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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine cooperative and regional educational service agencies from the viewpoint of the consumer, explaining what users of cooperative and regional services may be seeking now and in the future. Since sufficient school finances will continue to be a problem, educational managers will look to cooperatives for greater efficiency. Rural school districts will likely resist the loss of local control and will cooperate with other districts to avoid consolidation. School districts with decreased enrollments will likewise look to cooperatives to provide the same services to fewer students. However, cooperative and regional educational services agencies must recognize the potential they possess, and must take the initiative as "brokers" of cooperative education. Subdivisions of the discussion are: awareness as a key factor; the influence of economics; cooperatives and the concept of accountability; cooperation as an alternative to bigness; cooperative agencies and declining enrollments; cooperative agencies and educational alternatives; local control and cooperative educational service agencies; and the cooperative educational service agencies and their place in rural education. The key to successful cooperative education is "getting the story told". (KM)

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REGIONAL SERVICE CENTERS - A CONSUMER'S VIEWPOINT

by

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Abstract:

Although public education has become an unstable enterprise in a relatively short period of time, it is nevertheless necessary to assume a futuristic posture if one is to develop any measure of proactive behavior.

The educators first order of business is to become aware of certain key factors presently identifiable, which will influence the future.

Sufficient school finances will continue to be a problem. Educational managers will look to cooperatives for greater efficiency, especially if there are increased demands for services. Should the Federal government assume a greater share of the financial burden, it can also be assumed that it will continue, with greater influence, to promote more cooperative and regional educational service agencies.

Rural school districts will likely continue to resist further consolidation and threats against local control by furthering their cooperation with other districts. School districts faced with decreasing enrollments will also look to cooperatives as a means by which they can maintain previously provided services to fewer students.

There exists a vast area of unexplored potential for rural-urban cooperation. Likewise, cooperatively financed and managed alternative or specialized schools are a distinct possibility. The time is ripe and opportunities abound.

However, the cooperative and regional educational services agencies must recognize the potential they possess, and it is they who must take the initiative as "brokers" to show educational managers in the individual school districts that it is in their own self-interest to join with others to improve the education offered their students.

In rural America, the educational cooperatives and regional centers may play an especially significant role in maintaining or improving upon a desirable way of life.

The consumer will "shop" the cooperative "marketplace" more frequently than in the past, but his "shopping list" will grow only in proportion to his awareness of the services available.

INTRODUCTION

In the world of marketing, the successful merchandiser is one who has either accurately predicted the needs of the consumers, or he has developed a product first, and then convinced the consumers that they would benefit from using his new product. A comprehensive marketing firm is usually found to be engaged in both aspects - predicting consumer needs and developing products to meet them, and also in developing the new products first and then creating the market. In the first case, the merchandiser must be aware of the needs of the consumers. In the second case, he develops an awareness in the consumers.

Cooperative and regional educational service centers are confronted with similar market dimensions for they are "merchandisers" of educational services and their success and continued existence depends upon their ability to satisfy consumers.

It is hoped that this consumer's viewpoint will be of some use to those who manage cooperative educational enterprises. If this paper helps to make them more aware of the needs of those who utilize their services then both will benefit. It is also hoped that this paper will help to create an increased awareness on the part of consumers as to the potential of cooperative and regional educational service centers for meeting their identified needs.

The need for current "market research" involving cooperative and regional educational service agencies and those who are the "consumers" of such services was supported by a comprehensive review of the literature conducted by the writer and Mr. Roy Tally, Director of WIRE (Wisconsin Information Retrieval for Education). It would appear that those who provide cooperative educational services have a paucity of "market research"

to aid them in becoming more aware of consumer needs. One might also conclude that the cooperative and regional service centers ought to become more aggressive "advertisers" if they hope to develop a greater awareness of the services they have to offer.

PURPOSE

It is the purpose of this paper to examine cooperative and regional educational service agencies from the viewpoint of the consumer. It is the assumption of the writer that most interested parties are aware of the existence of cooperative efforts among school districts. Shared teachers, group bidding, computerized scheduling services, specialized pupil personnel services, Federal programs coordination, payroll and bookkeeping services, data processing services, regional media centers, joint equipment purchases and use -- the list is endless, restricted only by legislation and man's creativity and ingenuity. It can be said with a high degree of confidence that the consumer has a sizable and growing catalog of existing and potential cooperative services at his disposal.

However, because of the previously mentioned variables, it is evident that the writer is dealing with a concept and process to which there is an implied continuum of utilization and application. To be sure, there are many consumers who have stretched their imaginations and resources to develop highly sophisticated cooperative programs and systems. But it must also be noted that there are those who may presently be lacking in permissive legislation or sufficient insight and information to develop even rudimentary forms of cooperative and/or regional approaches to providing improved educational services.

With this in mind, the writer chose to assume a futuristic posture. Exercising the rationale that the reader can review existing literature

to date, the writer has attempted to synthesize the views of others and to incorporate his personal observations of what the consumers of cooperative and regional services may be seeking at the present time and in the near future.

The writer begs the indulgence of the reader and would give assurances that it is not the usual pastime of an otherwise conservative school administrator to gaze into a crystal ball. Ventures into unexplored territory are fraught with "philosophical entrapments" and numerous other dangers. Those who venture too far into the realm of "unsubstantiable reflection" knowingly traverse beyond the reach of a colleague's helping hand. Consequently, the reader should be aware that it is quite possible that the writer's views and conclusions are not necessarily shared by the majority of school superintendents or like consumers.

AWARENESS AS THE KEY FACTOR

The late Saul Alinsky, who headed the Industrial Areas Foundation, a training institute for community organizers, advanced the theory that to organize people, one must appeal to their self-interests. He held the opinion that people cannot be organized around altruistic motives, such as the welfare of children or the good of education. (Arisman, 1973: p. 2)

School districts, be they large or small, are the most discrete units which utilize cooperative or regional educational services. Specific individuals, teachers, students, or others may be the direct consumers, but authorization, by contract, must necessarily be executed between two or more legally established entities.

Perhaps it is stretching a point to equate school districts and

individuals, but if one chose to do so, he might find that although school districts are internally committed to altruistic goals, their external relations with other districts are, more often than not, weighed on the scale of self-interest. Thus, any cooperative effort between two or more "corporate" entities must appeal to their mutual self-interests to effect an acceptable arrangement.

It is the opinion of the writer that if permissive legislation exists, the degree of cooperation among school districts will be proportionate to their awareness of the potential for cooperation to meet some measure of their self-interests. Therefore, if one is to address himself to the consideration of what the consumer or potential consumer of cooperative educational services desires, one will, of necessity, need to examine areas of internal, mutual needs. The greater the mutuality of need, the greater the potential for the formulation of symbiotic relationships.

In reviewing Educational Futurism 1985 - Challenges for Schools and Their Administrators (Hack, Briner, Knezevich, Lonsdale, Ohm, and Sroufe, 1971), a book distributed to its members by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) for the purpose of encouraging proactive behavior by educational administrators, the writer was amazed to discover the absence of any significant mention of the role of the cooperative, regional centers in meeting the educational demands of the future.

This 225 page work contains a collection of 200 annotated bibliographies featuring the most prominent futurists in North America. The writer found no direct mention of regional or cooperative educational centers in the bibliographical material, nor are they mentioned in an additional 13 references or the index. However, it should be noted that proposed 1974 AASA resolution number 14 supports the formulation of regional

educational service agencies to "provide with economy and efficiency" a wide range of services. ("School Administrator," December 1973: p. 7)

Obviously, consumer awareness of potential must precede all other factors. Assuming the writer's prerogative of making an occasional value judgment, it is indeed unfortunate that a greater, collective awareness does not appear to exist.

THE INFLUENCE OF ECONOMICS

Economics has perhaps played more of a role in educational decision-making than most educators would care to admit. The economics of (a.) improving educational services voluntarily desired by a school district, or (b.) improving educational services mandated by imposition from a higher governmental authority, are the most common initiating forces for the consideration of cooperative arrangements. When a legislative body requires that improved or additional services be provided by local school districts, it seldom assumes the total added cost of such services. Thus, local districts are forced to comply and seek the least costly means of doing so.

The Federal government has been quite instrumental in developing cooperatives and regional centers. This has taken place not only through direct funding for centers, but more indirectly through its practice of giving high approval priority to program proposals involving more than one school district or a consortium of smaller school districts. Evidently, it is national policy that educational cooperatives exist and flourish as a part of the process of social and educational engineering.

It is not difficult to understand that those who would present an argument for expanded services at the lowest cost to the taxpayer would look to cooperatives and regional centers as a model to achieve both goals. However, the incidence of two or more school districts simultaneously

determining to order their priorities in such a manner as to desire to improve or add certain like services at the same time is rather remote. Therefore, it would appear to be safer to assume that externally imposed factors rather than internal factors give impetus to the establishment of cooperative services. Once established, however, internal factors may have a sustaining effect to the extent that the cooperatives become a part of the educational "establishment."

Hack (1971: p. 75), after analyzing the works of Daniel Bell, Martin Shubik, Norton Long, Haskew, Hensen, Brickell, Goldhammer, Moynihan, and others, concluded that the locus of government may continue to shift toward the Federal level by 1985.

One might then also conclude that the local school districts will continue to be reactors rather than initiators. Consequently, if the consumer is to assume a proactive stance, he must prepare for greater participation in cooperative and regional endeavors, both for economic survival and as a manifestation of national policy over which he may have little control.

COOPERATIVES AND THE CONCEPT OF ACCOUNTABILITY

One need only to look down the current list of "best sellers" in education to support the contention that the "educational establishment" has lost favor with the public it serves. Many critics claim that the schools are too bound in status quo, too insensitive to the needs of parents and students, and too self-serving. Others would view the public schools as the "rat hole" into which is poured more money each year without any evidence of increased "productivity".

Legislators in many states continue to draft bills to make the schools more accountable for the dollars they spend. In another form of legal

action, a high school graduate in San Francisco has filed suit against the school district because it is alleged that they did not teach him to be a functional reader. Many reformers appear to think that public education is mired so deeply in the mud of inefficiency, petty politics, and labor-management confrontations that it has failed to be a responsive, public institution.

In mid-January, 1970, Jesse Unruh, Democratic Assembly leader in California, introduced a bill to adopt educational engineering widely in that state. He called for opening schools to help from the private sector, noting that "one of the problems facing the public education system . . . is that it has no real competitors to spur it to excellence." (Lessinger, 1970: p. 108)

If one elects to negate the competitive value of private and parochial schools, perhaps Mr. Unruh's statement is a fair one. Certainly the introduction of the voucher system, the free school movement and other reform-oriented experiments would support the notion that both greater accountability and alternatives are deemed desirable by a substantial segment of the educational community and the general population.

To be sure, traditional, bureaucratic obstacles must be overcome, for as Sebold confirmed, "only those meanings are being perceived and recalled which reinforce images [p. 149]." In other words, we are prone to hear and see what we want to hear and see.

However, an equally formidable obstacle may reside within the framework of teacher union master contracts. With all but 20 of our states having permissive, collective bargaining legislation, the teaching profession is now well organized and dedicated to the achievement of high standards for

both education in general and the welfare of union employees. Should public institutional goals differ from the organizational goals of its labor force, clashes can and will result.

The public school systems obviously have a case to make in defense of the charges leveled by their critics, most of which translate into their inability to act or react in a flexible manner. Often stymied by laws, pressure groups, labor confrontations, influential community leaders, "axe-grinding" school board members and countless other forms of sociological and educational strife, public school management has simply become, in many districts, an heroic effort to "keep things going". Educational managers ~~simply~~ do not have the flexibility or the autonomy enjoyed by managers in the private sector.

Consumers in the future will continue to seek more flexibility in achieving institutional goals, and flexibility, in a management sense, translates to the degree of retention or loss of management rights. Consumers may find the alternative of purchasing services from a cooperative educational service agency a refreshing experience in the sense that it may restore some of the flexibility previously enjoyed, even if a significant number of restrictions will continue to exist.

In essence, the school district either buys the service or declines to buy the service, thereby reducing at least some of the limitations of job pick, tenure, seniority, due process, lay-off procedures, grievances, and a host of other labor-management related considerations.

Certainly, the labor movement will quickly catch up and organize the cooperative and regional agencies. However, during the interim period and even afterward, the concept of purchased third party services should continue to yield a greater degree of flexibility to school district managers. The consumer will have an additional option to exercise.

The increase in contracted food services, janitorial services, and transportation is evidence of the educational managers desire to "buy" flexibility in the form of contracted services. Performance contracting and turnkey construction can also be viewed as a means by which educational managers can shed themselves of certain day to day operational responsibilities, thereby conserving their managerial resources to be used in tasks which are more basically internal.

A good "market analyst" would find that a "battle weary" educational manager is ripe for certain cooperative services. Many would much rather describe certain performance objectives and contract for their achievement rather than to assume the full responsibility for achieving the objectives despite an inability to control innumerable variables.

When a specified population has been designated to receive a particular educational service, either by an internal or external decision-making process, it may seem logical to look to a cooperative or regional entity to identify and/or proffer alternative means of offering the desired or mandated service. Such agencies may even take the initiative in "putting together" their own programs for the purpose of nonprofit resale to participating districts. Such an action on their part would be similar to that of a key contractor assembling a group of individuals or companies for the specific purpose of providing a needed, comprehensive service for a client or group of clients.

As operations become more complex in the public sector, school districts may find it increasingly attractive to seek alternatives to providing all required services as an internal function. Personnel costs are now taking more than three-fourths of the budgeted school operational dollar. The districts, as consumers, will be seeking alternatives to putting more people

on payrolls to do more jobs. The thought of buying client, contracted services through a cooperative "broker" may continue to become more economically and politically feasible than buying more people.

COOPERATION AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO BIGNESS

Each year there are fewer school districts in our country. The total number at the present time is approximately 17,995. In 1968 there were 26,983 districts ("Digest," 1972). In Wisconsin alone, the number of school districts decreased from a high of 7,777 in the mid-1930's to a present total of 436 ("A statistical Report," 1973: p. 6). Apparently, reorganization and consolidation are the realities of our time.

The pressure to consolidate is based upon the premise that larger units are both more economical to operate and that they can offer more comprehensive educational programs and services. As one might expect, such efforts to consolidate school districts by governing bodies has resulted in conflict and controversy which continue to the present. As Conant (1967) noted, such socio-psychological factors as community identity, pride, and status become pitted against the logic of cost effectiveness and program improvements when merger is suggested or mandated.

Many arguments continue to be advanced against the notion that bigger is better, and communities still express a desire to pay more taxes to survive as smaller entities. Many opt to get along with fewer services and program offerings. Value judgments abound in this controversial area of public education. The whole matter becomes more difficult to understand as one observes the current paradox of aggressively promoted consolidation in rural America being paralleled by the decentralizing of urban school districts.

Studies continue to be conducted in support of both sides of the issue. Studies conducted in Wisconsin by Clements (undated) and later substantiated and supported by Rimm (1971) indicate that school size does not have a significant influence upon student achievement in the University of Wisconsin System. Studies by Rimm also provide evidence that students attending smaller schools (500 or less) participate more fully in extracurricular activities. Qualitative arguments are also made by both sides on this issue. However, in cold, statistical reports compiled by state departments of public instruction, the numbers continue to indicate that per pupil costs are higher in smaller districts, and smaller districts offer fewer services and course offerings.

And so the controversy rages, especially in the East and Midwest where distance and transportation problems are not in themselves strong counter-arguments as they are in the western states.

Consumers in the future will be looking more favorably toward cooperative agencies as alternatives to further consolidation. Governing bodies may also find the cooperatives to be more of an acceptable compromise both in the economic and educational services domains. As one cannot separate politics from the scheme of man's interaction, and whereas compromise has always been an acceptable means of resolving differences in democratic societies, it may be safe to assume that educational cooperatives will assume an increased role in meeting both the educational and economical arguments presently supporting reorganization and consolidation.

COOPERATIVE AGENCIES AND DECLINING ENROLLMENTS

As school districts decrease in number and become geographically larger, the recent census would support the observation that they are also decreasing in student enrollment. This phenomenon is new to our times and

its effects are far-reaching.

It would appear that there will be a limit to what extent the public will allow its school districts to reduce course offerings or services as a general reaction to the declines. Internal consolidation may be on the horizon for many districts. They will close some school buildings by moving children to their newer facilities. Many other prudent measures will need to be taken; however, it is questionable that the public will tolerate a major reduction. Yet, to provide the same level of programs and services to fewer recipients would, on the surface, appear to represent a decrease in efficiency and economy. Teachers' unions, facing increased surpluses and lay-offs for at least the next ten years, will vigorously oppose any cutbacks.

The consumer will look to the cooperative agencies to play a key role in assisting districts to maintain their services and programs by sharing with others. Sharing will become an increasingly attractive alternative in coping with reduced enrollments and the problems inherent in the continuing manifestation of the phenomenon.

COOPERATIVE AGENCIES AND EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVES

It is apparent that the subject of alternatives has gained currency in public education. The following definition is representative of those found in the literature:

In brief, alternatives is a positive term. It describes an effort to broaden the scope of a school of school system by providing additional things to learn and ways of learning them -- and under conditions that a school system sets, thus making alternatives valid forms of education.

Alternatives, where properly understood and professionally run, are not "gut" courses that require no work. They are not separate schools for disruptive or troublesome youth. They are not remand centers for

youths with criminal records. And they are not remedial centers for students who fail to "cut it" in regular (traditional) schools. Alternatives, simply put, imply other ways of learning." (Stevens, 1973: p. 2)

Students, parents, minority groups, and many educational leaders are suggesting that alternatives are a logical extension of the concept of individualized instruction. It allows the learner to match interests and personal learning styles and needs; to select from a variety of learning experiences.

Some districts have established alternative programs within existing schools, while others have created separate alternative schools. It would seem that another logical consideration would be the creation of alternatives among school districts, mutually planned and coordinated by a cooperative agency. The efforts of each district would be multiplied by the addition of each participating district and the number of alternatives from which to choose would far exceed any individual undertaking by one district.

The consumer will look to the cooperative agencies to provide a structure by which districts will plan in accordance with their mutual needs. For example, one district may concentrate on the development of vocational facilities to accommodate students from neighboring districts as well as its own students, thus avoiding a duplication of effort. A neighboring district might develop a well staffed and comprehensively planned drama department, again to accommodate students from neighboring districts on a reciprocal basis.

Each school district need not try to be all things to its students, nor should it continue to attempt to provide a "little bit of everything." Weiss (Dec. 1972) makes a strong argument for doing just the opposite. Citing the works of Jencks and Coleman, Weiss concluded that school districts have too many goals, make too many promises which they cannot keep, and in

many instances are not the best institution to deliver desired services. Weiss calls for school districts to utilize modern planning techniques such as Program Planning Budgeting Evaluation Systems (PPBES) and Critical Path Methods (CPM) to selectively eliminate goals and reduce services which have little impact on learning.

Comprehensiveness, as Conant (1967) viewed it, may well have to be viewed on a cooperative, regional basis in the future as an alternative to attempting to be "over comprehensive." Participating schools may have to be scheduled in a different manner, but the scheduling technology exists and is available in tested form at the present time. It may be a small price to pay for local autonomy and the preservation of community identity.

Consumers may also look to cooperatives for the creation of separate alternative schools. This is a present reality in Minnesota, Illinois and perhaps many other states having regional, secondary vocational schools, jointly planned, financed, and operated through a cooperative structure. However, there is no need to limit such schools to vocational pursuits. They could also serve the gifted and talented or those interested in studying the performing arts.

The specialized high school has existed in our larger cities since before the turn of the century. With modern modes of transportation, improved scheduling technology, and an enlightened educational philosophy, such schools could become more commonplace on a regional or inter-regional basis.

However, even where permissive legislation exists, it is apparent that the cooperative educational agencies will need to provide the leadership and motivation. The consumer will "buy" the concept if it appeals to his recognized self-interests to establish such alternatives.

LOCAL CONTROL AND COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES

The writer would be remiss and unrealistic if the political dimensions of the role of the cooperative and regional educational service agencies were to go unmentioned.

With the exception of Hawaii, which is a wholistic state entity, state constitutions provide for the establishment of local school districts, at least at the county level. The districts are governed by a school board or board of trustees which has specific, delegated governing powers.

One of the highest priorities of the various state school board associations and the National Association of School Boards is the preservation and maintenance of "local control." Local control, however, is not necessarily deemed to be in the best interests of organized labor in the teaching profession.

Unions promote much larger units, statewide or perhaps even nationwide in nature (e.g., the Teamsters Union). The power of labor is proportional to the quantity of the work force it controls. The much discussed proposed merger of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers and even more comprehensive efforts to form larger coalitions of public employee groups reflect union efforts to broaden their power base.

By mutually supporting legislation which promotes better educational services, increased efficiency and more prudent use of the tax dollar, teachers' organizations, the school boards, and other special interest groups continue to prove the old cliché that "politics makes strange bedfellows." The phenomenon witnessed in this instance is the "hardnosed" taxpayer groups joining ranks with union elements to achieve economies in operation without sacrificing services, with each hoping to achieve different ends in the process. Simply put, larger educational units (school districts)

provide a more powerful union base. More economy will create more available dollars, but who will benefit from those dollars?

The following excerpt from a Michigan Education Association Task Force report illustrates the union's desire to develop a broader power base through the creation of larger educational units:

Part of the reason for this lack of association creativity and aggressiveness is the unwillingness of locals to band together and strike, if necessary, in order to provide a more stable and potent bargaining base. The plain fact is that up to this point most teachers have not demonstrated a willingness to inconvenience themselves for their colleagues in other locals. There is still too much "me first."

("Final Recommendations," 1973: p. 1)

In several states, the National Education Association and their state affiliates are presently sponsoring regional agencies known as "uniserves." Wisconsin is divided into 15 such units in various stages of "staffing up." In a speech delivered to the annual spring convention of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators at Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in April of 1973, Mr. Morris Andrews, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Education Association, suggested that reorganization or consolidation in Wisconsin utilize the present boundary lines of the state's existing 19 Central Cooperative Service Agencies, thus creating a practical alternative to the operation of the 436 school districts (Writer's personal notes).

It would appear from this evidence that school boards placing a high priority on local control and those smaller communities wishing to maintain their schools as local institutions, may find the utilization of cooperative agencies a means by which to survive the pressure from unions, the legislature, and special interest groups. Through the agencies they have an alternative to effect improved educational programs and greater economy without sacrificing their autonomy.

Consumers will probably become more supportive of cooperative, regional agencies when they feel more threatened by labor's influence at both the local and state levels. Cooperatives should present a politically acceptable alternative to further reorganization and consolidation, but the threat to the status quo and the alternatives to meeting those threats must be better recognized by the school districts and the citizens they serve.

THE COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES AND THEIR PLACE IN RURAL EDUCATION

It is the inherent right of every citizen in our country to have access to free, public education. It is the intent of our Constitution that a test of equality of opportunity, tempered by reasonableness, be applied to the education offered to the youth of our nation.

Obviously, it is not reasonable to assume that a geographically isolated, small Great Plains community be in a position to offer the same number and variety of courses as a large urban center. However, it would seem unreasonable for the small community or the urban center, for that matter, not to be exploring additional ways and means to improve the educational opportunities available to their youth, especially something as basic as the concept of cooperating with neighboring school districts.

Large urban centers are more comprehensive and self-sufficient by the very nature of their size. Yet, it is not uncommon to note that they take cooperative action and support activities undertaken for their mutual benefit. Because of geographical separation, the larger cities have not been able to work for the direct sharing of services; however, they are quite active in sponsoring various lobbying efforts at the state and Federal levels. In the future, it is not too unrealistic to assume that the larger urban centers will find it to their mutual advantage to pursue cooperative programs with their surrounding rural neighbors, as it is obvious that each has something

to offer the other.

At the present time, the writer can only conclude that the most viable means of improving the quality of rural education lies with the cooperative, regional educational service agencies. They presently exist in each state in various states of development, from the highly organized to the struggling but surviving remnants of early Title III Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) experimental demonstration centers.

In a speech presented at the National Outlook Conference on Rural Youth in October of 1967, Nolan Estes (1967) expressed the concern of many when he alluded to the constant "brain drain" resulting from the migration of bright young men and women from rural areas to urban centers. He indicated that if the migration was to be stemmed and if the rural areas of our land are to maintain and improve upon the quality of life, then we must look to improving the educational opportunities of rural youth.

Thus, it would appear that the cooperative regional educational service agencies have a manifest destiny in rural America. They will play an increasingly important role in the political, social, and educational future of the areas they serve.

The consumer may well look to the cooperative agencies as the most important means by which to preserve and improve upon a desirable way of life.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Although public education has become an unstable enterprise in a relatively short period of time, it is nevertheless, necessary to assume a futuristic posture if one is to develop any measure of proactive behavior.

The educators first order of business is to become aware of certain key factors presently identifiable, which will influence the future.

Sufficient school finances will continue to be a problem. Educational managers will look to cooperatives for greater efficiency, especially if there are increased demands for services. Should the Federal government assume a greater share of the financial burden, it can also be assumed that it will continue, with greater influence, to promote more cooperative and regional educational service agencies.

Rural school districts will likely continue to battle further consolidation and threats against local control by furthering their cooperation with other districts. School districts faced with decreasing enrollments will also look to cooperatives as a means by which they can maintain previously provided services to fewer students.

There exists a vast area of unexplored potential for rural-urban cooperation. Likewise, cooperatively financed and managed alternative or specialized schools are a distinct possibility. The time is ripe and opportunities abound.

However, the cooperative and regional educational services agencies must recognize the potential they possess, and it is they who must take the initiative as "brokers" to show the educational managers in the individual school districts that it is in their own self-interest to join with others to improve the education of their students.

In rural America, the educational cooperatives and regional centers may play an especially significant role in maintaining or improving upon a desirable way of life.

The consumer will "shop" the cooperative "marketplace" more frequently than in the past and his "shopping list" will grow in proportion to his awareness of the services available. However, if the cooperative and regional centers do not take the initiative and "advertise" their services,

it is doubtful that any other entity can do the job for them. The Federal government and most state governments appear to be supportive. Others, including local school districts, may pay little less than lip service if left to their own initiatives.

The key is obviously in "getting the story told." It may take a comprehensive approach by a private foundation or the Federal government to coordinate the various educational entities to develop a model program on a grand scale. Such a model would certainly be exciting to test against what the future holds in store for American education.

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