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ABSTRACT

New York State schools have adopted a variety of alternative schools and programs. The schools and programs include free schools, community schools, open education schools, street academies, schools without walls, minischools within schools, minicourses in the curriculum, and alternative programs that bridge the gap between schools and colleges, the world, and work. This document considers the factors behind the movement toward alternatives, the differences between current alternative schools and the traditional alternatives, the relationship of alternative schools to open education and to career education, the effective alternatives for college-bound students in the later years of high school, and the relationship between the development of alternatives and the processes and goals of New York State's redesign effort. The publication also examines whether alternatives contribute to change in the total system and whether this contribution accelerates the change process. (Author/DN)

# PROVIDING OPTIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

in

New York State

Schools





The University of the State of New York
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Albany, New York 12224

October 1973

# THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

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## PREFACE

As educators we have been importuned to reform the schools in the interest of greater quality, more efficiency, increased economy, fewer failures. These goals are not easy to attain, yet we must be committed to them.

I stated in my Inaugural Address that if there were one single thing I wished to accomplish during my tenure as Commissioner of Education, it was to see that the educational system would become more humanistic.

One of the meanings of that word surely must be a diversity in curriculum offerings which appeals to the hearts and minds of all students at all levels of development.

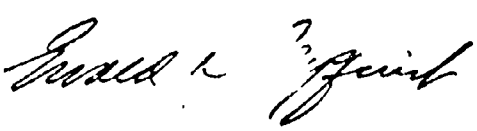
I am deeply impressed with the changes taking place throughout the educational system which strongly suggest that we are making real progress toward those goals. There is more here than meets the eye.

I am especially impressed with the extent of creative pioneering and imaginative innovative reforms in curriculum offerings and educational programs in the schools of the State. An inventory of these departures from tradition is being compiled and will be distributed in brochure form at a later date.

And as this paper points out, all of this has been accomplished despite the imagined restraining forces of Commissioner's Regulations and Regents Rules. As I have stated publicly on several occasions, the Department stands ready to waive these normal requirements when presented with responsible proposals for new departures in educational programs.

It is my fervent hope that this paper will stimulate and encourage other school systems to experiment with and diversify their learning environments to the end that we can anticipate a zero-reject system. There are those who would de-school society. For this radical and unacceptable notion I would substitute the need to re-school the educational system.

If we had not already done so much, we would not still have so much to do.



EWALD B. NYQUIST
*President of The University of the State of New York*
*and Commissioner of Education*

## CONTENTS

## THE NOT-SO-STATIC STATUS QUO

Recent issues of *Inside Education* and other periodicals have carried descriptions of a wide variety of innovative programs in New York State schools. Prominent among these articles as well as on major conference programs are reports about different types of alternative schools and programs. Examples of these are seen in the development of free schools, community schools, open education schools, street academies, schools without walls, minischools within schools, minicourses in the curriculum, and alternate programs for seniors bridging the gap between schools and colleges or the world of work — to name only a few of the major alternatives.

Some of the New York programs or schools have received national publicity. Among the best known are the World of Inquiry Elementary School in Rochester, The World of Tomorrow Elementary School in Glen Cove, East Hill Elementary School in Ithaca, the Interim Junior High School in Rochester, the Village and Community Schools in Great Neck, John Dewey High School in New York City, Rochester's School Without Walls, the Street Academies in New York City, the minischools in Haaren High School and in John Bowne High School in New York City, the major Auxiliary Services to High Schools program in New York City, and others in White Plains, New Rochelle, Mamaroneck, and Buffalo. In addition, numerous high schools have working relations with area 2- and 4-year colleges to provide optional programs for seniors that include offering college courses in high schools for joint credit, enrolling seniors in courses on college campuses for credit, and providing access to colleges for more students after 3 years of high school. In sum, there is ample evidence that change is taking place in elementary and secondary schools of the State.

What are the factors behind this major movement toward alternatives? How do the current alternative schools and programs differ from the traditional major alternatives presented by a wide variety of nonpublic schools and by the wide range of electives and options available within the public school system? Will the provision of alternatives contribute to change in the total system and possibly accelerate the process? How does this development relate to the process and goals of New York State's redesign effort? What is the relationship of alternative schools to open education and to career education? What alternatives are proving effective for college-bound students in the later years of high school? And, above all,

how could so many schools in the State accomplish so much and introduce such major program changes, given the presumed strait-jacket of Education Law and the Regulations of the Commissioner?

This statement is addressed to the foregoing questions rather than to descriptions of any of the alternatives per sé. During the spring our Information Center has been conducting an in-depth survey of such programs as a part of a multistate effort. From this inventory, a catalog will be prepared for dissemination. In addition, plans are being developed to provide opportunities for direct sharing of these experiences at a statewide conference in the fall.

Finally, based upon our experiences in the past several months in relating to several major alternative programs and schools, we are providing some guidelines for public school systems that are considering introducing significant optional programs. The guidelines reflect the Department's basic support of carefully planned, conducted, and evaluated programs that represent responsible experimentation. We have found that new policies and procedures are necessary in order to relate to such experimentation in a positive manner. As Department staff members worked with several programs, we identified both certain facilitating steps we needed to take to be supportive of certain types of changes and also some cautions that need to be observed to keep the experiments within legal constraints.

Changing any institution in a significant way is never easy to achieve. We feel that some schools are showing us a workable mechanism for change through alternative or optional programs and schools. In what ways can this movement affect the slow rate of change and result in the needed reform in our schools?

## THE RATIONALE FOR ALTERNATIVES — CHOICE IS THE ESSENCE

Any educational system that seeks to permit every individual to achieve at his maximum potential must provide multiple options. At all levels of the system, choices need to be made to accommodate a wide variety of factors — parental preferences; students' needs, interests, preferred learning styles, and personal welfare; as well as the welfare of society. The goals of education that we accept to carry out the ultimate mission of the New York State educational system are not now being fully achieved by all students. While this is most obvious for many of those in lower socioeconomic groups in urban areas, it is also true for many others who are now not well served by the traditional program in all schools.

In recent years a number of school systems in New York and other states across the country have risen to the challenge. Recognizing the inadequacies of the schools as pointed out by critics both within

and outside the system and also by the increasing numbers of dissatisfied clients who either turn off and drift along or give up and drop out, several innovative leaders have taken steps to increase the number and range of options available to parents and students. Since 1968, we have witnessed the development of a wide variety of "alternative schools" within the public school system, and a rapid increase in the number of nonpublic "free schools" and other alternatives to both the traditional public and nonpublic schools. Many of the latter alternative schools have survived only a short time — an average of 18 months nationwide — and were identified by some as "alternatives *to* schools" rather than as viable alternative schools. A few alternative programs have developed outside the system that remain as exemplary models of well-designed and well-operated "open schools" or as parallel institutions that complement the public schools.

Although the term "alternative school" is still widely used, it has taken on a somewhat negative connotation because of early identification with those types of programs perceived by the general public as alternatives to school. We prefer to think in terms of the need for providing complementary "optional learning environments" or simply "options" rather than in terms of "alternatives" that offer a choice between two incompatible things. Thus, in our thinking, the present program with its ever-evolving modifications still presents a legitimate and viable choice for many students. When we use the term "alternative," it will be in the sense of offering a choice among many programs, each of which may serve the needs of some students. We also accept the obvious, namely, that no single option or alternative can possibly serve the needs of all students. It is imperative, therefore, that all school systems develop programs that provide those served — the students and their parents — with a choice among educational options. In a positive sense, entry through freedom of choice becomes the chief characteristic of the type of program or school that we are considering as an optional learning environment that may be classified as a major option.

## OPTIONS IN THE CONVENTIONAL PROGRAM

It is necessary to distinguish between some of the choices that have been possible within the traditional school setting, including some fairly recent developments, and the more major options that are of relatively greater significance. To do so, it is necessary to list some of the characteristics that may be used to establish criteria for judging whether a program qualifies as a major option. First, there must be the element of choice, as previously indicated; without students' freedom of choice for entry, the program may only be a device for grouping. Second, to be classified as an alternative "school," the

option must be more than a single class or only a part of the school day; it must represent an integrated total program. Third, any major option must have, in the main, a significantly different curriculum in which there has been considerable involvement of the parents and students in the planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of the program. In addition, an alternative school may operate in separate facilities from the regular program, generally encompass more than one grade level, usually make extensive use of community resources, emphasize open education practices, feature individualized approaches, focus on learning-oriented programs, and be problem centered.

Given these characteristics, many of the innovations of the past decade that led to revised programs in various curriculum areas, as important as some of these have been, do not satisfy enough of the criteria to qualify as major options. Neither do the multitude of minicourses that have been introduced, particularly in English and social studies, to provide choice within mandated areas, or those developed on a smaller scale to provide interludes for students as a respite from the regular program or to satisfy superficially an external demand such as for career education or a student demand for relevance. By the same token, the addition of new electives in areas such as consumer education, social sciences, basic legal concepts, and the like — although providing more choices for students — do not, by themselves, provide major options. Neither do isolated provisions for independent study, work-study, or even individualized learning satisfy the criteria.

All of the foregoing examples may serve as initial steps toward, or eventually become integral parts of, major options for students. Each may provide opportunities for movement away from a highly traditional program toward a variety of options in a school system. The provision of minicourses, for example, has shown in many schools how poorly students have been prepared to make choices while, at the same time, they demonstrate the value of bringing together highly interested and motivated students and teachers. Introduced separately, however, all such innovations usually only result in superficial changes in the total program.

One positive result of these and similar evolutionary changes is that the conventional program thereby becomes a much more viable alternative for many students. It is imperative that this fact be recognized because there can be no significant support developed for major options to regular schools in a society where the majority of the taxpayers — themselves products of the system — still perceive the schools as doing a good job. It can be predicted that major changes will result in the regular program as different optional programs prove

their worth. In fact, the impact of alternative schools is already being felt in the regular schools in some school systems. In time, we can expect to see major changes in the program for all students as a result of the movement toward more options for some.

## ALTERNATIVES AND THE CHANGE PROCESS

Few critics of the schools would perpetuate them in their present form without recommending some change. Today, urban schools, in particular, are in a state of change unlike that of any previous time. Multiple pressures have converged so rapidly on an educational system never known for its ability to respond rapidly to change, that "solutions" to the multitude of problems appear and dissipate with alarming frequency. Yet, the vast majority of parents in all ethnic groups look to the schools to correct the deficiencies, and, quite universally, hold with unswerving faith to the efficacy of programs that develop basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. Vast differences exist, however, in most communities as to the goals and purposes, but, more sharply, with respect to the procedures and practices to reach them. Bringing about change under such circumstances is difficult, and solutions will not come easily. Those schools that are introducing major options for students are in the process of effecting change by organizing themselves in a way that makes change possible. As new alternative programs are designed and implemented, the total school community must not only *live with change* but, in essence, *live the changes*. In so doing, all involved become better prepared to cope with change, one of the survival skills that must be developed in any program.

It is all too evident that the day-to-day problems associated with keeping the school system operating effectively prohibit rapid, comprehensive, system-wide change, as desirable as that may be. Even a goal as acceptable as individualizing the program cannot be tackled across the board at all levels and in all courses at one time. Neither can an innovation, such as the use of differentiated staffing, be introduced without concurring changes in several other related practices, such as modified scheduling, a different use of facilities, provision of wider range of resources, the introduction of different management techniques, and many more. In short, there will be few permanent changes of substance if one tries to remold the whole system at one time. Sudden and wholesale reform is seldom possible and often fatal.

It already appears that one way of approaching the problem with any hope of success is to do so by creating a subschool or minischool and working within somewhat more reasonable parameters. After establishing for such a subschool a subset of goals and purposes

within the total set of those accepted for the system, program planning, development, implementation, and evaluation can be managed with some hope of achieving the purposes of the experiment. Since it is not practical to scrap the entire system and start over from scratch, it seems that the next best thing to do is to design a new program for one or more subgroups of the school population. An analysis of ongoing alternatives indicates that this is exactly what is being done. The differences among the options lie in the various subgroups that have been identified and the types of programs developed to meet their needs.

Another supporting factor that strengthens the case for alternatives relates to the need to provide options for more than students alone. There are individual differences among school administrators, teachers, and parents — as well as among students. There are preferred styles of leadership and management, and the congruence between the principal's personality and style and the goals of any program are a major factor in the success of the program or school. Likewise, teacher preferences play an important role, and alternative programs make possible choice by teachers as to where they can best serve. Most important, parents often want to make choices, especially for younger children, and generally find their options overly restricted. The situation that results from the combination of satisfied preferences can provide the ideal learning environment, whether it reflects an open, collegial system or one that is more structured and bureaucratic. Yet, regardless of its climate of compatibility through choice, no publicly supported school will be perceived as effective unless it is demonstrating capacity to develop each individual to his maximum potential, including proficiency in the basic skills.

In this regard, the typical alternative or option is manageable with respect to implementation and evaluation because practically all such programs are limited to subgroups of no more than 200 students. The staff, although differentiated in composition, is also relatively small. The necessary special inservice programs, therefore, are limited to a small cadre of professionals and paraprofessionals with resultant effectiveness and efficiency. Similarly, feedback from all persons involved can be better utilized in the formative evaluation that is essential to make adjustments as the program develops to ensure that objectives are being met. Finally, since any public alternative of an experimental nature must be subjected in time to summative evaluation if it is to be a system component, the advantages of dealing with small, well-defined manageable options are obvious. Those alternatives that prove their worth through such experimentation, in combination with the conventional program, should ultimately constitute, in aggregate, the unique system of education needed in each school district.

## REDESIGN AND ALTERNATIVES: COMPATIBLE OR NOT?

One of the top priority programs of the State Education Department for the past three years has been Project Redesign. Redesign is defined as a comprehensive, systematic process of change involving the participation of a total community in the examination and redefinition of its educational needs and goals. As a change strategy, Redesign deals with the entire system of education and not only is concerned with setting goals and designing programs to facilitate those goals, but is also basically concerned with developing an implementation strategy for putting the programs into operation. The only option was soon seen as "changing while operating."

As stated at a conference recently:

> In Redesign, we are trying:
>
> 1. To bring about those changes in education methodology which will permit us to design education much more in response to student needs -- especially their needs for real experience rather than just providing the traditional curriculum offerings.
> 2. To change educational management so that our school districts are better able to assess the future and to set in action programs to achieve definite goals.
> 3. To bring about changes in the relationships among the various segments of our State Education system so that the regional agencies (BOCES), and the State Education Department become much more effective in supporting the efforts of local school districts.

Early in the history of Redesign, a set of 24 characteristics was developed which described a new system of education or a total educational environment needed to meet the needs of the future. Among the characteristics were:

- An individual development plan for each student
- A system in which the teacher and learner might be interchangeable at any time
- A zero-reject system; that is, no student is "turned off" by education
- A system which operates with a plan that is flexible and self-renewing
- A system that exists to serve the needs of the community
- A system that provides many alternate ways of attaining the goals of the students

Given the previous definition of Redesign, some of its objectives, and some of the characteristics of the kind of educational system we would like to have, where do alternatives or options fit in? What have we learned from the prototype Redesign districts during the past three years relative to the change process?

In the first place, we have discovered that the change process takes time; time to build credibility, to get the total community involved, to raise the sights of the community through experiences in looking at alternative futures and options, to build management skills, and to take first steps in effecting program changes. In so doing, a number of new and different types of services were identified that were needed from both the Department and from other resources. We also found out that it is necessary to generate initial success through small, achievable steps rather than by remaking any major segment of the system in one giant step.

It is not the intent here to detail the successes and the failures or the specific outcomes of the process in any of the districts engaged in Redesign. It is significant to note, however, that some of the initial steps have consisted in the establishment of alternative programs of one type or another that increased the number and range of choices. Most importantly, each new potential program component is evaluated with respect to the district's long-term goals. In addition, the broad involvement of students, teachers, and the community in the decision-making leading to adoption of the program component ensures acceptance and support. The Redesign objectives, process, and goals create in the school systems the fertile ground in which viable optional learning environments can be nurtured and grown. Such alternatives may provide the larger, more significant steps needed to realize the system-wide change envisioned in most school districts of the State by the end of the decade.

For schools not formally engaged in the Redesign effort, consideration should be given to the implications of some of the foregoing factors as alternatives are planned and implemented. Foremost, there is need to determine where such an experimental program fits in with respect to the long-term goals of the district. Redesign, by its very nature, demands long-range planning, goal-setting, and then a systematic program with performance objectives established to reach the goals within a stated time frame. Alternatives of substance, introduced in any school system, will not last unless they are compatible with the other program components that contribute to the long-term goals. If optional learning environments are to be accepted and supported, broad involvement of those affected is imperative. This step means that parents who opt for traditional programs as well as those who favor open, less structured programs must be involved, where appropriate, to guarantee their support. It is also evident in school systems now offering a variety of alternatives that a different management style is needed. As building principals are given added responsibility for school-by-school program development and accountability, both the system-wide and school management systems need to reflect the

participatory, collegial mode of operation rather than the monocratic, bureaucratic type that is still the norm. In effect, most, if not all, of the services needed by the Redesign schools will be required as significant alternatives are introduced in any system.

## ALTERNATIVES AND OPEN EDUCATION

To some people, alternative schools are synonymous with open education. In fact, while many of the highly visible alternatives incorporate features that characterize open education, not all of the optional learning environments that now exist represent open environments in all respects. It is significant, however, that many features of open education are common in the alternatives that have been developed to meet the needs of the disaffected, the potential or actual dropout, and others who do not succeed in regular programs.

Practically all of the alternative elementary schools that have appeared under private sponsorship — free schools, community schools, and the like — are open schools — some so open that any determination that the program is equivalent to that offered in the public school is difficult, if not impossible, to make. Many of these new nonpublic elementary schools satisfy the preferences of those parents who earlier opted to enroll their children in Montessori or similar types of preschool and primary grade programs. Most of these alternative elementary schools serve small numbers of children at comparatively high costs to parents.

Pressures from such parents on public school systems, coupled with reports in recent years on the success of British Infant Schools and the rise of a fast-developing cadre of open education proponents in this country, have resulted in steps taken in many districts to implement open programs. Almost immediately the picture was confused by the trend toward "open space schools," some housing open programs with an open curriculum, open participation by students and teachers, and learner-oriented, others merely implementing the traditional program in open space with minor changes. The net result has been the creation of relatively few complete alternative open schools and, instead, the development of open classrooms, open corridor and cluster programs, and similar partially open programs. In the main, most parents still cannot find choices among elementary schools or programs, although the effect of open education philosophy and practices is bringing changes in the schools that are resulting in better individualized programs.

It has become fairly clear, however, that just as not all students, or teachers, can operate best in an open space school so, too, not all can or will benefit from the learner-centered, highly unstructured open

school. Thus open education does not provide the only answer, and such schools, as is true of the conventional program, provide only one type of alternative.

There is evidence, too, from the experience in some districts that establishment of one open alternative school among a group of regular schools can lead to several logical and troublesome outcomes. Unless the district has an open enrollment policy, there will be both parents in the other attendance districts who want their children to be enrolled in the open school and parents in the open school district who want their children in one of the regular programs. Other districts have had problems resulting from putting all their focus on one school through added supportive services, publicity, and in other ways; this has led teachers to classify themselves as "in" or "out." In both examples, the solution eventually must be equal access to such options as an open edueation program.

The legal responsibility of the local board of education extends to all schools in the district, both public and nonpublic. All diploma-granting secondary schools must be registered or accredited. All other schools, elementary and secondary, must be able to demonstrate that their programs are substantially equivalent to those offered in the public schools of the district. Usually, the board of education delegates responsibility for such a determination to the chief school officer who must arrange for a visit to the school to evaluate the program. Information is provided in the 1973 edition of *Minimum Requirements for Schools in New York State* to assist both public and nonpublic officials in this determination of equivalency. Not all free schools or some open schools have been determined to be equivalent.

## CAREER EDUCATION THROUGH ALTERNATIVES

No total education program for any student is complete without options that permit orientation to, exploration of, and training in some aspects of the world of work. Many New York State schools have long provided major optional programs and schools as part of their vocational curricula. BOCES area occupational centers have extended these choices so that most students in the State now have access to 2- or 3-year programs with a wide range of opportunities to gain entry-level marketable skills. Featured as an integral part of some curricula have been extensive work-study programs. In addition, some other students not enrolled in occupational programs have also participated in work experience programs as attempts have been made to cut down on the number of dropouts from the regular program. While such optional learning environments have been made available

in increasing numbers in recent years, only a fraction of the student population has received any significant exposure to the world of work.

The thrust of career education programs is to expose all students to the world of work by providing for the sequential development of occupational awareness, orientation, exploration, and specialization. The overall objective is to ensure that students leaving high school will be prepared for either employment in a job of their choosing or for further education in 2- or 4-year colleges or other postsecondary institutions.

At the elementary school level, the objective is to develop awareness of the wide variety of careers, using the cluster concept as a device to help children classify them in manageable categories. Even at this level, programs are developing that provide options through meaningful out-of-school experiences and by bringing more resources into the classrooms, both people and materials. Especially in individualized programs, new opportunities are provided for students to pursue interests in learning about careers.

In middle schools and junior high schools, the focus is on orientation and exploration. Although most programs at this point tend to be classroom and materials oriented, some alternative programs are providing opportunities for students to get first-hand contacts with a variety of occupations, not as workers but as observers. Through cooperative arrangements with businesses and industries in the community, with adequate supervision and follow-up by liaison personnel, such experiences can provide feedback for use in planning or adjusting the experiences provided in the school. When reinforced by the teachers in the regular courses who must accept a vital role in the process, the result can be both a more relevant curriculum and a student better prepared for the decision making that leads to specialization.

Most major alternative programs that have a career education focus or in which career education is an integral component are found in senior high schools. For some students, these options become the specialized courses in the vocational schools or BOCES centers that develop entry-level job skills. For others, the options are pretechnical courses in the regular school in preparation for technical programs in 2-year colleges or technical institutes. For those whose career choices in the professions require more extended postsecondary programs, the options are within the college-preparatory curricula, but even for these students, new alternatives are being developed. Among such options are new provisions for college-bound students to have experiences in work-related programs. (This is discussed in the next section.)

Among the most important alternatives for high school age youth are those designed to serve the needs of dropouts or potential drop-

outs. While some of these alternatives notably certain street academies in New York City, have focused on college preparation, others have developed as career education-oriented programs, incorporating work-study programs very different from those of the past. In one such alternative program, the students are engaged in a highly individualized in-school program, with high performance expected on a competency-based skills development program. In perhaps the most outstanding alternative program for youth who have dropped out of both regular high schools and vocational schools, the Auxiliary Services to High School program in New York City, specially structured programs built around learning-skill centers, operating both day and evening, are preparing youth for high school equivalency examinations. Some of the youth reenter regular high schools after achieving success in the program; a high percentage earn equivalency diplomas; and a significant number enter and succeed in colleges. Many are employed throughout their participation in the program, and vocational counseling is an integral part of the experience. Another career education type of alternative to "in schoolhouse" education is the employer-conducted program. In sum, a wide variety of options are becoming available under the career education umbrella, and many of these make use of community resources for those youth who have not succeeded in regular programs.

## ALTERNATIVES FOR THE COLLEGE-BOUND

Optional programs for students in grades 11 and 12 whose career objectives require a college education take on several different forms. Those that satisfy the criteria for alternative schools provide a subgroup of students with a very different learning environment. The various "community" schools, the school-without-walls type of program, and those simply called alternative schools are open schools characterized by high reliance on the students' desires for and capability to benefit from a learner-centered, self-directed program that makes extensive use of out-of-school resources. For some students, the opportunity for independent study, for volunteer work in social agencies, for internship or other types of work experiences, or for other exposure to problems outside the schools, all centered in a nonconventional setting -- provides a good transitional program before college.

Many options are being provided to seniors through a variety of cooperative arrangements between schools and colleges. Some of these alternatives have been available for years. Many schools in the State have offered college-level courses as part of the Advanced Placement Program for over 15 years and have provided about 25 percent

of all the candidates in the country for these examinations. Similarly, early admission programs have existed for years, with provisions made for completing high school requirements in less than 4 years. A number of schools have cooperated with area colleges in a variety of ways to provide college-level experiences to seniors.

Recently, a number of foundation-sponsored programs have been developed to reduce the 8-year high school-college program to 7 years. At the same time, both 2- and 4-year colleges in increasing numbers have worked out new arrangements jointly with area high schools that have increased the number of options significantly. College staff are teaching college-level courses in high schools with provisions for college credit, if desired, and for high school credit. Increasing numbers of seniors are enrolling in courses on nearby college campuses for joint credit while completing requirements for their high school diploma in their home school. Many more colleges are accepting students at the end of their third year. Some of these students have completed their requirements for a diploma through an accelerated program. Others are receiving their high school diploma after completing one or more required courses in college, such as a fourth unit in English, and having the credit validated by the high school principal. Examples of 7-year programs are those underway at the State University of New York at Albany, Binghamton, and Fredonia. Another experimental program being developed at LaGuardia Community College combines grades 10, 11, and 12 with a 2-year college program to create a new "middle college." All of these options for college-bound students in New York State and across the country provide viable choices for students and evidence of change in the system.

## APPROPRIATE ALTERNATIVES FOR THE GIFTED AND TALENTED

Perhaps the students most in need of and best served by multiple optional learning environments are the gifted and talented. Although the development of a comprehensive system of individual learning for all students is an essential first step, it will not guarantee that the needs of the gifted will be met unless appropriate alternatives are provided for them. In another statement, to be released early in 1974, the unique needs of these students, described by the Fleischmann Commission as "the most handicapped group in the schools when their mental ages are compared with the age-level at which they are taught," are discussed at length and specific action recommendations are made. Here, only a brief consideration is given to the alternatives that have

appeared to serve the needs of both the academically gifted and those who are talented in a variety of areas such as music and the a

Many of the options described earlier for the college-bound stud in general are particularly effective for the academically talented. T provision of specialized high schools in New York City such as the Bronx High School of Science, Stuyvesant High School, Brooklyn Technical High School, and Hunter College High School have long represented a major type of alternative for a variety of gifted students. Likewise, the provision of Advanced Placement courses has served the needs of others in regular high schools. One of the best examples of a school that has a strong focus on the academically gifted is the Calasanctius Preparatory School in Buffalo. In Rochester, the Major Achievement Program (MAP) for years has been a significant endeavor to meet the needs of the same kind of student. In recent years, the Queens Association for the Education of Exceptionally Gifted Children has been instrumental, in cooperation with York College of the City University of New York and Community School District #29, in establishing classes for the exceptionally gifted in that district. Many of the pupils served in the latter program are from minority and low-income groups.

Currently, a number of cooperative programs are developing other appropriate alternatives geared to the unique needs of the academically gifted.

Numerous and varied opportunities are also being developed to meet the needs of those talented in music, visual arts, and the performing arts. In New York City, the High School of Music and Art, the High School of Art and Design, and the Performing Arts School are supplemented by the Student Art League, Children's Art Carnival, and other programs such as the Metropolitan Museum (Junior Museum) and Brooklyn Museum (MUSE). Various artist-in-residence programs have existed both in New York City and elsewhere in the State to provide experiences in depth with professional artists. A major new alternative program was started in September in Nassau County, where a Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) School for the Talented has been established to meet county-wide needs. In other schools, the talented pupils are served by independent study programs and other alternatives that permit them to develop their skills to the maximum.

The New York State Talent Network provides a special learning environment for the State's most talented youth. The School of Orchestral Studies, the first school of the Talent Network, has completed its fourth summer at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, under the cosponsorship of the State Education Department, the New York State School Music Association, and the Saratoga Performing

Arts Center, in cooperation with the Philadelphia Orchestra Association. The School is directed by Maestro Eugene Ormandy, with instruction by the first-chair players, during the 4 weeks that the orchestra is in residence at Saratoga. One hundred of the State's most talented instrumental students are screened annually from 35,000 students for membership in the School. During 1973, the second school of the Talent Network was instituted: the School of the Theatre, with instruction by the faculty of the Julliard School. If funds are allocated, the Talent Network will expand these options in 1974 to include summer schools in ballet and modern dance, the visual arts, film media, and choral studies. In sum, provisions for the talented are expanding as it is recognized that they require appropriate alternatives to meet their special needs.

## HOW COULD IT HAVE HAPPENED IN NEW YORK STATE?

To those who consider that changes in New York State schools are inhibited by numerous State mandates, all of the foregoing may come as a surprise, perhaps a shock. The number and variety of the alternatives, ranging as they do throughout the elementary and secondary program and across the State, reflect both local initiative and willingness to experiment and a positive attitude in the Department that is supportive of responsible experimentation. Educational leadership of the finest kind has always surfaced in our schools when challenges have been faced. The present movement toward diversity is only natural in response to the demands of the times.

There are some specific factors that make such experimentation possible, some of which have been indicated in the foregoing discussion of various optional learning environments or which may be inferred. The high school principal, for example, has authority to validate a wide variety of in-school and out-of-school programs for credit. Independent study, work-study programs, out-of-school instruction, study abroad, community internships, and similar programs may be validated for credit under existing regulations. Local procedures involve steps to obtain specifications as to the nature of the program, information about the qualifications of those teaching the courses or directing and supervising the activity, evidence of acceptable participation, and evidence of successful completion of the program on the basis of examination, performance, or other appropriate achievement indicators. New York City principals recently have been directed to establish Professional Accrediting Committees representing the professional staff. Such committees are to "review alternative projects and programs to be offered by the school and make specific recommendations, whereupon credit may be granted for such projects and programs subject to the approval of the school's principal." In

addition, it is indicated that "In appropriate cases of independent study or small-group projects, individual schools may make use of written agreements or 'contracts' to define in advance rights, responsibilities, and credit requirements for the mutual benefit of students, parents, and staff." In smaller school systems, such policies and procedures are typically developed in written form and endorsed by the board of education on recommendation of the chief school officer. The point, here, is that there presently is ample authority delegated to the local school officials to permit the introduction of many options.

Beyond this type of flexibility, there is another major factor that permits diversity. As is clearly evident from an analysis of the 1973 edition of the publication, *Minimum Requirements for Schools in New York State*, there are fewer actual mandates than many realize. Furthermore, there are two major classes of mandated requirements -- statutory mandates in the Education Law and those established in the Regulations of the Commissioner or Rules of the Board of Regents. Reference is made to the *Minimum Requirements* statement for specific examples of each. While many perceive statements in administrative or supervisory letters, syllabuses, or other Department publications as mandates, most are more accurately to be considered as "recommendations." Most recent State courses of study, for example, have been so developed that they require local "adaptation" within a flexible framework and do not lend themselves to "adoption." Obviously, even when all mandates are satisfied, a local school has wide latitude as it exercises its legal responsibility for determining goals and objectives and then for designing a program to reach them. Many of the options that have been described fall within the limits established by such mandates.

While it should be obvious, however, that legal mandates must be satisfied, it should also be recognized that there are provisions that have long existed in the Regulations that encourage experimentation. There is no procedure to waive statutory requirements to permit experimentation other than to have special legislation either to repeal the law(s) involved or to permit the specific experimental program. The latter procedure was followed a few years ago when special legislation was passed to permit pilot districts to experiment with the extended school year and provide State aid during July and August for the schools involved. Practically all of the existing options fall within statutory limitations, but with some approved loosening of requirements established by Regulations of the Commissioner.

The basis for the actions taken in granting such flexibility is in section 100.2(b) of the Regulations:

> Nothing herein contained, however, shall prevent a board of education from making such curriculum adaptations as are neces-

sary to meet local needs and conducting such experimentation as may be approved by the commissioner. This principle of flexibility shall apply to every area of the curriculum. The exercise of initiative and responsibility on the part of local school authorities in the administration of the curriculum is encouraged.

Several of the major options that have been introduced come under this provision. It is possible for Regulations to be waived for the purposes of experimentation. It is to be noted, however, that such experimentation must have prior approval. This approval assumes that all Regulations that will not be satisfied are identified and waivers obtained.

For the last several years, the Department has been approving locally developed tests which are offered in lieu of Regents examinations by school districts that have developed programs which do not follow the traditional semester schedule. This procedure requires a considerable time commitment on the part of the Department staff since each of the locally developed tests must be reviewed and, in some instances, revised or rewritten in an effort to ensure a high quality examination. Since staff time constraints have not allowed this service to be offered generally to local districts, the Department will be exploring additional testing dates for Regents examinations beyond the established January, June, and August testing schedule. Where possible, additional Regents examinations will be offered in March or April, thereby allowing students the option of being tested on a more frequent basis.

In sum, there are many different options now available to students in many schools because a number of forward-looking administrators and other educational leaders have taken advantage of the existing opportunities to experiment. In the process, a few have over-stepped the broad limits already described; others, having failed to secure prior approval, have been found to be in indefensible positions when questions have been raised.

In order to encourage further responsible experimentation and the introduction of alternatives in more school systems, the following guidelines have been developed. These will be used only for those *major* optional programs described earlier, including alternative schools. Obviously, those options that fall within the conditions set by existing requirements will not require application for formal approval; however, any major innovative option for which an administrator would like Department assistance in monitoring and evaluation should be submitted. The procedure is fully intended to be supportive rather than restrictive. It should be expected that Department personnel will draw upon their experience to provide constructive criticism and indicate defects or drawbacks that might otherwise not be recognized before programs get in trouble.

## GUIDELINES FOR APPROVAL OF MAJOR OPTIONAL PROGRAMS

The following guidelines do not replace existing procedures used for incorporating or chartering nonpublic schools, for registration or accreditation of secondary schools, or for the approval of locally developed courses of study. These procedures will continue to be administered by the Division of School Supervision (incorporation and registration) and the Division of Curriculum Development (course approval).

The approval of any experimental program will not necessarily carry with it the endorsement of the Department; rather, it represents approval of the proposal as a well-planned, responsible experiment. The accreditation procedures, leading to diploma-granting authority for secondary schools, require conformity with more restrictive guidelines than does this type of approval.

### Guidelines *

1. The proposed alternative school or program must satisfy all statutory requirements in regard to areas such as staffing, facilities, curriculum, pupil attendance and accounting, and the length of the school day and year.
2. The program description should clearly show which requirements established by Regents Rules or Commissioner's Regulations are satisfied. Requirements not so met must be identified and specific requests to waive such requirements for the duration must be submitted and approval granted *before* the program is initiated. It is within the discretion of the Commissioner to waive such nonstatutory requirements for purposes of responsible experimentation.
3. As expected for any experimental program, a clear statement of well-defined goals and objectives — what the experiment is intended to accomplish — must be submitted along with a description of the procedure to be employed to accomplish the objectives, the proposed duration, staffing, criteria for selecting students, facilities to be used, and other provisions taken to satisfy legal requirements. There should also be an explanation of the ways in which the proposed program differs from the "regular" programs and what the rationale is for adopting the alternative. The description should also document the process used in developing the proposal, specifying all those involved and the steps taken to develop support.
4. The proposal should include a plan for evaluation. There should be formative evaluation to guarantee continuous progress toward the stated objectives in order to improve or revise procedures as results indicate. A final, or summative, evaluation should also be included at the termination of the experiment as a basis for

* See References, page 23.

assessing the value of the program and for deciding whether the experimental program should be continued as an option in the regular program.

5. Evidence should be submitted to indicate that the Board of Education in public meeting has approved the experimentation on recommendation of the chief school officer, and that it will provide the necessary support for the proposed duration of the program.
6. Applications from chief school officers for approval of alternative schools should be sent at least 6 weeks prior to the planned starting date to:

Assistant Commissioner for Instructional Services
State Education Department
Albany, New York 12224

## REFERENCES

In most cases, the publication *Minimum Requirements for Schools in New York State*, 1973 edition, will be adequate for checking various requirements.

The following basic documents, however, should be referred to for more complete statements of Regents Rules, Commissioner's Regulations, and Education Law:

1) *Rules of the Board of Regents and Regulations of the Commissioner of Education*
2) *McKinney's Consolidated Laws of New York Annotated*, Book 16, 3 volumes, Sections 1–5500

Other recommendations may be found in the publication *The Secondary Curriculum of New York State, A Handbook for Administrators*.

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