materials), technical processing, graphics and production, and television. As the size of the district increases, a larger number of specialists in these categories is needed, and it is possible to have represented among them other specializations and competencies in relation to curricular areas, school grade levels, professional materials for teachers, and instructional technology. The professional staff members must have the assistance of secretarial and clerical aides, technicians, and maintenance and delivery workers. The number required would be determined by the size of the district. In larger situations, a member of the supervisor's staff might be charged with some responsibilities of a business management nature delegated to him by the supervisor.

5. The provision of audio-visual services from district centers has expanded notably during the last decade. In some cases, only a start has been made with resources and services provided for the more traditional materials; others have expanded to a more advanced level, utilizing electronic equipment, computers, television, banks or pools or resources, videotape, and dial access programing. Audio-visual services from the district center have reflected a significant change within recent times, moving from a concentration on distribution activities to one providing educational service for teachers and students.

6. The standard that processing of materials be done on the district level has been put into operation in an ever-growing number of situations. Newer schemes for the organizational patterns of centralized processing are in the exploratory stage. Whatever the plan, the basic philosophy or standard of providing centralized processing and removing these technical tasks and operations from the activities of librarians in schools remains a sound concept. The availability of commercial processing does not change the basic principle of the supervisory services involved. Larger units for processing, which will

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undoubtedly change the current standard of providing centralized processing offices in systems having as few as three schools, will be discussed later.

7. Attention is being given to the content of professional education needed for supervisory personnel and to the expansion of programs where this type of professional preparation can be obtained. Basic professional education is also undergoing careful scrutiny and re-evaluation, and provisions for in-service education have increased. Special certification requirements for supervisory positions are emerging. Although rigid standards for specialized professional education are always difficult and often hazardous to make, some professional direction and evaluation, if not control, are needed. One encouraging trend can be found in the frequently voiced recommendation that emerging programs should neither perpetuate nor create a dichotomy of professional education—one for school librarians and one for audio-visual specialists—and that these programs should be unified. A similar recommendation about certification requirements is also being advocated.

8. The final trend to be noted here has been referred to several times: the current activity in studying, planning, and implementing larger administrative and organizational units for supervisory services. District and state supervisors are actively engaged in shaping the scope and nature of the new planning. Many plans for larger units of service have gone beyond the transitional stage and they are now in operation. The remainder of this paper is concerned with some characteristics of regional planning that affect supervisory services at the district level.

Regional centers form a key element in the plans for larger units of service. Over-all administrative responsibility and control of regional centers can be strictly regional in nature, involving only those school districts within its boundaries. A state-wide plan under the direction of the state department of education and the office of state school library supervision is the most functional arrangement yet projected. (For this and innumerable other reasons, states that do not have state school library supervisors are distinctly handicapped. The full implementation of standards for state supervision is urgently needed.)

The number of regional centers in a state plan would vary, depending on size and density of school population, economic conditions,

legal controls, and geographic factors. For many states, the number would probably be less than ten. The centers would provide a wide variety of services, among them being: advisory, information, and bibliographic services; the evaluation of materials; special programs of in-service education for teachers, librarians, and others concerned with resources and library services for youth; implementation of innovative programs and research projects; centralized processing; production of materials; the provision of supplementary resources for school libraries and for district supervisory centers within the area; and the development of collections of materials for demonstration and examination purposes.

As these centers emerge, the range and nature of services at the district level will be affected. All of the services and resources noted above would directly or indirectly affect the district program, but some would have pronounced influence. Some probable changes include the following:

1. At the district center, emphasis would be increasingly placed on the advisory services given by the supervisors to school personnel in the district, on the development of library programs in the schools, and on the consultant work with other curricular specialists for the district.

2. The state as a unit for centralized processing is receiving consideration on a wide scale. Three types of plans can be noted: for a single processing and cataloging center serving all school libraries in the state; for regional district centers, administered either by the participating school systems or by the state, that would handle all processing and cataloging for the schools within the area of the district center; and for a state-administered arrangement with a single center handling cataloging procedures but with the regional centers doing the processing of materials.

3. Collections of materials maintained at the district level would be affected by the installation of regional centers: resources that supplement the collections in the school libraries, professional materials for teachers, and specialized materials. The most important criterion for determining which materials are located where (in the school library, the district center, or the regional center) is service, involving frequency of use and demand, accessibility, and convenience for the user. Additional factors affecting the range of materials available at the various levels include efficiency of delivery

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service, availability of facsimile transmission apparatus and services, and other conditions that make possible quick transference of materials.

Backstop resource collections will be needed for such resources as rare, archival, and infrequently used materials. The exact scope and coverage of the collections of resources at district levels cannot be precisely indicated at this time. Research is needed to determine what kinds of materials students and teachers use, what materials they would use if they were available or if they knew about them, and the frequency and immediacy of this use or need. Research is also needed before any decisions can be made about cooperative relationships between regional district centers for school libraries and centers for networks involving other kinds of libraries.

Regardless of whether the regional centers are under state or local (i.e., multi-district) control, state planning seems imperative. The regional centers might specialize in certain subject areas or follow some other form of concentration to serve the state as a whole; this would be in addition to meeting the ongoing requirements of the clientele in the regional district's area. Unless the materials are needed and used, duplication of collections among the regional centers is pointless.

The center most directly affected by these developments in the future would probably be the one at the district level, where supplementary and other collections of resources for teachers and students could be considerably reduced. The district centers would serve as the clearing-house between building and regional media centers in obtaining many needed materials.

4. Evaluation of materials constitutes another area of change. Although evaluation of materials has been done at the district level in many situations, particularly in metropolitan and other large school districts, many activities of this nature continue at the building level. Quantity of output, specialized competencies required in reliable reviewing, and inaccessibility of material for examination make it impossible for librarians in schools to do initial reviewing of material, even if they had the time available for this undertaking. Selection of materials, of course, remains the responsibility of the school librarians, but selection from materials that have already been evaluated. Again, the changes in this area are emerging and gradual. Many district staff members are as handicapped by the factors noted above in successfully evaluating materials as are the librarians in the schools.

Even so, they must assume the major responsibility, turning to other sources and agencies. As planning takes shape, evaluation of materials will gravitate toward the large organizational units, and ultimately will be contained within the framework of a bibliographic apparatus with national and regional centers. Evaluation of materials takes very specialized competencies of many kinds and requires the attention of full-time critic-specialists, knowledgeable about subject disciplines, the processes of learning and teaching, curriculum developments, the users of media, and the characteristics and uses of media. All of these developments will increase the opportunities for school librarians and professional members of the district supervisory staff to serve in the fullest degree as materials specialists and resource consultants in their own situations.

5. In this day of incredibly rapid technological change, pronouncements about size of operational unit for media services and resources can be sheer folly. The only safe principle to advance is that it is essential for district supervisors to be aware of change, to be flexible enough to adapt to change quickly, to experiment, and to build a philosophy that accepts the expense of obsolescence. What are the optimum units for television and videotapes? For banks or pools of information and resources? For dial access and computerized instructional materials? For films? For microform? For supplementary collections of printed resources? As some school districts struggle to get these materials and services on a district basis, others are enlarging the collections of these resources at the building library level (for example, films, television, microform, and professional materials for teachers), and still others plan in terms of regional units. Only research and accumulated experience can provide answers to these and many other questions. Planning new designs for organizational structure and for service units is an important activity, and is characteristic of all aspects of education, not just school libraries.

In summary, the structural form implied in current planning can be presented in chart form. This schematic chart contains some developments that are in an initial planning stage, some that have not gone beyond talking and conjecture, and some that are now in operation. In order to stress the importance of unified programs, the terminology used in the following chart refers to media centers and the lines represent channels of communication and services.

Whatever directions are taken, district supervisors will be actively involved in shaping them and in developing valid standards for their

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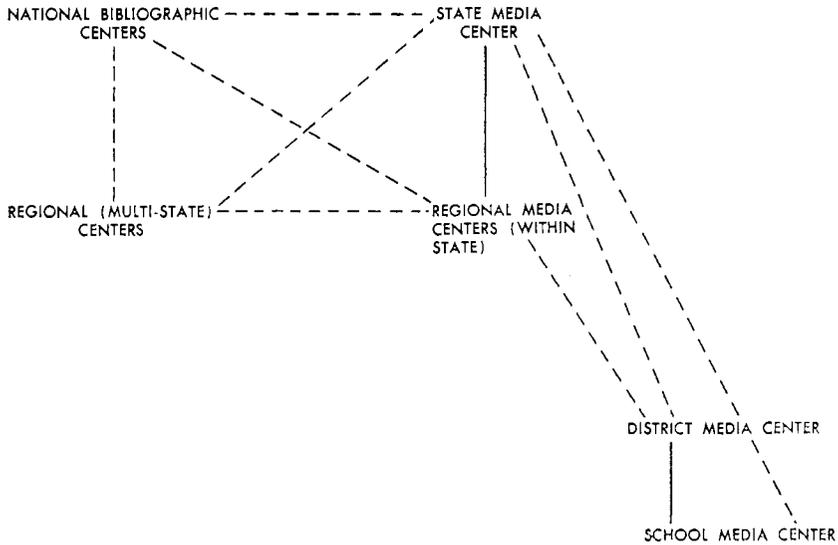


Figure 1.

implementation and evaluation. Their offices are now and will continue to be functional and important units in the total structure of education for youth.

Reference

1. American Association of School Librarians. *Standards for School Library Programs*. Chicago, ALA, 1960, p. 42.