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ABSTRACT

A survey taken, in questionnaire form, of high school principals is discussed. The purpose of this survey was to take note of the state of the English curriculum in Ohio high schools. Findings include: (1) About 41 per cent of the English departments have released time made available for professional activities; (2) School libraries are supporting English programs at a level ranging from satisfactory to excellent; (3) Roughly 70 per cent of English curricula in Ohio are presently offering considerably more than the required five English units. Findings of room for improvement include: (1) About 34 per cent of the schools are using teaching materials that provide no linguistic background for the structural analysis of the English language; (2) Admittedly 41 per cent of the staffs never schedule departmental meetings; and (3) Only a fifth of Ohio schools provide any measure of official recognition for good teachers and good teaching. It was also found that the majority of teachers and administrators are committed to relevant change. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: I. Funding, and II. Teacher expertise and training. Data are given in tabular form.  
(Author/CK)

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# OHIO ENGLISH BULLETIN

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## THE OHIO SURVEY OF HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH PROGRAMS

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*Verne B. Woolton*

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*James R. Nichols*

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## • BACKGROUND AND OBSERVATIONS

by Verne B. Wootton  
English Supervisor,  
Ohio Department of Education

As many of you perhaps recall, the January 22, 1971 issue of *Ohio Schools* contained an article concerning the state of the English curriculum in Ohio entitled "Change Comes Slow to Ohio's English Classes." The article was an accurate piece of interview reporting on the part of Beverly Gifford, O. E. A. staff writer. The title, however, which was later supplied by the editor of the magazine left something to be desired. Disregarding some flak from a few purists over the word "slow," we were both disappointed with the essentially negative tone of the title. Change -- for the better, we felt -- is really coming fast to English classes in Ohio schools. Compared with what had been done prior to, say, 1965, current innovative change may well assume landslide proportions during the next few years.

I had also, as you may recall, mentioned in the article the possibility of doing a State-wide survey in conjunction with the English Association to determine the nature and extent of curriculum experimentation throughout Ohio. The number of encouraging positive responses that the article elicited from both administrators and English teachers became a mandate to get on with the survey. Besides, we could hardly refer *all* visitation inquiries to Madison Local or Cuyahoga Falls -- especially those from schools with limited travel budgets.

Late in December, 1970, Jim Nichols and Tony De Jovine showed up at my office with the first draft of what was ultimately to become our survey questionnaire. By March, Jim and I had eliminated (we thought) all obvious ambiguities and reduced the size of the original instrument to a more manageable four pages. On April 26, 1971, copies of the "English Survey Questionnaire," together with a cover letter of explanation and beseechment, were mailed to the principals of 895 high schools in Ohio. (As an interesting sidelight, however, on how gremlins operate: we corrected the

spelling of "stationery" on at least two working drafts only to have "stationary" reappear on the copies that were finally mailed!)

By the end of the summer, a return of 378 questionnaires insured the mathematical success of our survey. Although I was personally a little disappointed, Dr. Nichols assured me that experts consider a 42 per cent return of such material something of a statistical coup. (We consoled ourselves with the probably unwarranted assumption that the non-responders really had nothing of interest to offer.)

It soon became apparent as the survey responses accumulated that, in our haste to get our questionnaire out to the schools early in April, we had evidently spawned something of a statistical monster. Although the tabulation of the numerical data posed no serious problem, how to do justice to the classification and interpretation of the expository elements of the responses certainly did! Secretarial personnel would be relatively useless here, and graduate assistants, non-existent at Muskingum, turned out to be in the same state of supply at Ohio University during the summer term.

At this stage, an appeal to Dr. Frank Zidonis, Director of English Education at Ohio State and a long-time friend and advisor of the E. A. O., provided a well qualified tabulator and interpreter in the person of Mrs. Mary Gnesda, a graduate assistant to Dr. Zidonis and a doctoral candidate in the field of English education. Words are hardly adequate to express the debt of gratitude we owe Mrs. Gnesda for the arduous task she undertook for the Association. Suffice it to say here that she made sense out of a maze of information that was often nearly indecipherable, and that she found a way to record every personal criticism or suggestion, whether a reflection of professional relevance or individual bias.

Elsewhere in this issue of the *Bulletin* Dr. Nichols will present and interpret, graphically and in detail, all the survey data. I appreciate, however, the opportunity here to comment briefly on certain of the findings from the vantage point of personal observation.

It is encouraging to know that

- (1) Although 41 per cent of the departments reporting do not schedule regular meetings, about 70 per cent now have released time made available for professional activities;
- (2) School libraries are supporting English programs at a level ranging from "satisfactory" to "excellent" where 86 per cent of our schools are concerned;
- (3) Where only 17 programs admit to using no paperbacks, about 72 per cent of those reporting now make use of paperback supplemental materials;
- (4) Roughly 70 per cent of English curricula in Ohio are presently offering considerably more than the required five English units. The upper limit here sometimes exceeds 50 separate courses, probably of the nine-week "mini-course" variety;
- (5) Most encouraging of all, where 281 schools report a program that is still basically traditional, a whopping 72 per cent can evidently hardly wait to move in the direction of shorter, phased elective offerings or some sort of non-graded elective program.

However, despite the very encouraging trends just mentioned, there remains a great deal of room for improvement in an area where

- (1) About 34 per cent of our schools are evidently still using teaching materials that provide no linguistic background for the structural analysis of the English language;
- (2) Admittedly, 41 per cent of our staffs never schedule departmental meetings on anything resembling a regular, organized basis;
- (3) About 77 per cent of our schools make no regular budgetary provision for miscellaneous departmental expenses;
- (4) Some 30 per cent of our teachers have no released time available for meetings, program evaluation

or revision, or outside visitation;

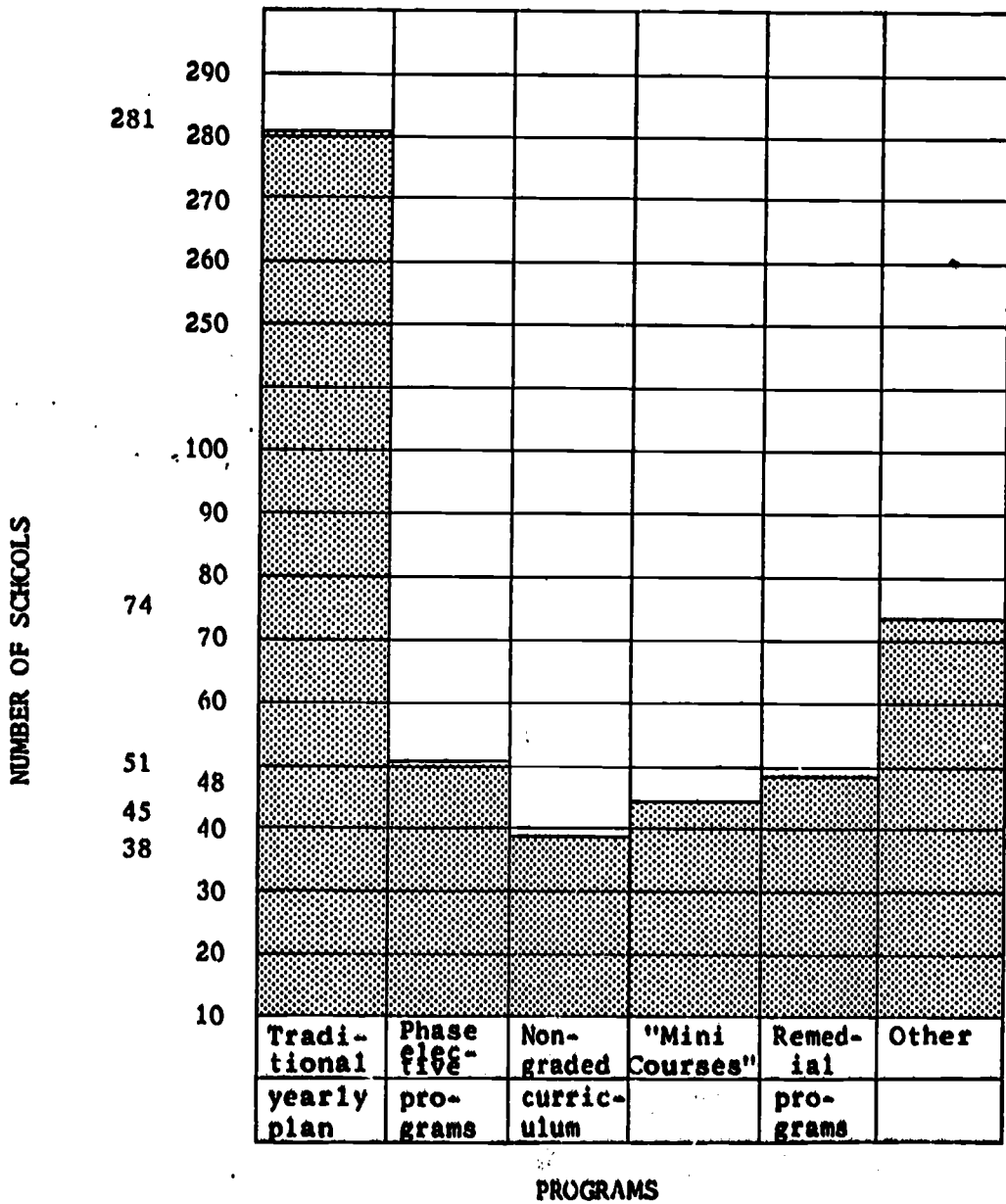
- (5) In spite of the current hue and cry, 40 per cent of the schools are unable to provide individual reading programs;
- (6) In as wealthy a state as Ohio, nearly a fifth of our English teachers have more than five teaching assignments per day; and finally
- (7) Although psychological analysis now seems to be a matter of serious concern where students are involved, only a fifth of our schools provide any measure of official or public recognition for good teachers and good teaching.

In the final analysis, however, these shortcomings that have just been listed have, in a general way and often to a more extensive degree, always been with us. As already indicated, the really important development that these survey data have disclosed is a widely distributed dissatisfaction with the traditional, out-moded English program of 36-week units of study. Most of the real professionals in our discipline, all the way from the N. C. T. E. to the local classrooms, have long suspected that the status quo was no longer capable of either meeting the needs or holding the interest of many of today's teen-agers.

It is heartening indeed to know now that teachers and administrators have got the message at last and are going to do something about heeding it. These changes that seem imminent are not only a matter of relevancy, they are a matter of utmost urgency in the direction of improved establishment - youth lines of communication. May our next article merit the title, "Change Revolutionized English Doldrums in Ohio Schools"! Let's hope we all live to see it.

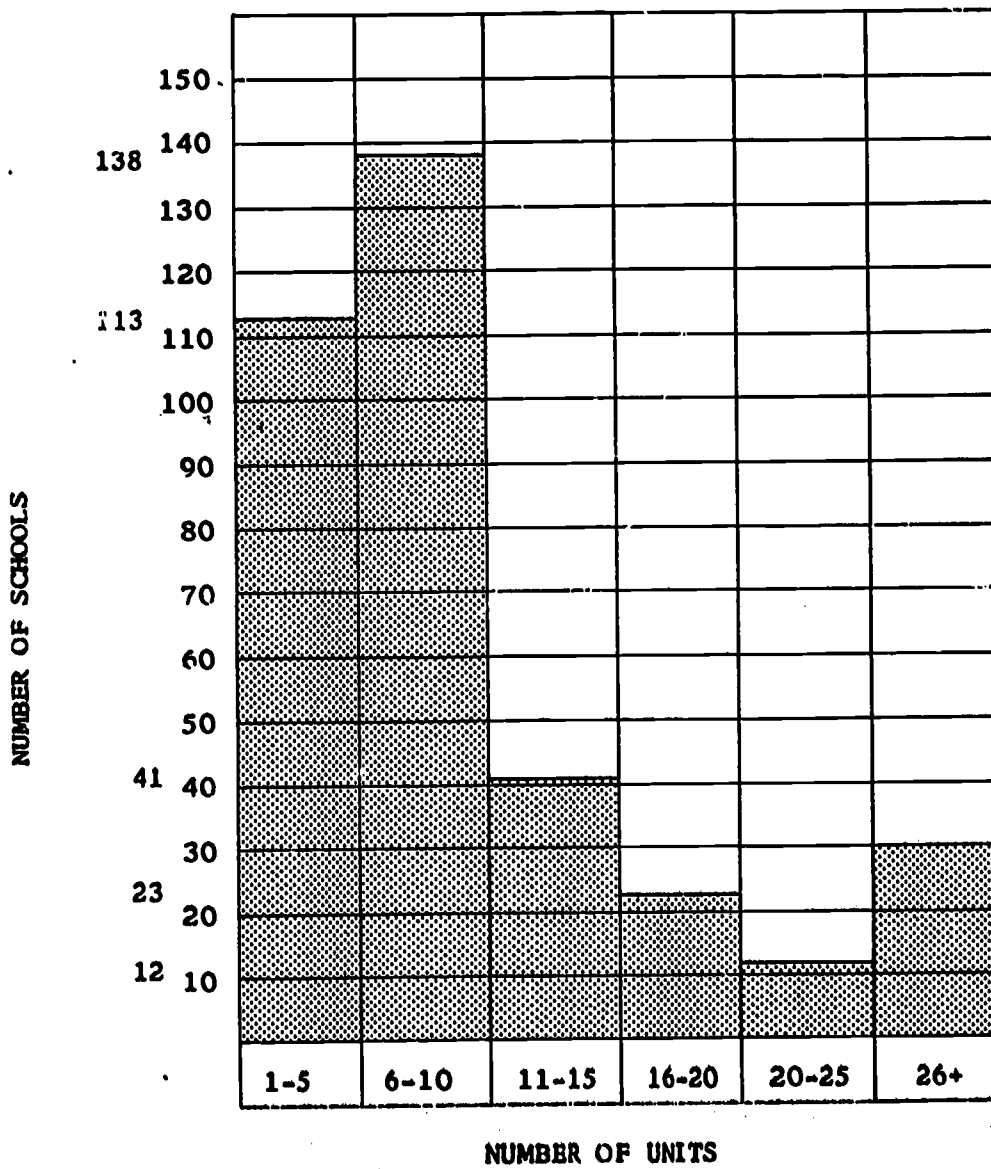
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Table 1. Department Programs



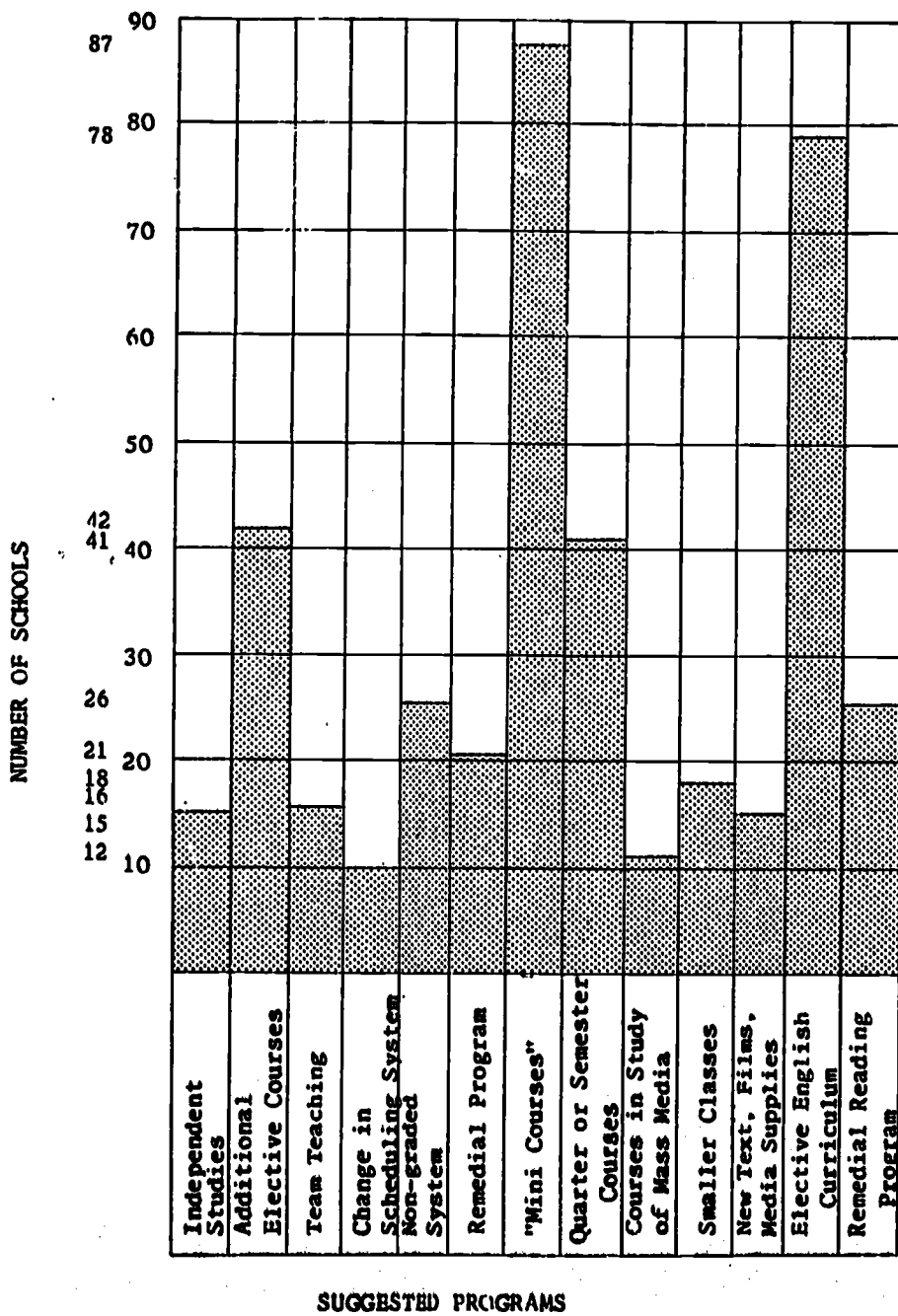
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Table 2. English Units Offered  
(grades 9-12)



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Table 3. Suggested Programs and Improvements



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Table 4. Effective Teaching Devices or Lessons

TEACHING DEVICES	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS					
	38	30	25	19	13	9
Video-Taping						
Audio-visual Aids						
Independent Study						
Reading Programs						
Team Teaching						
Closed Circuit T.V.						



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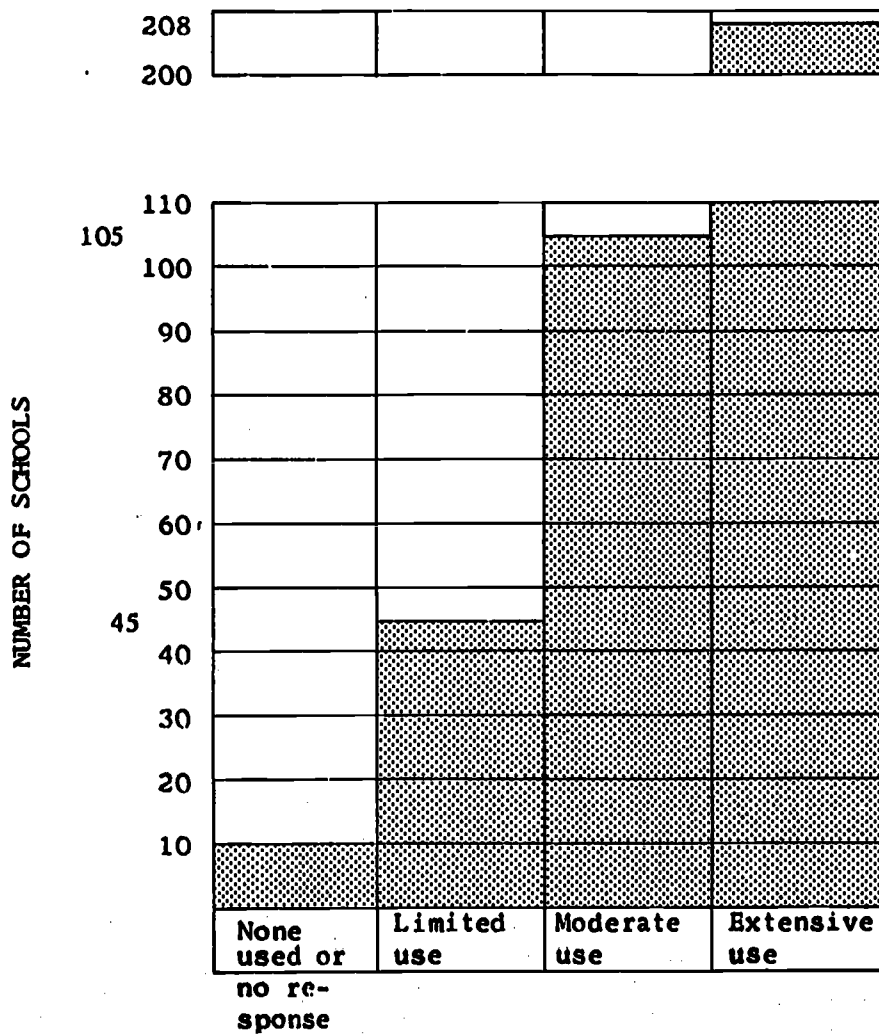
Table 5. Linguistic or Language Approaches to Grammar Study

Approach	No specific	Traditional	Structural	Generative-transformational	Composition	Eclectic	Other
130							
120							
110							
100							
90							
80							
70							
62							
60							
50							
39							
40							
30							
24							
20							
13							
11							
10							

APPROACHES

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Table 6. Use of Paperback Books



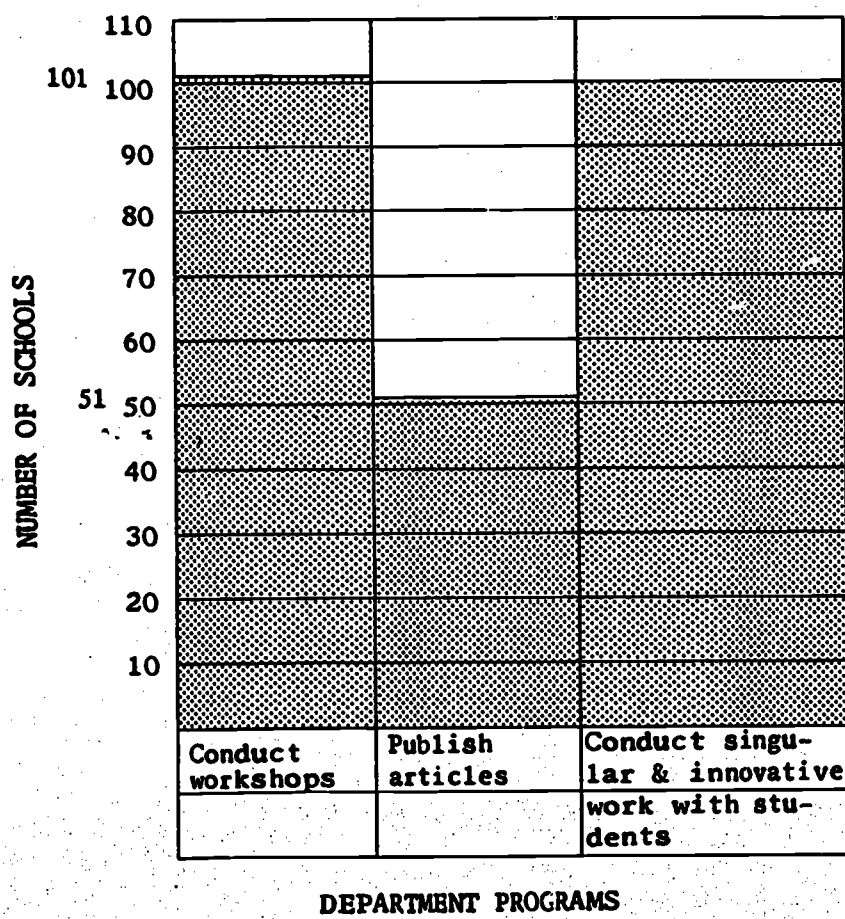
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Table 7. Number of Professional Conventions Attended Per Year

NUMBER OF CONVENTIONS ATTENDED PER YEAR	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS					
	0	1	2	3	4	5
70						
63						
60						
52						
50						
40						
31						
30						
20						
16						
8						
3						

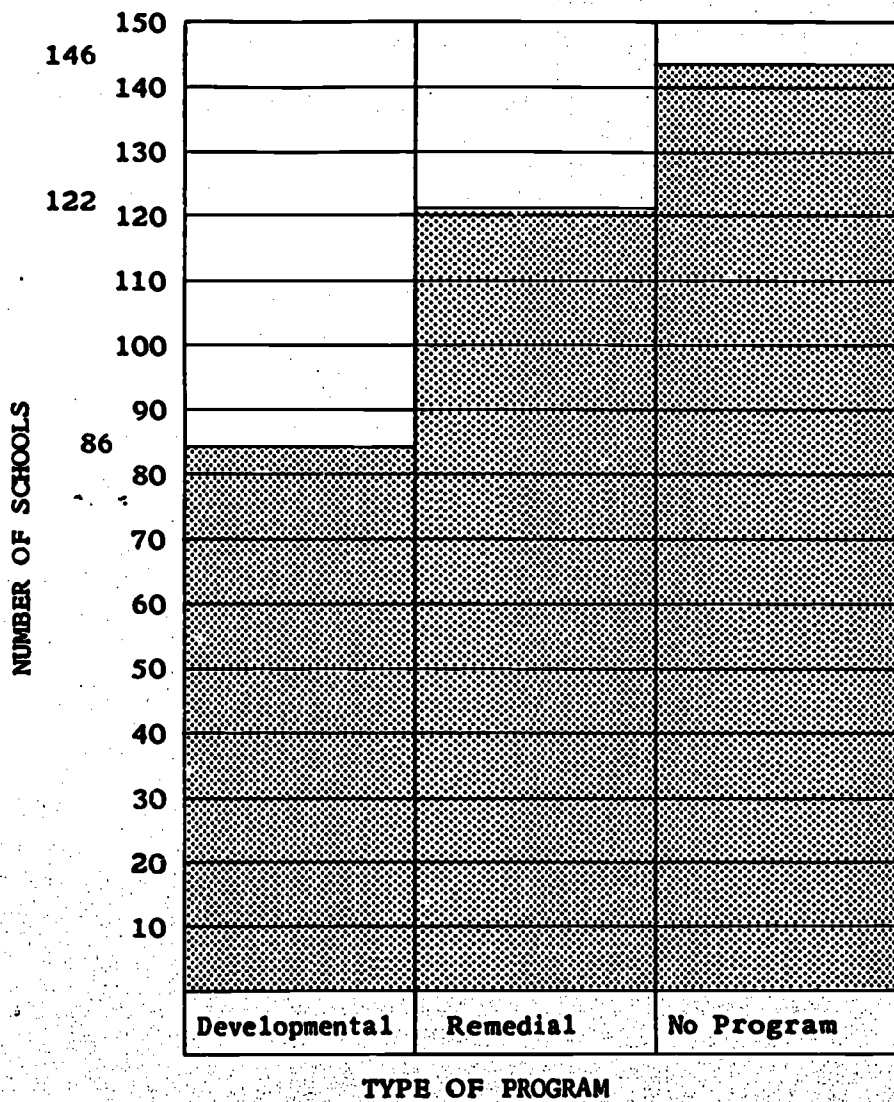
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Table 8. Workshops, Articles, Innovative Work With Students



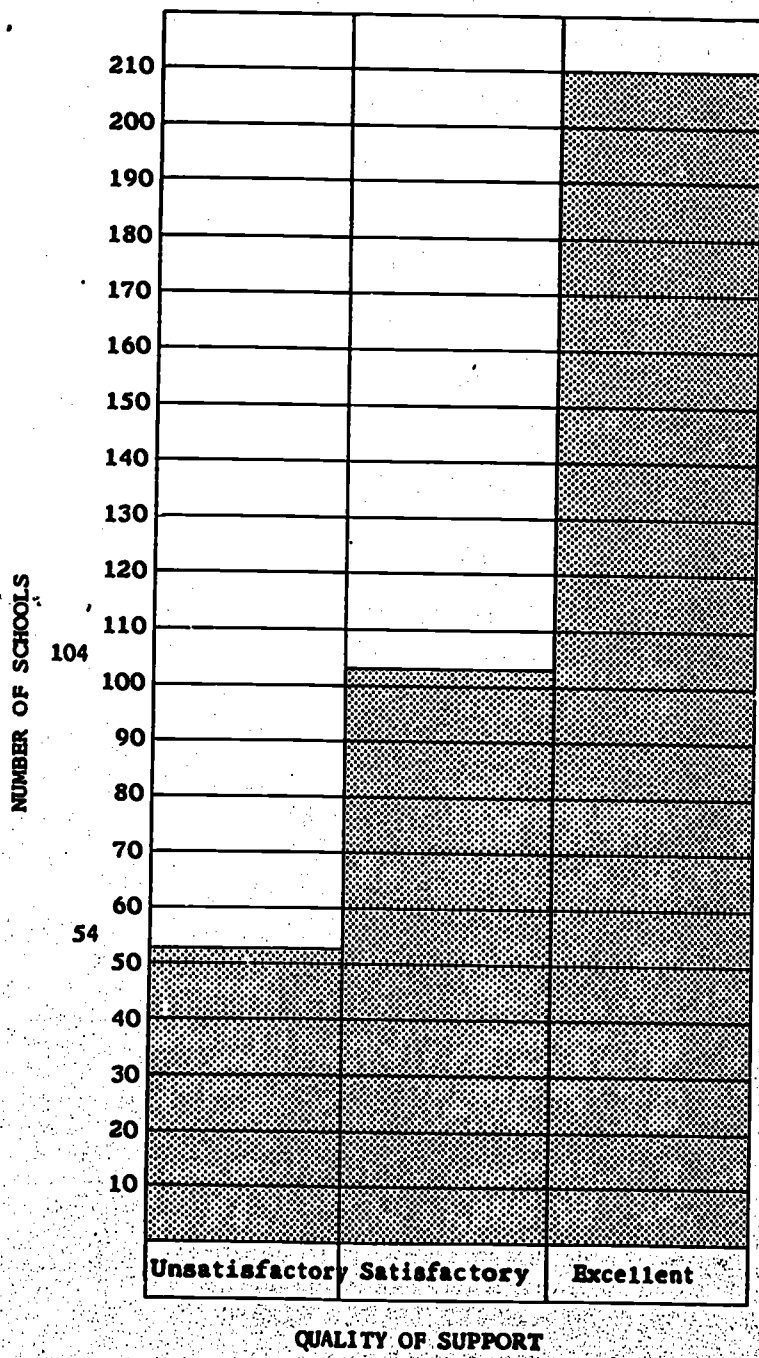
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Table 9. Individual Reading Programs



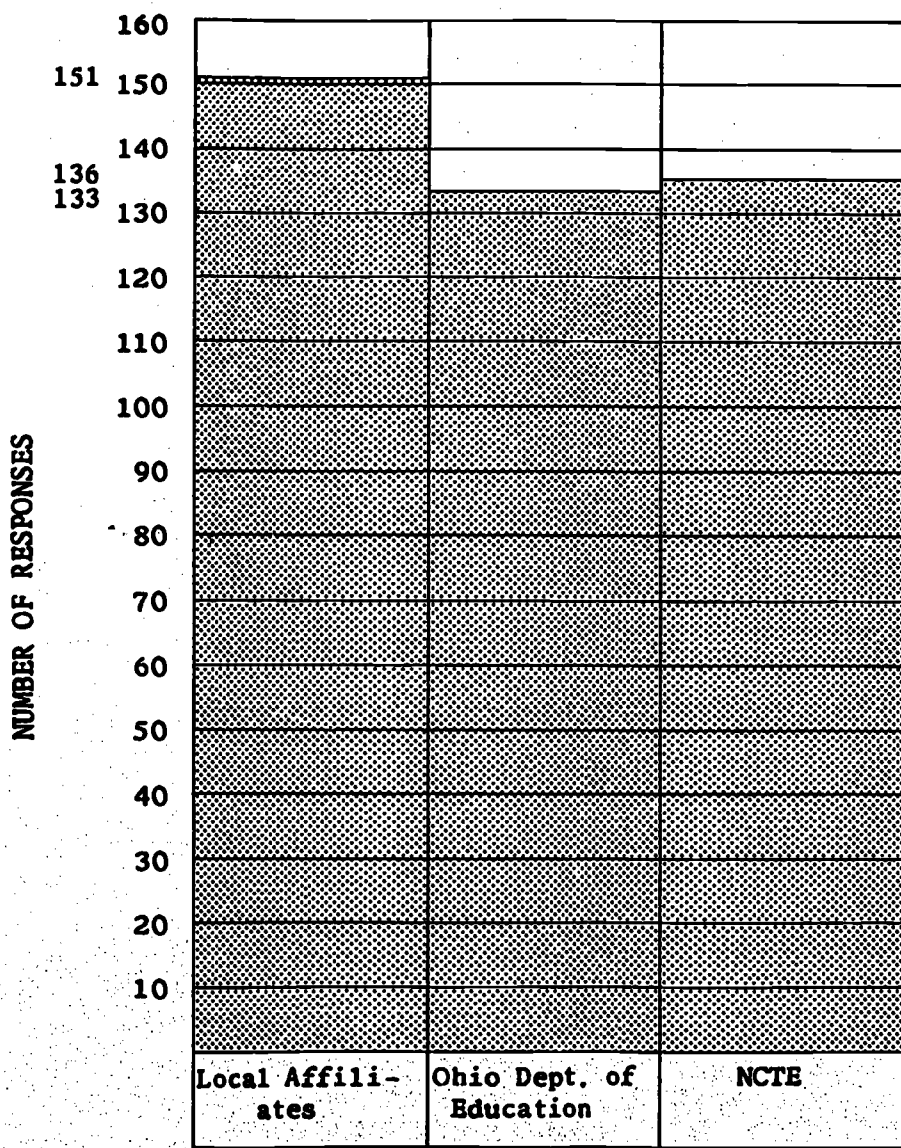
ENGLISH CURRICULUM SURVEY

Table 10. Library Support



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Table 11. Cooperation Between English Organizations



ORGANIZATIONS WHOSE COOPERATION IS IMPORTANT TO EAO

## INTERPRETATION OF THE SURVEY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

by James R. Nichols  
Muskingum College

Verne Wootton has already expressed the debt which the entire questionnaire project owes to Mrs. Mary Gnezda for her compilation of the mountain of material we received during June/August of 1971. The subsequent graphic presentation of much of the questionnaire results was ably and carefully done by Miss Eileen Schlemmer, a senior English major at Muskingum College. To these women and the many many staff personnel who helped in the preparation, mailing, and completion of the data received, the *Bulletin* wishes to express its appreciation and thanks for doing hard and necessary work so very well.

In regard to the tables themselves a number of specific points should be noted. Table 1 may contain some inaccuracies. I suspect that few if any language arts courses were counted in this question. The preponderance of traditional programs (281 out of 537 responses) seems lamentably high, but certainly reflects more the lack of available funds for innovation than a lack of imagination. The small number of remedial programs also points up the desperate need for funds which so many of our Ohio Schools face. Change in and of itself is hardly necessarily laudable, but such a lopsided commitment to the status quo as indicated in Table 1 does not suggest an active and vital school system. If we can't get the money, then we as teachers must develop (where needed) other alternatives to the present structures.

Again, in Table 2, I suspect that we see the problems which inadequate financing can produce, but when over two-thirds of the schools reporting can offer no better than 1-10 units of English, we're in trouble. Certainly teaching more and varied units requires more staff and more money, but we must begin to meet the challenge better. English 1-4 is dull not only to take but to teach. An attempt to introduce explicit and clearly defined subject areas into our English curriculum will not only make our teaching more effective and enjoyable, it will also make it more in-

tellectually honest and challenging. Note, for instance, in Table 3 the popularity of both the mini-course system and the elective English curriculum. John Glenn High School in Muskingum County was able to institute a mini-course system in September 1971 despite a lack of funds which would appall most administrations. Attendant dangers are many, including lack of books for courses, extra work for teachers, and a possible loss of needed emphasis upon basic rhetorical and writing skills for freshmen and sophomores. The latter I would especially deplore whenever it happened. But the dangers are all worth the risk if we can present our students new and truly exciting intellectual challenges.

It is also worth noting here that many administrations fall behind their teachers in the development of new or additional learning approaches. Money is not always the problem, but often it is a lack of aggressive and imaginative leadership. It is still lamentable that over 40% of the schools reporting (Table 6) still make moderate to no use of paperback books which can significantly cut the costs of new English programs. Courses which are desperately needed such as mass media and remedial programs seem to be in short supply as well. In Table 4, it was equally telling that the number of responses dropped off as sharply as it did. The use of audio-visual aids is well established in our schools and we can be thankful, but the questionnaire elicited only 25 affirmative responses on the initiation of independent study within Ohio schools. Admittedly video-taping and close circuit T.V. are extremely (perhaps prohibitively) expensive for most schools, but team teaching or new reading programs are proving very effective in many schools and deserve investigation by any staff which seriously wishes to improve its program.

Certainly the most serious problem exposed within this part of the questionnaire was an almost complete lack of experimentation and basic knowledge concerning linguistics and language study, an area where more truly major and profound changes have taken place in the last fifteen years than in any other area in our field. Most disturbing was the 130 responses



which admitted to "no specific approach" in this area. Perhaps if we want to know why college freshmen are often such abominable writers we have a good part of our answer here. How can any study be challenging or fun when it lacks clarity, imagination, or discipline. If we as teachers lack intellectual direction concerning our subject, how can we possibly transmit it to our students with vigor. Even the traditional approach to linguistics, with all its intellectual lies and failures, is better than none at all. Here is an area which is basic to preparatory grade school and high school teaching, and we need to be better at it. Structural and generative approaches to grammar and linguistics should be part of every school system in the state, and I for one sincerely hope that the more imaginative and aggressive administrations throughout Ohio will begin building such programs.

Part II of the questionnaire dealt with teacher expertise and training. Tables 7 and 8 are in this regard especially interesting. Both Verne Wootton and I suspect that our choice of language (i.e. "conventions" vs professional meetings) might have been a little pretentious here and thus causes some inaccuracy, but nonetheless it was disappointing to receive such a high number of responses indicating no attendance at professional meetings of any kind. Again, this is an area that we would hope school administrations would emphasize in the coming years. Faculty work load is already too heavy, and there is an urgent need to see that our teachers are kept in touch with what is happening in other classrooms and schools, not only throughout the state but throughout the country. Teaching must be constantly new and constantly fun. It's not a mechanism which we can lock in and expect habit and repetition to produce results. There must be challenging ideas always present. The number of departmental workshops and innovative individual programs reported was gratifying in this respect, and I was happy to see such a large number of teachers able to publish material and thus share their ideas with their fellows.

The remaining tables are, I believe, fairly clear. The need for remedial programs

has already been mentioned as has the need for funds to support such programs. As Verne has noted, it was pleasant to see that many libraries are doing so well with so little. Such reports are encouraging, although I refuse to cheer wildly until we begin spending one tenth as much on our libraries as we do on our sports programs. I might also suggest that those librarians who are hard pressed for funds begin searching through the raft of free state publications which students could use. There is a wealth of material there for the asking. Approached directly and with tact, very often local town organizations (Lions, Rotary, etc.) will contribute funds or help mount campaigns. The League of Women Voters also has a number of fine pamphlets etc. for history and political science shelves. All at almost no cost to the school.

Finally it seems clear that the organizations most directly useful to the high school teachers are their local affiliates, although Table 11 suggests that most teachers would welcome some effective cooperation and coordination at state-wide as well as local levels. This has long been needed and will be the goal of the EAO during the coming years. The questionnaire, if you'll pardon a very biased opinion, suggests that Ohio is getting the quality of education which it is willing to pay for, maybe even a little better than it is paying for. This shouldn't be surprising. Talent likes to be rewarded and innovation requires wealth. As teachers, however, we cannot be content with such facile criticisms. If we want and need more money, it may be that we ourselves will have to go out and get it. Again and again and again. It is going to be up to us, the teachers of Ohio, to make education better in our state and begin correcting the weakness which the questionnaire has outlined. We must begin to publicize and share our successes and openly admit to our failures. In coming issues I hope that those who have had successes and failures will write the *Bulletin* concerning them. If desired a *Bulletin* staff member will interview you and write up your story for statewide publication.

If the survey is to finally prove useful it

must be only the beginning. To open up and expand the lines of professional communication between Ohio English Departments was the goal of this joint EAO - State Department of English Education effort. This is the explicit and continuing goal of the *Ohio English Bulletin*.

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Table 8. Workshops, Articles, Innovative Work With Students

