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ABSTRACT

In February 1974 a survey was conducted which focused primarily on elective programs and elective courses in the secondary language arts curricula in Indiana. Responses to the survey show (1) a movement toward predominantly elective programs in recent years, (2) almost no movement toward predominantly required programs, and (3) a similarity in the content skill areas that are stressed in both elective and required programs. This report contains the pertinent information gained by the survey and written in the form of answers to those questions asked most frequently by Indiana educators. In addition to the fifteen areas of inquiry covered by the survey, the report includes two graphs of criteria data, conclusions (covering eighteen specific points), and a brief summary and statement of implications. (JH)

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state language arts survey: a report

Indiana State Department of Public Instruction
Harold H. Negley, Superintendent
1974

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The teachers and administrators who responded to our questionnaire are to be thanked for their efforts. The survey could not have been completed without their professional contributions.

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In February of 1974, the Indiana State Department of Public Instruction conducted a survey of the secondary language arts curricula in Indiana. The goal of this project was to determine the current status of the language arts curricula in the State focusing primarily upon elective programs and elective courses. The study was completed for the purpose of enabling the state language arts consultants to make viable recommendations to the local education agencies.

The Indiana State Department of Public Instruction has gleaned the pertinent information from the survey and has presented it in this summary report to all interested teachers and administrators. The report has been written in the form of answers to those questions which educators have asked most frequently regarding the language arts curricula in Indiana.

The sample represented in this study cannot, without analysis, be considered a random sample of the total population. It was produced by those who responded to a questionnaire distributed to the total population. Because of this, questions may arise about the validity of any conclusions drawn from this sample about the total population.

In hopes of answering these questions, two (2) criteria -- school population and school geographical location -- were selected and analyzed by a T-Test to compare the mean of the sample to the mean of the total population. It was found that differences in the means for both the school size and the school geographical location, although small, were statistically significant* at the .01 level. The statistical significance of small differences can, however, be explained by the large size of the sample. Thus, although size and region can be said to have affected response, the actual deviations of the sample means from the corresponding population means are not great enough to challenge the representativeness of the sample on the basis of these two important criteria variables.

If questions as to the reliability of the following conclusions still arise, consult the graphs of the criteria data presented in figures one and two of this report. They portray the small differences which exist between the sample and the total population.

*"Significant" here does not indicate "important" but is used here to indicate "signifying a true difference between the sample mean and the population mean."

ENROLLMENT OF SCHOOLS RESPONDING TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE

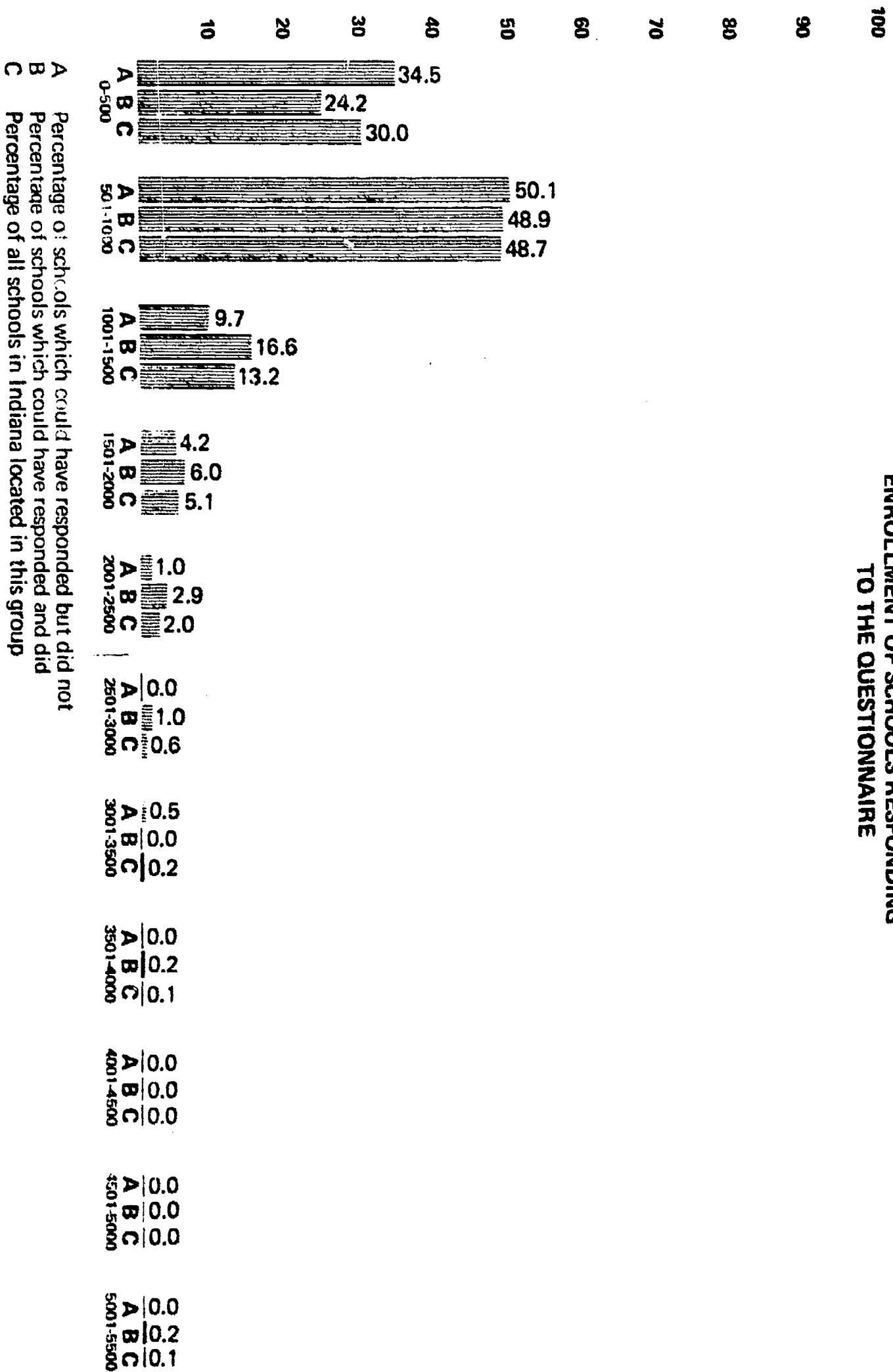


Figure 1.

**GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF SCHOOLS
RESPONDING TO QUESTIONNAIRE**

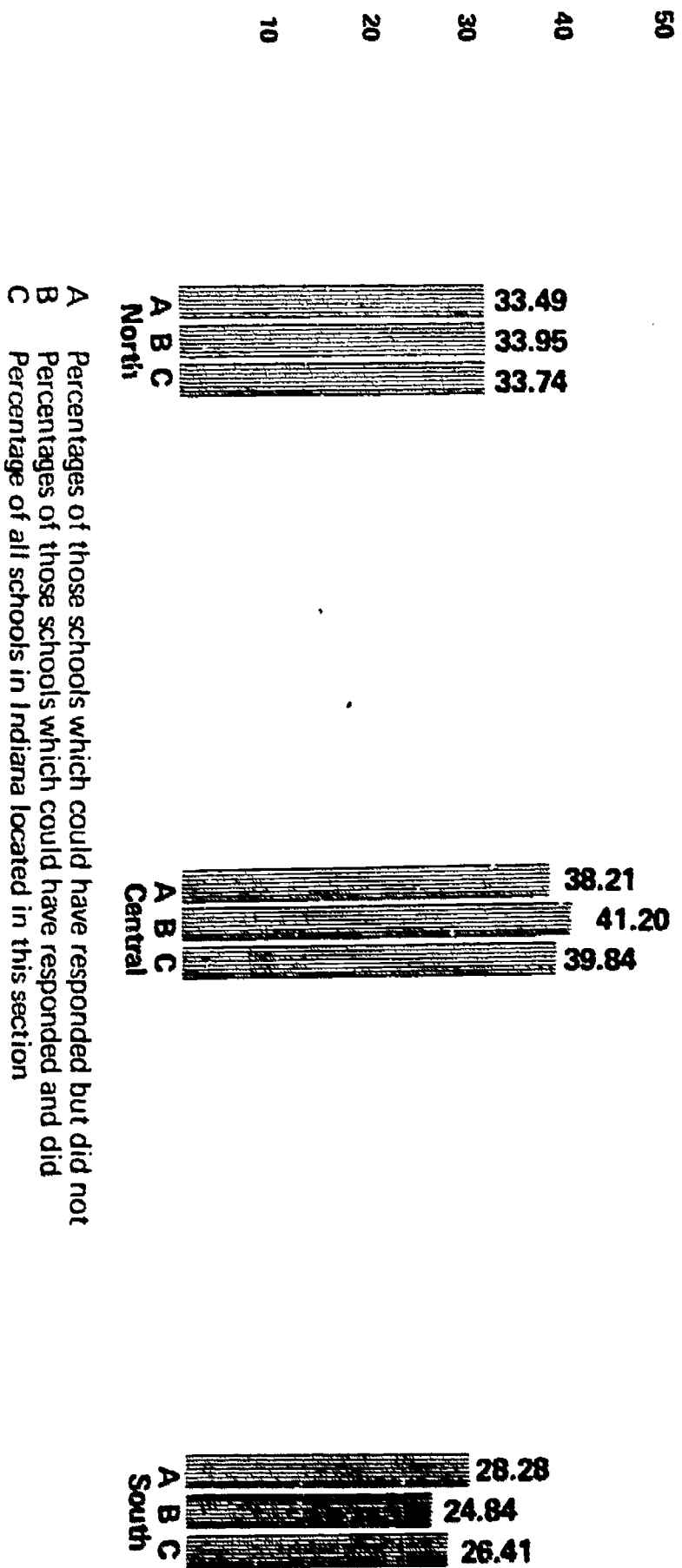


Figure 2.

1. WHAT CURRICULAR DESIGNS ARE USED MOST FREQUENTLY IN THE SECONDARY LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAMS IN INDIANA?

Of the 496 respondents 55 per cent reported that the language arts curricula in their schools are organized solely around the concept of semester/year-long required courses. Nineteen per cent said they maintain required courses but combine them with more than 5 electives or provide for some student selection of their courses by content and difficulty level. Eight per cent said their language arts programs provide exclusively for student selection of courses by content and difficulty level. The remaining 18 per cent reported that their language arts programs are best described as having a combination of the above selections.

Of the 277 high schools which responded to the questionnaire, 35 per cent indicated that their curricula are comprised of semester/year-long required courses at each grade level with fewer than 5 elective courses. Forty-one per cent of the high schools reported that they maintain required courses but combine them with more than 5 elective courses or provide for some student selection of content and difficulty levels. Twelve per cent of the responding high schools said their curricula are organized solely by student selection of content and difficulty levels, and another 2 per cent indicated they are offering pilot phase electives to a control group. The remaining 10 per cent of the respondents reported combinations of the above curricular designs and cannot be placed in any specific category.

2. WHEN WERE THE CURRENTLY USED CURRICULAR DESIGNS IMPLEMENTED?

Sixty-three per cent of the 496 respondents said they implemented their present language arts programs during or before the 1970-71 school year. Eighteen per cent reported their present language arts programs were implemented during the 1971-72 or 1972-73 school years. The remaining 18 per cent reported their present language arts programs were implemented during the 1973-74 school year. One per cent of the population did not respond.

When considering the specific curricular designs, it was found that 88 per cent of the 239 who indicated their designs could best be described as semester/year-long required courses at each grade level with fewer than 5 elective offerings had implemented their current curriculum designs before the 1971-72 school year. In contrast, 7 per cent of the 40 who said their curriculum designs would best be described as student selection of course by content and difficulty level had implemented their programs before the 1971-72 school year and 50 per cent of this group had implemented their programs during the 1973-74 school year.

3. ARE ANY OF THOSE SCHOOLS WHICH HAVE IMPLEMENTED AN ELECTIVE LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULAR DESIGN PLANNING TO RETURN TO A REQUIRED CURRICULUM?

Of those 40 respondents who said they currently are providing a curriculum based upon student selection of courses by content and difficulty level, none reported they are planning to return to a totally required curriculum and one school reported that it is planning to implement a curriculum combining required and elective courses. Of those 7 who reported they currently were piloting phase elective courses to control groups, none reported a plan to implement a predominantly required curriculum. Three of the 7 reported they are planning to implement a curriculum based upon student selection of courses by content and difficulty level.

4. ARE ANY SCHOOLS WHICH CURRENTLY HAVE A CURRICULUM COMPRISED PREDOMINATELY OF REQUIRED COURSES PLANNING TO IMPLEMENT A PREDOMINANTLY ELECTIVE PROGRAM?

Of the 60 respondents who reported that their current curricula are mostly required, 11 per cent indicated they are planning to implement a program based upon student selection of content and difficulty level. Of those 271 who reported that their programs currently consist of only semester/year-long required courses at each grade level, 8 per cent said they are planning a program of student selection of courses by content and difficulty level and 4 per cent said they are planning to implement a pilot phase elective program.

5. WHEN WILL THE SCHOOLS WHICH ARE PLANNING CURRICULUM CHANGES IMPLEMENT THEIR PLANS?

Forty-two per cent of the 496 respondents reported they intend to implement a new program in September, 1974; two per cent said January, 1975; eight per cent said September, 1975; one per cent said January, 1976; and one per cent said sometime after January, 1976. Forty-six per cent did not respond to the question.

6. HOW MANY ELECTIVE COURSES TYPICALLY ARE BEING OFFERED WITHIN THE SECONDARY LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULA?

Sixty-seven per cent of the 496 respondents stated that their present language arts curricula include less than 10 elective courses in a single term. Fourteen per cent reported their curricula include between 11 and 20 elective courses; eight per cent said theirs include between 21 and 30 elective courses and 6 per cent said theirs include more than 30 electives. Five per cent did not respond.

Of the 245 respondents who described their curricular designs as semester/year-long required courses at each grade level, 90 per cent indicated that they have 10 or fewer elective course offerings. Of the 40 respondents who described their curricular designs as student selection of courses by content and difficulty level, 5 per cent said they have 10 or fewer elective courses; 32 per cent said they have between 11 and 20 elective courses, 37 per cent said they have between 21 and 40 elective courses, and 25 per cent said they have more than 40 elective courses.

7. APPROXIMATELY WHAT PERCENTAGE OF TIME IS APPORTIONED THE VARIOUS LANGUAGE ARTS SKILL AREAS BY THE AVERAGE SECONDARY SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS DEPARTMENT?

The average percentage of time each language arts skill area reportedly was allotted in the average language arts program is as follows:

	<u>All 496 respondents</u>	<u>Those respondents with extensive re-quired curricula</u>	<u>Those respondents with a totally elective curricula</u>	<u>High Schools only</u>
(a) Writing	15%	17%	17%	17%
(b) Language history, grammar, dialectology, etc.	21%	20%	13%	19%
(c) Literature	26%	28%	28%	29%
(d) Reading	12%	10%	11%	10%
(e) Speaking	9%	9%	11%	10%
(f) Media (mass media, journalism, film-making, etc.)	5%	6%	6%	6%
(g) Other	2%	2%	2%	1%

8. WHAT IS THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF ELECTIVE LANGUAGE ARTS COURSES OFFERED AT EACH GRADE LEVEL BY THE REPORTING SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN INDIANA?

<u>Percentage of respondents who report offering electives at each grade level</u>	<u>Average number of electives offered</u>	
Grade 7	8%	4
Grade 8	12%	4
Grade 9	26%	5
Grade 10	49%	7
Grade 11	74%	13
Grade 12	85%	13

9. HOW LONG ARE THE ELECTIVE COURSES WHICH TYPICALLY ARE OFFERED IN OUR LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULA?

<u>Length of course</u>	<u>Percentage of population offering such courses</u>	<u>Average number offered</u>
3 weeks	10	11
6 weeks	30	23
9 weeks	160	26
12 weeks	30	17
18 weeks	420	8
longer than 18	210	3

10. IN A PREDOMINANTLY ELECTIVE CURRICULUM, HOW DO LANGUAGE ARTS DEPARTMENTS PROVIDE FOR THE ACQUISITION OF BASIC SKILLS?

Of the 40 respondents who stated that their curricula are based upon student selection of content and difficulty level, thirty per cent reported that they require their students to complete a single designated course which is designed to encompass all language arts skills. Fifteen per cent reported that they require students to take a specific set of courses representing the various language arts skill areas (i.e., Basic Grammar I, Speech, Drama, etc.). Twenty per cent reported that they require their students to select a course or courses from each specified skill area (i.e., language, speaking, writing, etc.). Thirty-five per cent reported that they provide instruction in every language arts skill area within each elective course offered.

11. DO THE LANGUAGE ARTS DEPARTMENTS RESTRICT OR RECOMMEND ELECTIVE COURSES TO SPECIFIED GROUPS OF STUDENTS?

Of the 496 respondents to the questionnaire, 38 per cent reported that their elective courses are restricted to specific grade levels. Sixteen per cent reported that their language arts electives have no grade level restrictions. Twenty-four per cent reported that a difficulty level is designated for each elective course.

Of the 40 respondents who described their curricula as one of student selection of courses by content and difficulty level, 10 per cent reported that their elective courses are restricted to specific grade levels. Thirty-five per cent reported that they do not restrict grade levels but that they do designate the difficulty level for each course. Another 37 per cent indicated that they designate difficulty level but make no reference to grade level restrictions.

12A. DO THOSE SCHOOLS WHICH HAVE A PREDOMINATELY ELECTIVE LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM REPORT A CHANGE IN STUDENT ATTITUDE?

Of the 40 who described their curricula as one in which students selected courses by content and difficulty levels, 2 per cent said students have a more positive attitude less than 10 per cent of the time, 10 per cent said their students have a more positive attitude less than 25 per cent of the time, 22 per cent said their students have a more positive attitude about 50 per cent of the time, 52 per cent said their students have a more positive attitude about 75 per cent of the time, and 7 per cent said their students have a more positive attitude more than 90 per cent of the time.

B. DO THE SCHOOLS WHICH REPORT THE USE OF DIFFERENT COURSE LENGTHS REPORT OBSERVING ANY DIFFERENCES IN STUDENT ATTITUDE?

<u>Respondents who offer</u>	<u>on the average say their students' attitudes improve</u>
3 week courses	about 50% of the time.
6 week courses	about 57% of the time.
9 week courses	about 65% of the time.
12 week courses	about 65% of the time.
18 week courses	about 50% of the time.
courses longer than 18 weeks each	about 50% of the time.

C. DO THE SCHOOLS WHICH REPORT THE USE OF DIFFERENT PROVISIONS FOR THE ACQUISITION OF BASIC LANGUAGE ARTS SKILLS REPORT DIFFERENCES IN STUDENT ATTITUDE?

<u>Respondents who require/provide</u>	<u>on the average say their students' attitudes have improved</u>
a single designated course designed to encompass all language arts skills	about 37% of the time.
a specific set of courses representing the various language arts skill areas (i.e., Basic Grammar 1, Beginning Speech, etc.)	about 50% of the time.
a course(s) from each specified skill area (i.e., language, speaking, writing, etc.)	about 62% of the time.
instruction in every language arts skill area within each elective language arts course offered	about 60% of the time.

13A. WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF A PREDOMINANTLY ELECTIVE LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

Of the 40 who described their curricula as one in which students select courses by content and difficulty level, 15 per cent said their students have improved their achievement levels less than 10 per cent of the time since the implementation of the elective program; 27 per cent said their students have improved their achievement levels about 25% of the time since the implementation of the elective program; 25 per cent said their students have improved their achievement levels about 50 per cent of the time since the implementation of the elective program; 7 per cent said their students have improved their achievement levels about 75 per cent of the time since the implementation of the elective program; and no respondent said his students have improved their achievement levels more than 90 per cent of the time since the implementation of the elective program. Twenty-five per cent of those who described their curricula in this way did not respond to this item.

B. DO THE SCHOOLS WHICH REPORT THE USE OF DIFFERENT COURSE LENGTHS REPORT ANY DIFFERENCES IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

<u>Respondents who offer</u>	<u>on the average say their students achieve more</u>
3 week courses	about 50% of the time.
6 week courses	about 30% of the time.
9 week courses	about 35% of the time.
12 week courses	about 32% of the time.
18 week courses	about 30% of the time.
courses longer than 18 weeks each	about 37% of the time.

C. DO THE SCHOOLS WHICH REPORT THE USE OF DIFFERENT PROVISIONS FOR THE ACQUISITION OF BASIC LANGUAGE ARTS SKILLS REPORT DIFFERENT DEGREES OF IMPROVEMENT IN STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

<u>Respondents who require/provide</u>	<u>on the average say their students' achievement has improved</u>
a single designated course designed to encompass all language arts skills	about 32% of the time.
a specific set of courses representing the various language arts skills areas (i.e., Basic Grammar 1, Beginning Speech, etc.)	about 45% of the time.
a course(s) from each specified skill area (i.e., language, speaking, writing, etc.)	about 37% of the time.
instruction in every language arts skill area within each elective language arts course offered	about 35% of the time.

14A. DO STUDENTS ELECT TO TAKE MORE THAN THE THREE UNITS OF LANGUAGE ARTS NEEDED TO SATISFY MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION WHEN THEY ARE ON A PREDOMINANTLY ELECTIVE PROGRAM?

Of the 40 who described their curriculum as one in which students select courses by content and difficulty level, 20 per cent said that less than 20 per cent of their students take more than the 3 units of language arts required for graduation; 20 per cent said that 21-40 per cent of their students take more than the 3 units of language arts required for graduation; 35 per cent said that more than 3 units of language arts are taken by 41-60 per cent of their students; 7 per cent said that more than 3 units of language arts are taken by 61-80 per cent of their students; 7 per cent said that more than 3 units of language arts are taken by 81-100 per cent of their students; and 10 per cent of the group did not respond to this item.

B. DO THE SCHOOLS WHICH REPORT THE USE OF DIFFERENT COURSE LENGTHS ALSO REPORT DIFFERENCES IN THE PERCENTAGES OF STUDENTS TAKING COURSES BEYOND THE 3 UNITS NEEDED FOR GRADUATION?

Respondents who offer

on the average say their students take more than the 3 units of language arts required for graduation

3 week courses	about 53% of the time.
6 week courses	about 57% of the time.
9 week courses	about 41% of the time.
12 week courses	about 45% of the time.
18 week courses	about 55% of the time.
courses longer than 18 weeks	about 37% of the time.

C. DO THE SCHOOLS WHICH REPORT THE USE OF DIFFERENT PROVISIONS FOR THE ACQUISITION OF BASIC LANGUAGE ARTS SKILLS REPORT DIFFERENCES IN THE PERCENTAGES OF STUDENTS TAKING COURSES BEYOND THE BASIC 3 UNITS NEEDED FOR GRADUATION?

Respondents who require/provide

on the average say their students take more than the 3 units of language arts required for graduation

a single designated course designed to encompass all language arts skills	about 35% of the time.
a specific set of courses representing the various language arts skill areas (i.e., Basic Grammar I, Beginning Speech, etc.)	about 42% of the time.
a course(s) from each specified skill area (i.e., language, speaking, writing, etc.)	about 42% of the time.
instruction in every language arts skill area within each elective language arts course offered	about 42% of the time.

15A. TO WHAT EXTENT DO THE FOLLOWING GROUPS HAVE INPUT IN THE EVALUATION OF THEIR RESPECTIVE LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAMS?

<u>Group</u>	<u>Percentage of schools indicating that this group has input</u>
Students	56%
Paraprofessionals	4%
Teachers	91%
Administrators	86%
Outside Evaluators	16%
Parents	2%

B. FROM WHICH GROUPS DO THOSE SCHOOLS WHICH HAVE PREDOMINANTLY ELECTIVE PROGRAMS OBTAIN INPUT FOR THE PURPOSE OF EVALUATING THEIR LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAMS?

<u>Group</u>	<u>Percentage of schools with student selection of courses by content and difficulty level indicating that this group has input</u>
Students	92%
Paraprofessionals	7%
Teachers	92%
Administrators	85%
Outside Evaluators	22%
Parents	32%

CONCLUSIONS

1. Since 1971, there has been a movement by many of the secondary schools in Indiana toward the implementation of more predominantly elective language arts programs, and there are indications of a continued movement toward the implementation of elective language arts programs in the secondary schools of Indiana through the 1974-75 school year.
2. Most of the schools which have predominantly required language arts curricula have undergone no major curricular revisions in their language arts programs for the past three years.
3. Those secondary schools in Indiana which have implemented predominantly elective language arts programs within the past three years have no plans to alter their present programs.
4. Secondary language arts programs which maintain student selection of courses by content and difficulty level (i.e., phase electives) offer the student a more extensive selection of courses than do the predominantly required language arts programs.
5. Those secondary language arts programs in Indiana which are characterized by either predominantly elective or predominantly required curricula show no significant difference in the percentage of time each of them apportion the various language arts skill areas.
6. Literature studies comprise the greatest portion of all secondary language arts curricula in Indiana, and speaking and media studies comprise the smallest portion of all secondary language arts curricula in Indiana.
7. Within the secondary language arts programs in Indiana, fewer elective courses are offered in the lower grade levels than in the higher ones.
8. Of those secondary language arts programs in Indiana using courses less than one semester in length, the most commonly used is of 9 weeks duration.
9. Semester-length elective courses comprise a greater percentage of the secondary language arts programs in Indiana than any other elective course length.
10. Those schools offering semester and/or year-long elective courses in the secondary language arts programs in Indiana offer fewer elective courses than those schools offering courses of shorter lengths.

11. Those secondary language arts programs in which students select their courses by content and difficulty level almost never restrict their elective courses to specific grade levels.
12. Student attitudes improved more than half the time in those secondary language arts programs in which students select courses by content and difficulty level.
13. Those secondary language arts programs offering 9 and/or 12 week courses show a greater improvement in student attitude than do those programs with either shorter or longer courses.
14. Of the 4 surveyed methods which provide for basic language arts skill acquisition, the method requiring a single designated course designed to encompass all language arts skills achieves the least improvement in student attitude, in student achievement levels, and in the number of students taking more courses than needed to meet minimum graduation requirements.
15. The secondary language arts programs which have predominantly elective curricula show considerable variety in the degree of improvement in student achievement and in the percentages of their students who take more language arts courses than needed to satisfy minimum graduation requirements.
16. The length of the elective course is not significant in relation to the amount of improvement in student achievement levels.
17. Teachers and administrators are the two groups which are most frequently involved in evaluation of the secondary language arts programs in Indiana.
18. Students and parents have more input in the evaluation of predominately elective programs than they do in the evaluation of any other type of language arts program surveyed.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

A descriptive study such as this, necessarily limited by the moment of time which it depicts and the number of contingencies which can be identified, can tell us little about what to expect in the future or what value to place on the present. From the responses to this survey, we do know that there has been a movement toward predominantly elective programs in recent years and almost no movement toward predominantly required programs. We also know that the content skill areas which are stressed and unstressed are very similar in both elective and required programs. Yet we cannot predict whether or not these conditions will continue indefinitely nor can we determine whether or not these conditions should continue.

Since this study does not indicate what our language arts departments should be doing, but only describes what some language arts departments are doing, hopefully it will provide an impetus for self-evaluation. If we have changed our curricular designs recently, we should now ask ourselves why we did so and what the results have been. If we have not changed our curricular designs in recent years, we should now ask ourselves why we have not done so and what the results have been. A state-wide descriptive study such as this becomes much more meaningful if local schools use it as a basis for further self-study.