DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 068 986 CS 200 236

AUTHOR Farrell, Edmund J.; Farrell, Jo Ann
TITLE A Report of Present Conditions of English Teaching.
INSTITUTION National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, Ill.
PUB DATE Nov 72
NOTE 11p.
JOURNAL CIT NCTE Council-Grams; v33 n6 p1-11 Nov 1972

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Organization; Budgeting; Class Size; College Curriculum; *Educational Innovation; English; *English Curriculum; English Departments; *English Education; *English Instruction; School Integration; Secondary Schools; Teacher Education; *Teacher Morale; Teacher Supply and Demand

ABSTRACT

This special issue of "Council-Grams," the newsletter of the National Council of Teachers of English, reports responses to a September, 1972, questionnaire about the teaching of English sent to teachers and administrators of English and education in secondary schools, colleges, and universities. The questions included the following: What reductions or additions have been made in your budget for English, and with what consequences? Have positions responsible for the planning and supervision of curriculum been eliminated or added? Has the position of the department chairman been strengthened or weakened? Has class load increased or decreased at any level and to what extent? What innovative programs have been inaugurated or eliminated and why? What problems, if any, have arisen from attempts to integrate the schools and do these problems affect the performance of English teachers? What kind of year do English teachers anticipate? The author concludes that present conditions for teaching English are, on the whole, unsatisfactory and that the NCTE needs to carefully establish priorities for moving the profession from what it is to what it should be. (Author/DI)

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

Council-Grams

1111 KENYON ROAD,
URBANA, ILLINOIS 61801

VOLUME XXXIII NOVEMBER 1972 NO. 6
SPECIAL ISSUE

"A Report of Present Conditions of English Teaching"

Edmund J. Farrell and Jo Ann Farrell*

In March 1970, a number of NCTE members, spotted throughout the country and knowledgeable about English curricula and related developments, expressed willingness to respond periodically to questionnaires about conditions of English teaching in their geographical areas. Among the group were classroom teachers, department chairmen in secondary schools, curriculum directors and supervisors of English in districts and cities of various sizes, members of departments of English and of education in colleges and universities, and English specialists with state departments of education. Persons in this information network were told that their responses would be used to keep members of the Executive Committee, the headquarters staff, legislators on education committees, and the membership at large better informed about the teaching of English throughout the country.

On September 11, 1972, a letter was sent to members of the network, requesting them to describe the kind of year they anticipated for teachers of English in their areas. This general request was then divided into a number of discrete questions having to do with teaching load, budgets, innovative programs, responsibilities for supervising teachers and planning curriculum, etc.

Nineteen of the 31 members of the network responded to questions posed in the letter of September 11. Of those 19, several sent out additional copies or variations of the questionnaire to teachers or supervisors in their areas. So as not to confuse the reader, responses to questionnaires mailed by a member of the network are summarized and treated as the response of a single person. While no evidence has come to the authors' attention that conditions being reported may be atypical of conditions nationally, the reader should bear in mind, nevertheless, the small number of responses to each of the questions that follow.

---

*Mr. Farrell is assistant executive secretary, NCTE; Mrs. Farrell is a former secondary teacher of English.

Council-Grams is published in regular issues about five times a year for NCTE officers and Directors, affiliate officers and the members of affiliate governing boards, members of NCTE Commissions, editors of affiliate publications, and subscribers. Special issues appear from time to time. Subscription rate: $7.00 per year, January-December. Write to Business Office, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

Council-Grams is meant to inform the leaders of the profession about current developments of interest or concern. To insure that the value extends beyond its circulation, the Council encourages those who receive *Council-Grams* to share copies with their colleagues.

Editor/Edmund J. Farrell

Research Assistant/Stephanie Trent
Editorial Services/Stephanie Trent
William Subick
Composer Operator/Mary Kaye Gwash

1. What reductions or additions have been made in your budget for English, and with what consequences?

Two respondents indicated that travel budgets were up slightly, and one respondent said that his English department had been provided with $3500 worth of supplementary paperback books and $400 to spend as it saw fit. In all other cases, budgets were reported as being either unchanged, despite inflation, or cut.

As will become more apparent in responses to later questions, the consequences of restricted budgets are many: teachers are not being replaced, department chairmen are losing their supervisory period in some schools, class sizes are up, funds are not being budgeted to reimburse teachers who attend professional meetings outside of their own district (in at least one district, teachers are asked to hire their own substitutes if they miss classes because of a conference), and new instructional materials are often compiled by teachers rather than purchased. [All indented statements are excerpted from the letters of respondents.]

> There was a general 5% reduction of forces in the English di: ipline. Most teachers who retired were not replaced. Some private schools have hired the retired teachers at reduced salaries and "terminated" some positions. As a result class loads are up considerably over last year—35 is something like the average minimum. Maximums are closely guarded secrets [presumably being kept by the administration].
>
> The budget cuts continue to affect personnel and equipment adversely. The reductions are bad enough in themselves. But some schools report that the lateness of budget cutbacks is forcing adjustments and the release of faculty well into the term.
>
> In general, budgets are not being cut directly. But they are subject to shrinkage. No increase in budget results in a smaller budget because of the cost of paperbacks, magazines, film, etc. . . .
>
> Many wealthy men are determined to cut the cost of education, especially in light of the "poor job the schools are doing." Thus one way is to cut out the fifth year of [preservice] education to cheapen the salary schedule; another is to root out the tenured teacher who has built up his salary; another is to cut back on requirements, [thereby] graduating students early. In reference to this last point, one school graduated 200 seniors at midyear.
>
> We are experiencing budget cuts, both in the central office and in the schools. Several of our programs have been curtailed, and most of our budget requests have been cut from 40-60%. As a consequence, many exciting new materials cannot be ordered, and we are attempting to improvise.
>
> . . . there is considerable tightening on travel budgets because many Board members are concerned about teachers who go to conventions to have a good time. . . .
>
> As for money, it is so tight that we are asked to curb even duplicating activities. Curriculum changes or additions are accomplished by teachers who are sufficiently interested to write material. . . .

Funds are tight; if the law allows, cut. The law will allow, unless the thing can be stopped.

2. Has your school or district eliminated or added postions having to do with planning of curriculum and supervision in English? Have the responsibilities changed for those still holding such positions?

Of the 14 who responded to this question, only one knew of a newly added supervisory position. All others indicated that positions were being cut or maintained at last year's level. In a couple of cases, respondents referred to unfulfilled promises of new positions.

> No. Apparently these positions were cut to the bone in earlier years.
>
> In all districts contacted, there is no change from the status of last year. In one district the curriculum director informed me that owing to his growing responsibilities, he is asking that an English consultant be hired, but there will be no action on the request this year.
>
> Added a position in Evaluation.
>
> The biggest hassle has been reduction of English consultants in my office from three to two. In a strange and disingenuous maneuver, one consultant was put "on loan" to the superintendent on a special project and not replaced. No malice, I'm sure, but no aforethought either.
>
> Currently, only one of the 28 districts . . . has an English coordinator. Six years ago . . . twelve of the 28 districts had some sort of [English] coordinator. . . .

In a number of cases, the responsibilities of those involved in supervising and planning curriculum appear to be expanding and undergoing redefinition as a consequence of federal programs, de-emphasis of subject-matter specialization, and legislated emphasis on "accountability":

> Committees responsible for curriculum planning have been expanded, and the guidelines for their responsibilities are probably now spelled out more specifically. There are government funds available during the past few years which allow hiring about 15 persons to work 6-8 weeks during the summer on curriculum development.
>
> Some content supervisors feel threatened and are asking whether or not their positions are obsolescent. At least many of them are realizing or admitting that the job description or their position has changed—perhaps radically so. All this poses another question: if the content supervisor must work K-12, what of the elementary teacher who might have several [subject-matter] supervisors to answer to?
>
> The responsibilities of our resource staff have changed considerably. Less and less do we work with individuals; more and more we work with groups of teachers. Each year we do much more writing in the development of programs and projects.
>
> New grounds of accountability have led to evaluation of tenured teachers every two years—formerly no evaluation after 15 years.

3.Has the position of the department chairman been strengthened or weakened? How?

The majority of the 13 who responded to this question believe that the role of the department chairman is being decreased in importance and that the rewards of the position are few. Instead of providing them with released time for departmental business, including supervising and evaluating teachers and helping plan curriculum, more and more schools are putting chairmen on the same five-classes-a-day schedule as other teachers. The result is that they become glorified book clerks, responsible for keeping track of instructional materials. Further, many chairmen receive no supplementary salary for whatever additional responsibilities they do have.

> The positions of department chairmen have been decidedly weakened. After a position paper, proposing among other things that the number of classes taught by department chairmen be reduced in proportion to the number of teachers in the department [so as] to give ample time for supervision, secondary principals reached a decision in a summer meeting to assign five classes to all department chairmen. This leaves almost no time for supervision, distribution of books and materials in a four-quarter system, professional enrichment, or even breathing deeply! . . . The only extra remuneration [chairmen] receive is pay for the five pre-planning and five post-planning days.
>
> Some systems are dropping the position of department chairman. [Other chairmen] see themselves as "policing" substitutes and keeping track of books. The latter situations seem to be true in the city.
>
> Concerning the department chairmen, five systems reported no change; one of these elaborated that the [function of] department chairman remains very weak because of no released time whatever.
>
> . . . we still have school districts in which department chairmen are elected for a one-year term by members of their departments and receive no remuneration for their work.
>
> The district administration for the first time is taking a serious look at the role of the department chairman to determine what improvements can be made in the position.
>
> The Union has had the election of chairmen as part of its bargaining for several years; a casualty in the final bargaining sessions. Chairmen continue to function as clerks: ordering books, scheduling meetings, and making out programs. No authority for supervision or evaluating teachers. . . .

Nevertheless, one can find—though only infrequently—places where the role of department chairman waxes more vigorous than ever:

> Five systems reported stronger chairmen because they are becoming real instructional leaders; they bear more responsibility in scheduling, curriculum planning, supervision; and in one system, they now evaluate teachers as well as programs. They are also becoming increasingly responsible for the accountability program, which is now law. . . .
>
> The role of the department chairman has been strengthened as we have been asked to assume new roles and to demonstrate new competencies. . . .

Senior high department chairmen are now "educational leaders" with added responsibility of supervision. The "educational leaders" receive a stipend and have fewer classes to teach.

In one particular school district the department chairman administers all aspects of the department, including the hiring of substitutes. In that district the department chairman is given a budget, and as long as he stays within that budget he is free to do whatever he wants to do. He can plan inservice programs, [and] he can give teachers time off to visit other schools or plan curriculum units.

4. Has class load increased or decreased at any level, and to what extent?

Members of the network offer little hope of secondary teachers of English achieving the long-sought goal of four classes a day and a maximum of 100 students. The only really happy report came in reference to one school in which, exclaimed the respondent, "Class load about 90 students!! Best anywhere!" Though load was moderately reduced in a few places, it nonetheless remained high in all geographical areas reporting:

Some improvement through collective bargaining: five classes of 28 in regular, 25 in AP and essential, and 20 in lowest track.

Class size has decreased. Teachers have no more than 150 students.

We continue to reduce gradually the size of comp classes, which was 24 per section a few years ago and is now 21-22.

Class load has remained the same.

Increased in 9th grade. Same in most other sections. One administrator is teaching one section of only 16 students.

Classes continue to be much too large, especially with the low groups.

Class loads for the most part remain five assignments and three preparations.

Increased an average of 5 students per class—have always been too high.

Class loads still range from about 125 students to 150 or 160 students. Again, there is no real pattern that emerges across our intermediate district. Some school districts are concerned about the English teacher and her load while others do not differentiate between English and physical education.

5. What innovative programs have been inaugurated or eliminated? Why?

Few people responded that innovative programs had been dropped. What some took for granted or, having experienced, questioned the worth of, others saw as innovative breakthroughs, e.g., mini-courses, electives, and team-teaching. One school is experimenting with a dial access information system; another has abolished the Carnegie Unit and has moved to local certification;

a group of students produced a 90-minute film adapted from a short story. Although scarcely representative of spanking new concepts in American education, these courses or changes in programs were nevertheless the exceptions. Most "innovations" cited had long been acclaimed or debunked in professional publications of teachers of English:

> Teachers, in general, at the secondary level are moving toward elective programs. But all too often the elective programs are designed for teachers and not for students. . . .English is still literature, the literature presented for analysis. That one teacher who is interested in media other than print is allowed to teach one or two sections.
>
> In junior high school a flexible schedule has started—two modules for every regular period. Short term with high interest electives have been introduced.
>
> As English departments move toward elective courses in ten, eleven and twelve, the ninth grade becomes more and more a skills course. Units of grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, etc. are all jammed into a one-semester or two-semester course. If the teachers had purposely planned to turn students off, they couldn't find a better design. . . .
>
> In a smaller district here . . ., the superintendent arbitrarily cut English requirements from four years to three and merely told the principal to tell the English teachers. During the meeting, it was made clear that the superintendent had considered cutting the requirements to four semesters. "Who can justify four years of literature?" (Of course, the course of study contained many more things than "literature.") There is talk of making the requirements "One semester of grammar and one of composition." At what year each will be required is a "decision for the English teachers."
>
> Innovative programs which have been added include composition laboratories, independent study, team teaching, a course in semantics and dialects as opposed to grammar, accountability, "continuum of objectives," the Poets-in-the-Schools project, Filmmaker-in-the-Schools project, and a seventh-grade reading pilot program. . . .One system proudly mentioned "objective referenced item pools for all objectives in the written communication strand of language arts, grades 2-10." I am sorry I don't know what that means.
>
> Our most subversive but rewarding project is our involvement with the Poets-in-the-Schools Program.
>
> . . . multiple entry, continuous progress courses, open laboratories, abolition of the Carnegie Unit, local certification.
>
> . . . we have just finished making a ninety-minute movie, 16mm color with optical sound. The students adapted a short story for screen and parlayed it into a feature length film. The actual filming began on May 1 and ran through the middle of June, two weeks beyond the end of the school year (that's the way the students wanted it). A distributing firm is currently negotiating with us for national distribution rights.
>
> The major curricular problems identified include . . . a lack of coordination between elementary and secondary programs; the provision of more elective courses reducing the total requirement in English; the proliferation of quarter courses or mini-courses, resulting in English-by-choice becoming "English by chance"; a lack of continuity in the

English program (spawned by electives or mini-courses); the difficulty of "pinning down" the middle-school curriculum when it's supposed to be exploratory.

Going back to five classes a week for frosh and sophomores is innovative here.

6. What problems, if any, have arisen as a consequence of attempts to integrate the schools, and how do these problems affect the performance of teachers of English?

On the whole, conditions nationally seem calmer than they were a year ago, but the calm may be that which precedes the storm—the long-awaited Supreme Court decision on the legality of mandated busing in metropolitan areas. Whatever the decision, it is sure to incense some groups.

The kids, once they are integrated, seem to get along reasonably well, perhaps, as one respondent suggests, because they are appalled at the behavior of their elders. Unfortunately, the individuals who appear most bewildered by integration are the teachers accustomed to working exclusively with middle-class students.

> . . . we seem to be in an "armed truce" period awaiting the landmark decision of the Supreme Court, which should be forthcoming this year. We have had relatively few riot situations recently, but we are a long, long way from integration. Schools which point to their results with the most pride at best can honestly claim only toleration. There is not even desegregation—as I said, mostly toleration.
>
> Generally speaking, I see this as a struggling year, more so than in the past because of displacement due to integration, but it should be an exciting one nevertheless . . . . Momentum already exists in many areas, and I expect it to grow once we find out who's teaching where. At the moment, faculty integration means confusion. Ultimately, it should mean fresh perspectives and real progress.
>
> While integration problems are aired in the newspapers, so far this year and last, our schools have been relatively quiet. It's a safe generalization to say that with the advent of busing . . . beginning last September, problems in the secondary schools have diminished. . . .not so much because students have learned to respect one another, but . . . because students became sick when they saw what the adults were doing. The students themselves decided that they could "make it work."
>
> Permissive transfers working well. (Here children travel far, neighborhood stays same.) Kids who come are motivated. Also kids know that nonconformity with school standards sends them back home to school.
>
> Believe everything bad that you hear about the integration situation. . . .I thought I knew the WASP psychology, but these here beat anything I have ever heard of.
>
> More Blacks, Chicanos, and young people are running for school board positions. One is 18. What this presages in the face of the highly conservative climate of the state is hard to say as yet.
>
> Many good, experienced English teachers are terribly concerned that the quality of their

programs will be impaired as a result of efforts to integrate. Those teachers, especially, who have a traditional view of English teaching, are terribly frustrated and face the biggest problems in integrated classrooms; they react by being stern disciplinarians and demanding large quantities of work. In those classrooms where teachers are generally able to concentrate on individuals rather than classes, the effect seems to be considerably less.

One of the crying needs for teachers is an inservice program which would help them understand students. . . .teachers are ill-equipped to work with any students other than the ones who come from upper middle-class homes. Most teachers are unable to work successfully with non-college bound students regardless of the race of the students. Most teachers are unable to move toward individualizing their program. English class after English class consists of the teacher standing before 25 or 30 students telling them what they should see in that which they read.

What kind of year do teachers of English anticipate?

Responses ranged from forthright bleakness ("gloomy") to tepid optimism ("All in all, this will not be a bad year for English teachers."). Only infrequently in the responses does one find a ray of sunshine in a sky of gray:

Late in the summer the legislature increased the funds available to local school districts. With the additional funds English teachers were rehired, and many of the budget items restored.

The only bright spot in our whole school system so far as the teaching of English is concerned is in our kindergarten and first-grade classes, where many of our teachers are working with renewed interest in teaching reading effectively in a broad language arts setting. The results are good, morale is high and getting better, and many students are very happy with school at that level. Beyond that, the picture is dismal. . . .Our accountability programs are going to insure that 1984 arrives no later than 1975.

In general, reports reveal that money is short, classloads are rising, chairmen are being deprived of opportunities to lead departments effectively, morale is low, and the future unpromising.

. . . we are most certainly in a state of transition in our schools, and most feel helpless. In the past, large amounts of money have been available for education; and there developed the general notion that money could solve all problems. Now that the money supply . . . has run out . . . most people [have been caught] flat-footed.

Intensifying many teachers' feelings of fecklessness or impotence in determining what and how they teach has been the continuing emphasis on behavioral objectives and accountability, an emphasis not willed by classroom teachers themselves but principally by legislators, businessmen, and administrators. In the responses one occasionally finds a kind word or two about behavioral objectives. Far more common, however, is the complaint that writing these objectives trivializes English while augmenting the teacher's already staggering load.

Certain to affect curriculum in English in coming years are changes now occurring in programs

of teacher education. In most states these changes are being made without consultation from university and public-school teachers of English or from the associations which represent them:

> [the state superintendent] waits until we leave for the summer and then . . .boom. He has succeeded in doing away with the required fifth year of education for all teachers and now is pushing hard to have recertification based solely upon performance objectives. At present, such a change is to become effective July 1, 1974. . . .Severe dissatisfaction with the schools is leading the powerful to put the control of education in the hands of the . . . superintendent and the legislature. Imagine their strength. Not all the universities and professional organizations together were able to prevent the fifth year from being dropped.
>
> There is another development in our state that may have rather profound effects upon language arts and English programs. This development is in the area of teacher training. Heretofore, under the approved-program approach, teacher-training institutions presented programs to the State Board of Education for approval. Such programs have been largely constructed upon the premise that teachers must be required to take courses (take training) in rather well-defined areas: a prospective teacher of English must have so much training in Shakespeare, in advanced composition, in reading, in American literature, in world masterpieces, etc. Now there is a new approach. Passed in the spring of 1972 and to be implemented beginning with the 1972-73 school year is the new "competencies" approach. Prospective teachers must now display competencies, and programs must be constructed to assure that the students master these competencies.

Although the questionnaire did not solicit advice about what NCTE might do to ameliorate present conditions for teaching English, one person wrote as follows:

> I asked [my] respondents to tell me what they felt the thrust of the NCTE should be to help them the most. The topics mentioned were help with multi-lingual programs in elementary schools, released time for department chairmen, the need for research and materials related to the open-space concept in middle-school grades and beyond, the need for materials designed for interdisciplinary education, and the need for a national campaign to stimulate public awareness of the nature of communication skills versus the formal teaching of grammar. Two respondents especially wanted to reverse the trend to elective English courses, especially quarter or minicourses, and to try to teach administrators something about the nature of English teaching. I would like to quote again from the respondent who reflected my attitudes best when he suggested that "one of the major thrusts of the NCTE should be to address itself to the needs of society and how the English teacher can serve students more appropriately. I know that we are trying to do it on a piecemeal basis. I would like to see a single thrust for a matter of two or three years where we simply address the problem in its broadest terms. Rather than looking at gimmicks, we ought to be looking at the picture and then letting the gimmicks arise from the solutions to the larger problem. . . .The biggest nitty-gritty problem *from the viewpoint of the . . . teacher* [in this state] is the accountability legislation which has been thrust upon him the last year or so. However, *the biggest problem that I see* is not this nitty-gritty problem at all, but rather one that most English teachers do not see: the identification of the perimeters of the discipline."

It may not be important at present that teachers of English agree on what the single most serious problem confronting the profession is. If responses from members of the network

accurately reflect national conditions, what may be more important right now is clear recognition that present conditions for teaching English are, on the whole, highly unsatisfactory. Such recognition should then be followed by careful consideration at all levels within the profession of what the teaching of English should be in the last quarter of this century.

If the consideration is to be careful, then teachers will have to attend to a number of thorny matters, not all of which have been touched on in the body of this report: the politics and economics of education as they now relate to English teaching; the implications for English of an ongoing exponential increase of information and an accelerating electronic revolution in communications; the place of English in work-study and external degree programs; the continuing ties between English—both as taught and as used—and racism in the society; the meaning of English in "career education"; the consequences for English of legislators creating programs of teacher education by fiat; the responsibilities of teachers of English in countering the linguistic pollution of politicians, advertisers, and militarists.

And careful consideration will have to be given to establishing what the priorities of NCTE should be, with its limited financial and human resources, in trying to move the profession from what is to what should be. Even with thought and care followed by individual and collective action, teachers of English may not be able to substantially change their world for the better. But without the effort, no vintage years for English appear to lie ahead.