



The Webster Parish, Louisiana, Program

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IN LOUISIANA THE PUBLIC SCHOOL administrative unit is, with two exceptions, co-extensive with the political unit, the parish. Predominantly rural Webster Parish, in the northwestern section, is fairly typical of the sixty-four parishes in the state. The parish superintendent is the administrative head of the public school system, whose affairs are governed by a parish school board. Members of the board are elected and the superintendent is appointed by the board. The supervisory staff is appointed by the board after nomination by the superintendent. In Webster Parish the staff consists of three instructional supervisors, a supervisor of guidance services, an attendance supervisor, a lunchroom supervisor, and a supervisor of library and instructional materials services. With the availability of Federal funds other staff members with responsibility to the Federal program have been employed at the parish level. An assistant superintendent has responsibility for building maintenance and for transportation; a maintenance staff functions at the parish level. The administrative head of each school is the principal.

The Louisiana public school administrative pattern is particularly suited to system-level programs. The unit is large enough to justify assignment of personnel to a program and also to require careful planning. It is small enough to permit initiation of a promising program with what may be a comparatively modest investment of personnel and funds.

The program discussed in this paper relates to supervision of library services with responsibility for all related services. This cumbersome description became abbreviated to "Materials Center" from the name given to the building which originally provided an office for the supervisor and housed the "related services." The term was commonly used by school personnel to refer to the entire program.

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Any interest which may attach to Webster's program is probably explained by a few conspicuous elements in the situation: Webster's averageness and typicality (not only within Louisiana, but also within a larger area), the modesty of the program particularly at its beginning, and its history, beginning in 1949.

In the files of the Center is a copy of a letter from the present author dated October 24, 1949, which is relevant to the initiation of the program.* Addressed to sixty-four parish and three city superintendents of schools in Louisiana, the letter stated the writer's interest in and availability for "a parish or city-wide service in materials for use in schools." It predicted that such a service could provide opportunity for pre-purchase examination and evaluation of materials, and that "upon request" books and materials could be processed centrally for individual schools; furthermore, beginning or untrained librarians could be supervised, and professional materials could be made available on loan to teachers. Such a service should be offered only "if a need for it is felt" and a local person, if interested, should receive first consideration in appointment. The letter concluded that selection of teaching materials was the responsibility of the classroom teacher with full information about funds currently available from all sources.

The interested reply to this letter from the superintendent in Webster Parish was not entirely unpredictable. Some months earlier the members of the Board in that parish had questioned the desirability of renewing the contract then in effect with the Webster Parish (public) Library whereby it provided supervisory and related school library services. The contract had been renewed annually for some twenty years, and although the quality of the services rendered had never been in doubt, a change of philosophy in regard to administrative responsibility led to a re-evaluation of the existing arrangement. The conclusion was that such services should be provided within the administrative structure of the school system. Thus the letter of October 24 revealed the availability of a professional able to implement the policy of the Board. As a result, the writer of the letter was employed and July 1, 1950, was set as the date for the introduction of a revised pattern of school library supervision and related services in Webster.

It is interesting to compare the implications of this letter, written

* The author was at that time a former state supervisor of school libraries, a position from which she had recently resigned.

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eighteen years ago, with the realities of the situation to which it led. Emphasis upon school library service seemed remarkably slight; instead there was stress on a concept of library service as a service in all instructional materials, relating library acquisition strongly to classroom teaching. Actually, in Webster the emphasis upon supervision of school library services and the performance of services at the system level in support of the school library have strongly characterized the program, and the teacher has continued to influence acquisition.

Since the schools in Webster were accustomed to centralized processing of library materials it was not necessary to wait for "request" to continue such a service. Similarly, while the concept of providing a service only upon the recognition of a "felt need" was adhered to as far as possible, this actually represents a dilemma which those in education must always face: until a service has been experienced it may not be recognized as needed, and it cannot be truly experienced unless it is in full operation. The initiation of a program, or change in an established program, can require courage and conviction.

By the end of 1950, the Webster Parish program was well established. A Webster Parish Schools *Bulletin* dated September 1950 states: ¹

Through action of the Webster Parish School Board, the services of a Materials Center have been provided for the schools of the parish. It is located in the basement of the home economics building on the grounds of Minden High School. . . . Teachers are invited to visit it, to use its services, and to plan the direction the services will take.

At the Center are (1) books and other materials which are being processed for inclusion in the school libraries of the parish, (2) books and other materials which are considered to be the property of the system rather than of any one school and which may be borrowed for school use, (3) sample books and other materials supplied by publishers and distributors for examination and evaluation, (4) professional materials in education, (5) samples of free and inexpensive materials, (6) tools for the identification and selection of materials.

The function of the Center, as it is now conceived, is (1) to continue the service in centralized processing of library materials which was formerly provided under contractual agreement by the Webster Parish Library, (2) to help coordinate library services in the individual schools, (3) to supplement school library services in ways

in which a need for supplement may be felt. . . . Services of the Center will take direction determined by an advisory council made up of the school librarians of the parish and teacher representatives chosen by each faculty.

A description of Webster's program appeared in the fall 1951 number of *The Bulletin of the Louisiana Library Association*,² one year after the initiation of the program. There were at that time more than 9,000 students enrolled in the schools of the parish: high schools, elementary schools, schools with a grade span of one through twelve, and small elementary schools with one, two, or three teachers. Qualified librarians served in all except the smaller schools and in these a teacher was designated as responsible for the administration of materials. The greatest distance between the town of Minden, where parish school offices were located, and any one of the schools of the system was approximately thirty-five miles. Textbooks, miscellaneous items such as modeling clay, tempera paints, and class registers had been placed at the Center, and their handling was the joint responsibility of the supervisor of instruction and the school library supervisor who was director of the Center.

The space occupied by the Center consisted of four areas, the largest of which was a room sixty by twenty feet. Here loan and examination collections were housed and books and materials were processed centrally. The room second in size was used to house textbooks and a third, still smaller, was for storage and supplies. The fourth area housed a truck which served the school lunch program as well. Fortunately the space was at ground level, while small windows, placed well toward the ceiling, permitted shelving of standard height. Pipes near the ceiling and laid parallel to it were "excellent equipment for the display of maps and charts."

At this time there were two sources of funds for materials, the state appropriation and the parish appropriation. Certain policies had been developed in regard to expenditures. Selection for purchase was a school-level responsibility. All materials supporting teaching, learning, and the general program of the school were to be equally considered. A materials committee chosen from each faculty was to decide upon a broad design of spending under each appropriation. For the small elementary schools the supervisor of library services was to coordinate purchasing, since they were served from a special collection maintained for them at the Center from which they might borrow freely.

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In processing materials, the policy then followed was to process for all schools at least through accession, suggestion of classification, and provision of catalog card sets, processing being completed only for those schools which requested it. There was an attempt at simplification. The accession number was to be used for identification on book cards and pockets rather than full typing of classification, author, title, and accession number. Wilson card sets were purchased for those books for which they were available and card sets were stenciled for others, but delivery of books and other materials to the school was not delayed for receipt of Wilson cards or completion of stenciled sets, both of which were sent at a later time. Non-book materials were accessioned in the number sequence with books.

The Council advisory to the Center represented the Center's relationship to the schools of the parish. Ex-officio members of the Council were the parish superintendent and the parish supervisor of instruction. Projects and activities were to be undertaken with the advice and at the suggestion of the Council and other groups such as the librarians who met periodically at the Center, the principals, or the materials committees of the various schools. One such cooperative decision, for instance, was that scheduled library attendance by elementary classes was to be discontinued; instead, individuals and committees were to be free to go to the library at any time, and materials were to be sent to the classroom for use there for the length of time for which they might be needed.

A second article describing the Materials Center and its program appeared eight years later in *The Bulletin of the Louisiana Library Association*.³ By 1959 twenty-five schools were served (the smaller schools had been consolidated), with an enrollment of approximately ten thousand. The staff consisted of one professional—the supervisor—one clerical worker and one part-time typist. An average of five thousand books had been processed annually during the nine years of the Center's existence.

The 1959 report serves as a commentary on the 1951 article. For example, the reference to accession numbers in the earlier article was explained: ⁴

Let it be understood that an accession *book* is not used, at either the Center or at the school. As a book is received at the Center it is given a number in a series which applies system-wide. An automatic numberer is used to imprint the number on the title page and on the corresponding order slip; at a local print shop numbers are

imprinted serially on book pockets and book cards, four or five thousand being prepared at one time. . . . This use of an accession number instead of "copy 1," "copy 2," and so on, means that it is not necessary to maintain an acquisitions file at the Center.

Acceptance of the responsibility for textbook administration called for this further comment:⁵

To many librarians this phase of the work of the Center truly is in need of justification. In Webster it is felt that there is sufficient unity in the textbook and library programs to relate them under one administration. . . . Responsibility for textbooks certainly strengthens identification [of library services] with the whole program of education.

Certain practices reported in 1951 are conspicuous by their omission in the 1959 article. The practice of allowing some variation in the completion of processing at the school had been abandoned. Classification had become firmly fixed rather than "suggested." The ill-advised attempt to simplify by using only the accession number as identification had been dropped and full typing became the practice. The stenciling of cards in addition to the Wilson sets proved to be expensive in card spoilage and in time required for stencil storage and location. Stenciling was discontinued and a single typed card prepared instead, and the librarian in the school expanded the card into a set.

The 1959 article makes no mention of a further decision regarding the processing of non-book materials. Because school library acquisitions of this type were comparatively infrequent, and because complete processing (without authoritative decisions sources) was almost prohibitively expensive in time for a small staff, such decisions were postponed—perhaps unwisely. It was recommended that a simple "nonbook inventory file" be maintained by the librarian in each school. At the present time non-book items for the school library are being acquired in such quantity that decisions about their processing can no longer be postponed. This extension of service is now a foremost concern of central processing in Webster.

Unscheduled library attendance at the elementary level was not mentioned in 1959. The perhaps summary decision to abandon scheduling in all schools resulted in a sharp decline in library attendance in some. Consequently the policy was modified to fit individual schools, although operation without a fixed schedule has

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been held to be a desirable long-range goal. Nor is there further mention of the system-wide Council advisory to the Center. This was a promising development, and while the *spirit* of the Council has been preserved, a Council in fact is no longer a recognizable entity. Loan collections are more specifically identified than in the earlier article, including filmstrips, recordings, and miscellaneous items such as anatomical models, a planetarium, and a model of an engine.

Since Webster was the only parish in the state at that time in which central processing was offered as a service within the administrative structure of public education, the 1959 article dwelt on this activity on the grounds that it might "require not only description and explanation but also justification." A full description of the central processing procedure which was followed is not essential to the present case study but features of the procedure which may not represent general practice are of interest.

As has been mentioned, a Wilson card set was provided for each book for which it was available. If it was not available, a single typed card patterned after those produced by Wilson was prepared in duplicate at the Center. One copy was filed at the Center for use if and when that item was acquired again at a later time; the second copy accompanied the book to the school to be expanded into a set by the librarian, as has been noted. It was also the responsibility of the librarian to complete the Wilson card set, to provide "see" and "see also" cards as they might be needed and, in general, to maintain the catalog.

Catalog cards were not supplied for the few schools which had never been served by a librarian equipped through training or experience to maintain a catalog. Instead, it was suggested that the duplicate order slips that were prepared at the time of selection for each item purchased be arranged in author and title files. Potentially useful in such a situation was an index to Dewey which was prepared at the Center with permission from Dewey Decimal Classification. The index consisted of ten or eleven two-column mimeographed pages of selected subject entries from the *Relative Index* of the seventh abridged edition. The entries were arranged alphabetically and each was accompanied by the Dewey classification. Books for the schools in this category were completely processed at the Center with all pasting, typing, stenciling and shellacking completed before the book was sent to the school.

Justification of central services in Webster does not differ from jus-

tification of these services elsewhere as is shown by the conclusion to the 1959 article⁶:

At the present time there is a special sensitivity to the importance of the local unit within any administrative pattern; there is a disposition to safeguard the individuality of the local unit, and to question the advisability of conformity. In Webster, . . . the Materials Center and supervision function to help maintain conditions permissive to maximum service from the school library, with no ceiling upon accomplishment and no restraint upon the exercise of imagination, ingenuity, and pure artistry by the librarian. In Webster "conforming" is all in the area of processing detail, and is entirely in the interest of insuring a continuity which will help free the librarian for attainment of his best in service.

In 1967 more than 11,000 students were enrolled in the twenty-five schools of Webster Parish. The school library supervisory and technical service staff now consists of one professional (the supervisor) and three full-time clerical workers, with assistance from several young people assigned through one of the youth programs sponsored by the Board. Approximately 6,500 items are processed annually. Quarters originally provided for the Center have been replaced by a new building constructed under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It is known as the Educational Services Center since it provides accommodation for meetings and offices for the system's supervisory staff, as well as for the supervisor of school library and related services and for the materials center. Routine delivery of materials is combined with school-lunch delivery.

A full catalog is now being developed for each school, and acquisition of new equipment for improvement of cataloging and processing procedures has been acquired. Each of two librarians in the system has responsibility for two of the smaller schools and this means that now there are qualified librarians serving in all schools in the system with the exception of one.

The chief elements in Webster's current program have been analyzed for presentation in "Briefs," a mimeographed publication designed as an aid to visitors to the parish. These may be classified broadly as supervisory and related services. Supervisory activities indicated are:

- (1) Functioning as a member of the parish supervisory staff through (a) working with the superintendent and with other super-

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visors, (b) working with principals and teachers individually or in groups, (c) helping to interpret library service and helping to determine what good library service might be, (d) working with architects and those responsible for renovation, and recommending furniture and equipment to be acquired or constructed, and (e) maintaining active membership in professional groups—local, state, and national—relevant to the program;

(2) Supervising school library services through (a) working with school librarians as individuals and as a professional group, (b) visiting school libraries, especially at request, (c) working with librarians new to the system and with substitute personnel whose presence is necessitated by a prolonged absence of the librarian.

Related services include:

(1) Acquiring and processing books and other materials selected and used at the school level and maintaining collections through weeding or rebinding;

(2) Handling textbooks, including allocations, requisitions, accounting, and maintenance procedures;

(3) Providing loan collections such as professional books and periodicals, recordings, filmstrips, art prints, Louisiana items, miscellaneous items, publishers' examination copies of tradebooks and textbooks; and

(4) Arranging inter-school library loans and borrowing from non-school agencies.

The supervisor's obligation to use supervision as a channel of communication has been recognized from the beginning of the program. Inevitably typewriter, mimeograph, and duplicator have been employed full-time, providing routine memos to the superintendent, other supervisors, principals, and librarians, and also bibliographies and lists, frequently revised, of materials available on loan and information regarding special services. There has also been concern for less routine communication. Representing Webster in professional meetings held elsewhere, and representing library and materials services in other professional groups functioning within the system, have provided important avenues of communication. Scheduling system-wide meetings of librarians at times when curriculum groups are meeting has been avoided. Instead, each librarian has been encouraged to associate himself with one or another of the curriculum or subject groups. This has proved mutually beneficial.

Another form of communication of prime importance to any program—evaluation of the services offered—has also been encouraged. In fact, the 1951 report concluded:⁷

In the first year of a service, evaluation of practices and procedures is particularly important. With regard to a materials center, and certainly that in Webster Parish, those responsible for its administration and continuation will want to have the answer to many questions. Is centralization of processing important enough to justify the inevitable delay in the delivery of materials to schools? Is a display of materials for teacher examination worth the time and expense involved? Can a loan service in parish-owned materials for schools function satisfactorily? What records of accession and location are really necessary? Of course, there is always the fundamental point of evaluation: does the maintenance of a materials center for the schools of a parish ultimately contribute to an effective educational program? Thoughtful response from those who use the service will provide the answers.

As might be expected, librarians in the system have been more articulate in evaluation than others of the school community—perhaps because they had more specific opportunities for expression. Although evaluation from others has been invited at least annually, it has usually come in the form of remarks made casually in conversation; their significance, however, has not been disregarded.

The supervisor has worked with librarians of the system in preparing a section on library and materials services for inclusion in the handbook for teachers published by the Board. She has worked with the same group and with instructional supervisors in preparing a series of colored slides, with script, which pictures the whole range of library and related services in the parish. An article contributed to the annual schools issue of the local newspaper proved to be the means of acquainting the community with such aspects of the program as "new textbooks for the new math" and the circulation of fine art prints to the schools of the parish.

Although supervision and the direction of centralized technical services are two distinct responsibilities, in Webster the two jobs are performed by one person with a minimal supporting staff. One can argue both for and against the initiation of a program under the handicap of insufficient personnel. In Webster the program was undertaken with the conviction that if it proved its worth support would be provided—and it has been. Current developments in technology

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and increasing availability of cataloging and processing services from commercial sources have real meaning for the small staff. With the adoption of worthwhile innovations will come greatly increased productivity per manpower unit in this aspect of library work. Finally, with the broader vision which comes as an endeavor matures, hitherto unrecognized and unexplored opportunities in supervision emerge. They may yet become part of the program in Webster.

References

1. Quoted in Hefley, Sue, "Webster Parish Materials Center," *Bulletin of the Louisiana Library Association*, 14:113, Fall 1951.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 113-116.
3. Hefley, Sue. "The Webster Parish Schools Materials Center," *Bulletin of the Louisiana Library Association*, 22:111-112+, Winter 1959.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
7. Hefley, "Webster Parish . . .," 1951, *op. cit.*, p. 116.