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ABSTRACT

An alternative schools "explosion" is currently producing a large number of diverse educational choices for parents and students. Alternative schools, or those schools that offer all students a distinctive choice of educational programs, can be classified by philosophy, curriculum, or governance. This report defines, explains, and classifies free schools, open schools, basic schools, magnet schools, schools without walls, minischools, and schools within a school. Combining information from educational literature with material from personal interviews, it describes functioning examples of each type of school. One chapter focuses on districts offering a large spectrum of alternatives and suggests reasons for the successes and failures of these programs. A concluding chapter offers a selection of helpful ideas gleaned from the literature and from interviews on successful implementation of an alternative school program. The conclusion is that alternative school programs hold promise for those who believe that different students learn best in different ways. (Author/JM)

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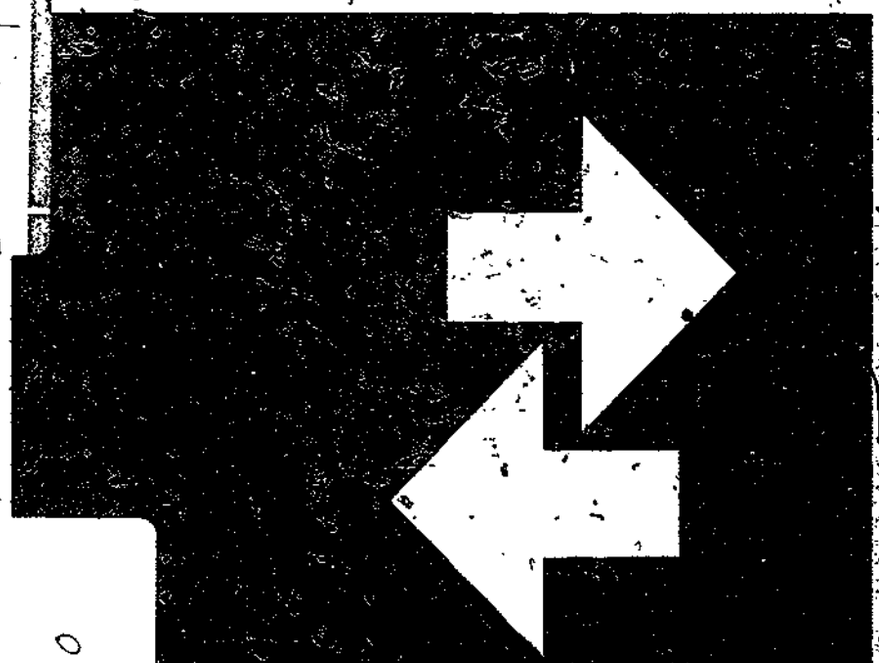
Series 1, No. 13



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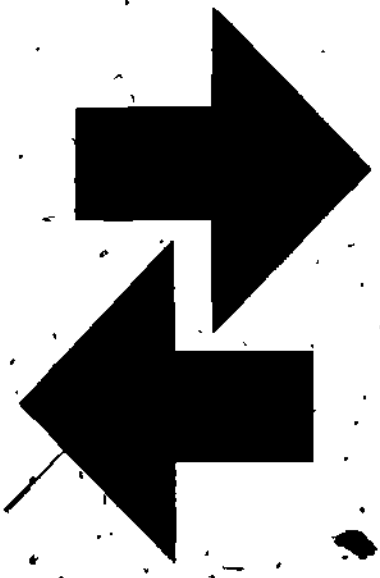

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

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FOREWORD

Both the Association of California School Administrators and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management are pleased to cooperate in producing the *School Management Digest*, a series of reports designed to offer educational leaders essential information on a wide range of critical concerns in education.

At a time when decisions in education must be made on the basis of increasingly complex information, the *Digest* provides school administrators with concise, readable analyses of the most important trends in schools today, as well as points up the practical implications of major research findings.

By special cooperative arrangement, the series draws on the extensive research facilities and expertise of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. The titles in the series were planned and developed cooperatively by both organizations. Utilizing the resources of the ERIC network, the Clearinghouse is responsible for researching the topics and preparing the copy for publication by ACSA.

The author of this report, Jo Ann Mazzarella, was commissioned by the Clearinghouse as a research analyst and writer.

S. Lee Hawkins
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INTRODUCTION

Back in the rosy-hued sixties, when alternative schools were new and shining and largely untested, they were thought by many to be the forerunners of a sweeping and fundamental "revolution" in American education. Today, in the cold, clear light of the seventies, while there are a few still doggedly waiting for that revolution to happen, most now view the educational alternatives of the sixties as precursors to a new stage in educational "evolution."

If it is true that alternative schools have helped education to evolve, it is also true that they themselves have evolved. Today's alternative schools are in many ways very different from their early predecessors.

In the beginning, the alternative schools movement was largely private, an attempt by parents, some students, a few teachers, and more would-be teachers to break away from traditional public schools and to found schools run not by professional educators or administrators but by the people they served. These small private schools, most of which had shoestring budgets, stressed individual freedom for students and the necessity for them to take responsibility for their own learning. The school founders took as their champions educators like John Holt, Jonathan Kozol, Paul Goodman, and the grandaddy of them all, A. S. Neill, whose Summerhill School had for many years given students both free choice about whether to attend classes and a large part of the responsibility for governing the school through democratic school meetings.

Today, only a handful of such "free" schools still exist. As Neill himself had predicted, Summerhill could not survive the shock of being transplanted to American soil. Many schools, after a few years, either became more traditional or (after an average life span of about two years) simply died.

Deal, in his now almost classic analysis of the failure of

these alternative schools, noted that some of the most commonly cited reasons for such failures were that the schools

- did not succeed in achieving important educational goals
- had insufficient funds
- were linked to the "counter culture" and as its importance waned, so did they

Deal adds to this list his belief that the typical early alternative school contained the seed of its own destruction, "an underdeveloped and nearly anarchic structure for decision making and problem solving."

But if most of the early alternative schools died, one of their most important underlying concepts had taken root, a concept that now has taken hold in public education. This is the idea that parents, students, and teachers ought to be able to have some choices about what kinds of educational programs they participate in. *Choices* are what the public alternative schools movement of the seventies is all about. This movement is based on the idea that public schools, instead of offering one standard educational program to all students, ought to offer several alternative programs to fill the individual needs of the people they serve.

Mario Fantini, the champion of the new public alternative schools movement, emphasizes this element of choice. He says that "the notion that there are a variety of ways in which children learn and can be taught is certainly not new. What is new is the thought that it should be made operational in the schools—not by chance but by choice."

Fantini traces the roots of the current alternatives movement not so much to "free" schools as to the "freedom" schools of the civil rights movement—schools that were specifically geared to the needs of black children. Out of these schools came the idea that different kinds of students actually need different kinds of schools and that a school can be tailored to the needs and desires of a specific group.

The public alternative schools that students, parents, and teachers now choose from are no longer merely "free" schools

or "open" schools or parent- or student-run schools; they now include a whole spectrum of educational alternatives stretching all the way to fundamental or "back to basics" schools with strict rules and authoritarian teaching methods.

Categorizing the plethora of public alternative schools is confusing because there are several different methods of categorization. These schools may be categorized by

- educational philosophy (how they teach)
- curriculum (what they teach)
- administrative and political structure (who runs them)

Alternatives classified by educational philosophy include free, open, humanistic, fundamental, and basic schools. Schools classified by curriculum include magnet schools and schools without walls. Those classified by administrative structure include schools within a school, minischools, team teaching schools, and schools that stress participative decision-making.

Some confusion arises from the fact that while all these methods of classification overlap, most schools are actually identified by only one aspect. For instance, the Evergreen Alternative School in Eugene, Oregon, is called a "magnet" school. It might just as properly be called an "open" school or a "school within a school" or be classified as a school that includes parents and students in decision-making.

Even more confusing is the fact that the same terms are used differently in different districts. One district's "magnet" may be another district's "school without walls." In one district, a "minischool" may occupy only a few rooms and serve only neighborhood children, while in another district a minischool may have a separate campus and serve students from the whole district. An "open" school in one city may be the "free" school of the neighboring city.

Confusion is further compounded by the fact that different districts may use even the term "alternative" in different ways. Minneapolis, Minnesota, for instance, uses the same definition to be used in these pages; that is, alternative schools are any schools (including schools within a school) that offer

all students a distinctive choice of educational program. In Pasadena, California, however, the "alternative" school refers to the open or humanistic school among their "special" schools. In New York City, on the other hand, "alternative" schools are schools for students who have problems with the regular program.

All this is further complicated by the fact that some alternative schools simply aren't. Some programs that are called "alternatives" (perhaps to satisfy the district's need to be educationally "au courant") offer little that can be clearly differentiated from regular programs. One must be careful in assessing the distinctiveness of alternative programs to look for real differences in philosophy, curriculum, or administrative and political structure.

Two types of schools often called "alternative"—schools for students with special talents and for students with special problems—are omitted from our discussion. These schools, for dropouts, alienated students, and those with performing or artistic talent, are not included because they were around before the alternatives movement really began and because they are not open to all students and thus do not offer real choices to everyone.

It is probably a mistake to say there is an alternative schools movement in public education today. There is instead what would better be called an alternative schools "explosion." The number of public alternative schools functioning today is probably somewhere between five and ten thousand and growing all the time. Barr has concluded that "such numbers suggest that the most far reaching experimentation and innovation to ever occur in public education is now underway."

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

The chief difference between some alternative schools and the regular program centers on educational philosophy. The two types of alternative educational philosophy to emerge most distinctly are open (or free) schools and basic (or fundamental) schools. The two couldn't be more different. While open schools are informal, stressing creative discovery, student autonomy, and teachers acting as facilitators, basic schools are formal and stress obedience of students to teachers who are authority figures.

Free or Open Education

The terms "free" school and "open" school are not considered by everyone to be identical; one distinction is usually that free schools are even "freer" than open schools in terms of demands on students. Nevertheless, their similarity in emphasizing student autonomy and individualized programs makes it reasonable to lump both types of schools together in the same category as representatives of roughly the same educational philosophy.

Open education, with its antecedents in the British primary schools, has, according to Sealey, been often misunderstood. He notes that one common assumption is that open education refers to a "mass of youngsters milling around in an open space." Dismissing this chaotic picture of open education, Sealey explains that in an open school "the classroom is organized in such a way that it enables children to be independent in their use of available resources." His observation of ten open classrooms led him to conclude that this independence makes education more "responsive" because "teachers try to ensure that the learning experiences relate to individual children as they appear to be at any given time."

A study by Groobman, Forward, and Peterson of what they called "informal" schools found that students in such

schools showed more positive attitudes toward school and teachers and greater transfer of learning to nonschool settings than did "formal" school students. Betts likewise found that students at West Philadelphia Free School had better self-concepts, attitudes toward school, and behavior than did students in other Philadelphia schools.

On the other hand, Deal maintains that "alternative" schools that give students *too much* autonomy and responsibility for decision-making do not survive. Deal, though discussing "alternative schools" in general, shows by his descriptions of their characteristics (authority vested in students, emphasis on doing and experiencing) that he is actually referring to open or free schools.

Deal pinpoints four stages in these schools' development: euphoria, depression, dissatisfaction, and resolution. In the last stage the school either dissolves, returns to conventionality, or allows staff more responsibility for setting school policy while remaining "alternative."

That Deal's theories are so widely quoted is a bit of a mystery since he bases his conclusions on only two schools. Yet his ideas ring true and his stages have been widely observed by others involved in the development of alternative schools.

Bakalis, after surveying fifteen alternative schools, found, like Deal, that where students were given total responsibility for learning and teachers acted as resource persons *only*, no one was satisfied with the approach.

All this research, taken as a whole, seems to point to certain conclusions. Although free or open education is more responsive to students' needs, improves attitudes toward school, and increases the transfer of learning outside the classroom, giving students too much freedom and responsibility leads to problems. Just how much freedom is "too much" is, of course, an area for profound and heated disagreement.

Two schools that illustrate the free or open education philosophy are located in Pasadena and Stockton, California. The Washington Center for Alternative Studies in Pasadena houses 500 students from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Started in 1972, the school, according to Shirley Neill, emphasizes students' development of responsibility and self-initiated learning.

Neill explains that, beginning with the earliest grades, students are given some choices about the activities they participate in. By grades four or six, students are allowed to make choices about how they spend several periods a day. By junior high, they spend the morning on the core curriculum and the afternoons on freely chosen activities. The result is that by high school, students are treated and respond "very much like adults."

Peter Hagen, Pasadena school district's administrative director for planning, research, and development, told the writer in a telephone interview that he believes such a school is effective only for very bright, self-reliant students.

Another thriving school is the Stockton Open School, started by parents and teachers in 1975 for grades K-8. In a telephone interview, the school's head teacher, George McCormick, described the school as "humanistic and less authoritarian" than other schools in Stockton. He warned that such schools often attract (or are used as a dumping ground for) a large number of students who are hyperactive or "grossly unsuccessful."

Because staff at this school want to ensure a wide range of abilities and types of students, students are given a one-week trial period to see if they can adjust to the freedom of the school. Although the staff does accept some "problem" students, they refuse to take more than the school's fair share.

Basic Education

Basic education, also called "back-to-basics" or fundamental education, rests on the idea that teachers ought to have complete control over what, when, and how students will be taught. Unlike proponents of open or free education, fundamentalists are not as much concerned about whether students like school or are "self-directed" in their learning as they are about whether students obey teachers and produce high test scores. While basic schools received their name be-

cause of their emphasis on "basic skills," it is important to remember that other schools—even open schools—may stress such skills also. What is distinctive about basic schools is the way in which such skills are taught and the almost total lack of emphasis on everything else.

Noting that "alternative education . . . originally meant in most districts that open, liberal alternative schools could be made available in addition to the already existing traditional ones," Schofield observes how ironic it is that "back-to-basics advocates in some districts have used the concept of alternative education to promote traditional, more conservative schooling." Indeed, basic schools are becoming such a popular form of alternative that it is possible they will soon outnumber alternative open schools.

A basic school has been in operation in Cupertino, California, since 1973. The A+ (Academics Plus) School opened with 175 students in grades one through six. According to Pursell, the school was initiated by parents with the support of a principal. Although favoring a more open approach, the principal believed parents should be able to make the final choice about their children's education. Pursell writes that the school's founders believe some children learn best in a structured environment and "need the thrill of competition against one another."

One of the biggest problems encountered when instituting this school was finding enough students in one neighborhood school to make up a class of thirty at every grade level. Although over 1,000 students initially signed up for the program, they were dispersed among the city's thirty-nine schools. Founders of the school discovered that most parents were not committed enough to the program to transport their children across town to another school.

Yet Pursell believes that in spite of such problems a fundamental school must remain voluntary, and that it must be an adjunct to a neighborhood school rather than taking over a whole school and forcing local residents to attend another school.

Finding parents who will transport students is not a prob-

lem in Palo Alto, California, where half the enrollment at fundamental Herbert Hoover Elementary School comes from outside the neighborhood, and transportation is not provided. But according to James Hessler, the district's coordinator of secondary education, Palo Alto's school board prefers to limit the number of such districtwide alternatives. In a telephone interview, Hessler expressed his belief that the board wants neighborhood schools to provide enough program choices to prevent all the students of one particular philosophy from being drawn away. This problem is especially acute in Palo Alto where principals are concerned about declining enrollments.

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS WITH SPECIALIZED CURRICULA

Some alternative schools build their programs around specialized curricula to attract students with special interests. These schools stress such areas as music, the arts, foreign language, ecology, or out-of-school experiences. Usually these schools accept students from all over the district and are called "magnet schools."

Magnet Schools

Cincinnati, Ohio, began its magnet schools program in 1973. Eardley reports that the program encompasses fourteen different types of schools, including those emphasizing arts, science, math, and foreign language. The most popular schools here are the arts school and the German bilingual school, both of which boast high parent involvement. Eardley notes that magnet schools, as they are organized in Cincinnati, do present one problem: both teachers and principals in the regular program feel some jealousy because the magnet schools have more money ($130 more per child) and the district's best students.

One especially successful magnet is the Zoo School, an environmental studies program in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Schlemmer explains that this school for sixth graders is actually located on the grounds of the Grand Rapids Zoo. While not neglecting the basic requirements of the regular sixth-grade program, the school emphasizes animal behavior, seasonal changes in animals, hiking, and nature studies. The school tries to attract highly motivated disadvantaged sixth graders.

Another magnet school, housing 150 students from grades one through six, is located in Eugene, Oregon. A publication issued by Superintendent Thomas Payzant and the Eugene School District 4J explains that the Magnet Arts School

teaches basic courses like reading, mathematics, social studies, and writing through some form of art.

Herman Schwartzrock, principal of the school, told the writer that the school was started by interested administrators and teachers, but now also receives a lot of support from parents. Schwartzrock, in his Ph.D. thesis centering on the school, noted several problems experienced by the school in its first year that were solved in the second year: a previously inflexible budget, while not increasing, became flexible enough to be used for needed materials; a staff that was much too busy was relieved by the institution of a head teacher and volunteer coordinator; the percentage of students with behavior problems was reduced from 20 to 10 percent; the ill-suited building was adapted; and the large number of curious and disruptive visitors spontaneously decreased.

The Magnet Arts School shares its building and Principal Schwartzrock with Condon School, a school that is part of the regular program. This makes it a magnet school that is also a "school within a school."

Schools without Walls

The "school without walls" is a special kind of magnet school basing its curriculum on the resources of the community. Many such schools have no school building and hold classes at art museums, zoos, hospitals, churches, and various job sites. The purpose of these programs is to get students out of the "ivory tower" atmosphere of the classroom and into the community where education seems more real and relevant. An added bonus is that these programs, because they do not require expensive facilities, often operate at a cost less than that of the regular program.

The Parkway Program in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, probably the most famous school without walls, began in 1969 with funding from a Ford Foundation planning grant and now is funded entirely by the school district. A 1973 publication by the Philadelphia School District explains that the original purpose of the school was "to integrate students with the life of the community." Classes are held in sites all

over Philadelphia, including local colleges; for transportation the school provides free bus tokens. To provide students with a sense of belonging that might be lost by attending such far-flung classes, "tutorials" were instituted consisting of twenty students and an intern and staff member who provide guidance and help with basic educational and human relations skills. Students are all volunteers and are chosen by lottery.

Ruth Steele, a Parkway planner, told the writer that the program is flourishing with five units serving 1,250 high school-aged students. A reading specialist has been added to each unit. Steele cautioned that two factors that deserve careful consideration in such a program are communication among staff members and students and preparing teachers to provide the combination of skill training and guidance expected in tutorials.

Philadelphia's Executive Assistant for External Operations Oswald Giulii told the writer that in 1977 administrators considered dropping the Parkway Program because the Philadelphia district had been severely crippled financially. Yet when it became clear that this program, unlike other Philadelphia alternatives, was costing no more or perhaps even less than regular programs, it was retained.

Begun at about the same time as the Parkway Program, and in many ways similar to it, Chicago's Metro High School stresses career education. Half the courses are held in school headquarters and the other half throughout Chicago, principally at job sites. After studying the program Moore and others concluded that one of its most important results was a student-teacher relationship characterized by noncompartmentalization, dialogue, warmth, and lack of authoritarianism. Like Parkway's Ruth Steele, Moore believes that such a program depends heavily on the skills of teachers in group counseling.

Chicago's Director of Program Development Donn Wadley expressed to the writer his opinion that one of Metro's problems has been its lack of a clearly defined model of how to maintain relationships with the business community. Since many classes are held in local businesses, it is important that

relationships with businesses initiated by individual staff members or students not be allowed to atrophy with staff or student turnover. Administrators in the district are now attempting to solve this problem by thinking of new ways to structure the school's relationship to local resources.

In Teaneck, New Jersey, Alternative I combines a school-without-walls structure with a philosophical emphasis on student independence and self-initiated learning. Mersereau writes that the 110 junior and senior high students can choose from courses given at the alternative high school, regular high schools, and a local university. The school also arranges apprenticeships or internships in hospitals, courtrooms, museums, and elementary classrooms. Students are given much choice about how educational goals are met and independence in how they use their time.

In a telephone interview, Teaneck's Director for Secondary Education Frank Arone reported that most graduates of Alternative I do "tremendously well in college." Arone emphasized that one of the reasons for the school's success was a long planning period; students and teachers studied and planned for almost two years before opening the school. He noted, too, that success depends greatly on wise staff selection. Staff for Alternative I must exhibit a deep commitment to students and must be people who have "stability as well as ideas." Arone also stressed the importance of allowing an alternative school to continue growing and changing in response to new ideas from staff and students.

Magnet Schools for Desegregation

Magnet schools have been in the spotlight lately as a means for accomplishing school racial integration. The theory is that magnet schools are a good voluntary means of integration because they attract all kinds of students from all over the district, and racial quotas can be easily balanced through the admissions process.

Oswald Giulii, Philadelphia's executive assistant for external operations, told the writer that alternative programs were "taking the lead in integration" in Philadalphia and "doing

rather well in most cases." Because Philadelphia is too large for districtwide magnets (twenty-seven miles wide), magnets instead draw from subdistricts. Because Philadelphia administrators have found that an enrollment of more than 50 percent black students in a school causes an exodus of whites, no magnet is allowed to become more than 50 percent black.

Yet others caution that there is a limit to how much magnets can aid in integration. Although many have looked to Houston's magnet system as offering a solution to integration problems, it serves only a small fraction of students. According to Levine and Moore, "As Houston school officials are the first to point out, the magnet school program there is not a racial integration program for the district as a whole."

Ned Harper, Alum Rock's system evaluator, mentioned to the writer that what may be happening in some low socioeconomic attendance areas is that the brightest kids—perhaps because they have more concerned and aware parents—are bussed voluntarily to schools in higher socioeconomic areas, leaving the low socioeconomic areas with schools full of lower achieving students. Harper stressed that this alleged pattern will remain purely conjectural until a planned study is completed this summer.

Perhaps this problem can be solved by copying the example of Chicago's Whitney Young Magnet High School. The school district poured disproportionately greater resources into the school, located in a low socioeconomic area, so that its higher quality would make it especially attractive to students. Moore and Levine justify spending larger sums on Whitney Young than on other schools because of its function as part of Chicago's urban renewal program.

What all the disagreement about magnets and desegregation suggests is that a magnet program can only be a small facet of an effective desegregation program. As Moore and Levine admit, "It is unrealistic . . . to expect that fundamental inadequacies in educational opportunities in big cities like Chicago can be cleared up merely by establishing a series of selective magnet schools."

This is true even in Dallas, a city that is in the forefront

in using magnets for desegregation on all grade levels. The magnet school program includes five "vanguard schools" on the elementary level, six "academies" on the middle-school level, and seven "magnet" high schools. In early 1978, the combined program served about 11,000 of 136,000 Dallas students.

Carlton Moffett, assistant superintendent of Dallas magnet school operations, told the writer that maximum projected enrollment for these schools is approximately 17,000 students—still only about one-eighth of the total enrollment. Dr. Moffett expressed his enthusiasm for magnets as "a viable tool to provide quality programs in a multiethnic setting," but agreed that this sort of program needs to be combined with other elements to make up a successful total desegregation program.

ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL POLITICS: WHO RUNS THE SHOW?

It ought to be clear by now that public alternative schools are offering all kinds of new educational choices to teachers, parents, and students. But this is not the only way they are innovative. Alternative schools are bringing with them significant innovations in organization, administrative arrangements, and governance. Indeed, a study by Duke concluded that "what is most significant about the data is that very few contemporary alternative schools opted for a conventional type of administrative organization."

Minischools and Schools within a School

One new type of administrative arrangement to emerge from the public alternative schools movement is the school that is subordinate to or part of another school. This kind of school is usually called a minischool or school within a school. It is usually housed in a section of a neighborhood school, and while it may have a head teacher or coordinator, it is ultimately governed by the principal of the "parent" school.

While the terms *minischool* and *school within a school* are for the most part interchangeable, they may have different meanings in different districts. Whereas a school within a school always implies the existence of a larger parent school also containing the regular program, a minischool may be one of several equal alternative programs housed under one roof; and while a school within a school is always in the same building as the parent school, some minischools (like the "adjunct minischools" in New York City) actually are geographically separate from the parent school. Both types of organization are useful when clientele for an alternative program do not fill a whole school. This subordinate type of organization means, too, that an alternative program does not need to take over a whole school and thus displace neighborhood children

who opt for the regular program.

Balsam explains that minischools in New York City are run by a teacher coordinator who, besides his or her administrative duties, also teaches part of the day; this coordinator is subordinate to the principal of the parent school. Balsam contends that one lesson to be learned from New York minischools is that arrangements in which teachers teach part time in the parent school and part time in the minischool are unsatisfactory. According to her, students need to feel that teachers belong wholly to their group.

Balsam has noted also an inherent tension in New York's type of minischool arrangement. Although staff of the subordinate school may be grateful for the facilities, assistance, and validation that a parent school can contribute, they nevertheless often long to be free of the supervisory constraints of the parent school.

New York City's Haaren High School represents another way to organize alternative subschools. Morisseau explains that Haaren is divided into fourteen minischools, each with 150 students. Each school has a special academic or career theme, and many include on-the-job experiences. Morisseau insists that those who attempt to divide a large school in this way must involve the whole school community in planning and setting up a program relevant to their needs.

Although the Evergreen Alternative in Eugene, Oregon, is called a magnet school, Head Teacher Pat Horyna told the writer it is more properly a school within a school. Occupying one of the "quads" at Eugene's Edgewood School, it is ultimately under the jurisdiction of Edgewood's Principal Bill Dugan. Horyna stated that reasons for Evergreen's positive relationship with its "parent" Edgewood include a great deal of interaction with the regular staff (including lunch periods), strong support from the principal, and a staff at Evergreen who are "positive, outgoing, and gutsy but polite."

Power Sharing

Even more important than alternative school organization is alternative school governance. Since alternative schools are

based on the notion that parents, students, and teachers ought to be given some choices about which educational programs they participate in, it makes sense that most alternative school programs include these people in planning and making decisions about programs.

Most educators agree on the importance of involving these groups in the planning of alternative schools. For example, a publication by Payzant stipulates that Eugene, Oregon, alternative programs are to be developed through the cooperative efforts of "educators, parents, pupils, and community representatives." Even more authoritarian basic schools like the A+ School in Cupertino have involved parents and teachers in the planning process. Barkhurst and Wolf found in a survey of public alternative schools that "teacher, parent, and student involvement during the initiation stages seemed to be critical."

Many alternative schools include staff, students, and community in governing schools as well. In Eugene's Evergreen School, much decision-making is done by a ten-member steering committee made up of parents, one teacher, and one auxiliary staff member. Recommendations concerning hiring come from a steering committee member, one auxiliary staff member, and two students.

Balsam notes that in many of New York City's mini-schools, the internal governing body is a student-staff committee, and in at least one school the students help interview prospective faculty. Balsam maintains that where students have real power, "an improvement in the care of mini school property is noted, and a great decrease in stealing of equipment and materials."

In a telephone interview, Los Angeles Coordinator of Alternative and Year-Round Schools Vincent Laura reported that all current alternative programs in that city have been initiated by parents. In addition, parents have participated in the selection of alternative school principals by submitting to the area superintendent a list of their first three choices. Problems have arisen, however, because the policy did not clearly spell out the limits of the power of all participants. Laura re-

lated that in two cases, when the area superintendent did not select the parents' first choice, parents appealed to the board, who in both instances sustained the decision after lengthy consideration. A board-appointed committee is now reevaluating the current procedure, which Laura believes has tended to waste the time of staff, parents, and board.

The power-sharing aspect of alternative programs means, of course, a new role for administrators. Fantini has summed it up by saying, "The role of the school administrator is to provide an enabling structure. This means giving basic information on alternatives to interested parties and arranging and facilitating meetings among teachers, parents, and students."

Zander, herself a principal in the Minneapolis schools, also sees the principal as a facilitator and adds this caution about the role: ". . . it seems obvious that the principal must be sincere in the effort to develop avenues for participatory decision making and not try to pass off decisions made by the principal as having been made by all affected by them."

Carrying these recommendations a step further, the Stockton Open School's Head Teacher George McCormick expressed to the writer his belief in the importance of his school not having any administrator at all. Although McCormick does "sign the forms" at the school and acts as a liaison with the administrative staff, he contended that a full-time principal (with a need to impose his or her own programs) would "destroy the school."

Not all experiences of power-sharing in alternative programs have been successful. Key participants in the Minneapolis Southeast Alternatives (SEA) Project started out with high hopes concerning community input and power-sharing in the project. Much parental input was incorporated into the planning stage, and the same sort of parental involvement in decision-making continued as long as the federal funding did. As federal funding was ending in 1976, Morley was especially enthusiastic about "the unanimity of purpose" that results when "parents, teachers, administrators, and students share in the decisions that shape the educational programs." Morley noted that "parent satisfaction runs from 75 to 98 per cent

at the five schools."

In late 1977, however, a telephone interview with University of Minnesota Teacher Center Director Fred Haven revealed that since federal funding ended, "general governance of the project has taken on a different tone." The Southeast Council, an advisory council made up of teachers, administrators, and parents, still meets because of the enthusiasm of its members. But the council no longer has a mandate or a formal place in the structure. Although recommendations of the council are listened to, according to Haven, there is some fear that in time the council will simply "fade from the scene."

Such a fate for power-sharing plans is not unusual. It is often unclear (even to administrators) just how much power administrators are willing to relinquish. The Scientific Analysis Corporation's evaluation of Berkeley's experiment in alternatives contends that by the end of this project, there was little power-sharing by parents and students. Authors of the report feel that administrators in Berkeley did not welcome intervention by amateurs in what they perceived were their areas of professional competence.

Sachs and Codding, by carefully studying alternative schools in four school districts, discovered that problems often result because "the norm that decisions are made democratically conflicts with the norm that the Board of Education must make all decisions."

DISTRICTS OFFERING A SPECTRUM OF ALTERNATIVES

Even though alternative public schools are sweeping the nation, most districts offer only one or two alternatives, with administrators assuming that most students will do well and be happy in the "regular" program. But for some educators, the alternative education dream is more all-encompassing. Educators like Fantini see diversity as the rule rather than the exception. They envision medium- and large-size school districts offering a whole spectrum of alternatives so that, in effect, the "regular" program becomes just one of the alternatives.

What happens in districts that offer a number of alternatives? What problems does presenting many alternatives produce? Why does this method work in some districts but not in others?

Minneapolis Southeast Alternatives

One of the first cities to offer a wide range of alternatives was Minneapolis, Minnesota, whose Southeast Alternatives (SEA) Project represents a pioneering effort in alternative schools. In 1971, Southeast School District in Minneapolis was among a handful of districts lucky enough to obtain a five-year grant from the U.S. Office of Education's Experimental Schools Program. During this time, the district received $500 per student per year (a total of about $7 million) to develop alternative schools.

Apparently, acceptance of the Minneapolis proposal was not based on luck alone. According to Morley, one reason Minneapolis was chosen was that the administrators in this district were unusually dynamic and committed to the concept of alternatives.

Much parental input was solicited during planning of the alternatives. Neighborhood meetings were held, and out of

this process groups formed around particular educational styles. Five schools emerged: a free school, an open school, an ungraded continuous progress school, a "contemporary" school (stressing basic skills), and a rather eclectic high school. Morley points out that these schools were never in competition, nor was there any assumption that one of them would emerge as the "best."

When federal funding ended in 1976, support of SEA was taken over by the district. Standardized tests, administered in that year, indicated that students compared favorably with state and national norms. At that time, Kocher noted evidence that parents and students were taking advantage of the alternatives offered them in the fact that almost half the students in the district were not in neighborhood schools. He noted, too, that data indicated that at most schools most parents felt their children were getting an "excellent" education and that 80-90 percent of parents felt that their children were happy.

A telephone conversation with the director of the Minneapolis Public Schools/University of Minnesota Teacher Center in late 1977 revealed that alternatives were still alive and well in Minneapolis. In fact, Director Fred Hayen reported that not only are all the SEA alternative schools still in operation (supported entirely by local funds), but "the alternative school design process has spread across the city" so that "sets of alternative schools" are scattered throughout Minneapolis.

Eugene

Eugene, Oregon, District 4J in 1977 offered seven elementary and four secondary alternative programs, an exceptionally large number for a town of approximately 100,000. The district, in a document outlining its alternatives program, explains why:

> In establishing alternative schools, it is the board's belief that different children learn in different ways, that no one single educational approach is the right one for all students, and that providing a large variety of educational options for students and parents helps the district better meet the needs of all its students.

According to Schwartzrock, Eugene's alternatives began in 1973 when new Superintendent Thomas Payzant indicated his interest in alternative schools as a "way of meeting student needs." Payzant began by holding a workshop for 300 staff members to discuss all facets of alternatives. He next held a meeting to obtain ideas from parents and students without the presence of staff. An Alternative Schools Steering Committee was selected to evaluate proposals, and lastly, an alternative schools fair was held at which parents and students heard presentations concerning nine types of schools and indicated their interest in their favorite types.

Eugene's alternatives are quite diverse, though some are difficult to classify. The Environmental Outdoor School, serving forty to fifty fifth- and sixth-graders, stresses ecology and environmental concerns. Action High School offers a school-without-walls program to 100 students who for half of each day participate in internships in community agencies. The Patterson Primary Center is an open program for 100 elementary students. All programs have been developed by parents, staff, and teachers; no transportation outside the neighborhood is provided.

Eugene has a Special Projects Assistant to oversee all alternative programs. A publication issued by Payzant and the district concerning criteria for alternatives stresses that alternative programs must not exceed per-pupil cost in other comparable school programs. This stipulation echoes recommendations by Fantini and others and makes good sense as a way of assuring acceptance and continued existence of the program.

Philadelphia

Beginning with the institution of the Parkway Program in 1969, Philadelphia has been a leader in the alternatives movement. Finkelstein noted that in 1969 alternative programs in Philadelphia were being given "system-wide priority." At that time, alternatives were serving 10,000 of Philadelphia's 275,000 students. A 1977 publication issued by the Philadelphia School District concerning alternatives proclaimed in that year that the city had "some of the most exciting educa-

tional opportunities offered in public schools anywhere." The publication listed a total of 102 alternative programs—28 elementary and 74 secondary—in the district.

By late 1977 however, things looked a lot different. In a telephone interview, Philadelphia's Executive Assistant for External Operations Oswald Giulli disclosed that the district, because of a serious financial crisis, had been forced to cut the program by 65 percent. At that time only thirty-five alternatives were being offered. Giulli explained that most of Philadelphia's alternatives had depended on small class size (around fifteen students) and were just too costly to be continued during a financial crunch. An exception was the Parkway Program, which had been able to keep costs down by utilizing community facilities.

Alum Rock

Another district that at one time offered a massive alternatives program yet does so no longer is California's Alum Rock Union School District. Alum Rock is unusual in that it received federal funding as a pilot program to test the feasibility of an educational voucher system.

In the original voucher idea, as conceived by Christopher Jenks and others, parents would be given an educational voucher to spend at the public or private school of their choice. Supposedly, through competition the best schools would survive. For rather obvious reasons, Alum Rock deviated from this concept somewhat. No schools in the area closed from lack of enrollment, no teachers or administrators lost their jobs, and no private schools participated.

Funding stretched from fall 1973 to spring 1977. Rasmussen reports that of Alum Rock's twenty-five elementary and middle schools, fourteen participated in the program. Each of the fourteen housed two to five distinct educational programs called minischools. An Alum Rock Union School District publication noted that the voucher system increased both diversity in the district's curriculum and autonomy of teachers in curriculum design.

Yet by spring 1977 the voucher project in Alum Rock

was dead. While the district still retained an open enrollment system, only a few real alternatives in the form of minischools remained.

Dan Weiler, commissioned by the Rand Corporation to evaluate the Alum Rock Project, commented to the writer that one reason few alternative schools remain in the city is that the district was more committed to the concept of decentralization than to providing a spectrum of alternatives. In addition, the large number of minischools became difficult to cope with; in Weiler's words, "the teachers became weary of the program."

Ned Harper, Alum Rock's system evaluator, stated that by 1977 Alum Rock administrators were allowing, but not encouraging, the retention of minischools. He also indicated that a major unknown was how much the various minischools had implemented truly distinct instructional programs. He indicated that Rand's forthcoming report on alternative education should provide an empirically based resolution to this issue. Finally, presumably because programs did not teach the same thing at the same time, students switching programs may have experienced a lack of curricular continuity. A number of teachers have complained of difficulties in integrating new students into ongoing programs.

Berkeley

Like Minneapolis, Berkeley, California, participated in the Experimental Schools Program from 1971-1976. Unlike Minneapolis, Berkeley allowed the program to die when funding stopped. At its peak, the program encompassed twenty-three program options (ten of these, however, had actually started before funding began). By 1976, only two programs that had begun since 1971 survived. Furthermore, the Scientific Analysis Corporation has contended that by the end of the project there was no significant difference between alternative schools and other schools in things like quality of education, dropout rates, or parent-community participation.

Why did the Berkeley program fold? The Scientific Analysis Corporation lists a number of reasons. One was unique to

Berkeley's interpretation of alternatives. The district committed much energy to three ethnically centered programs—two all black and one chicano—based on the belief that students would learn better in a program built around their own culture and ethnic history. The energy was wasted, however, because the Office for Civil Rights forced the closing of all three.

Another problem may have been that the program was weighted heavily in favor of secondary schools (seventeen of twenty-three), unlike the programs in Eugene and Minneapolis. Finally, according to the Scientific Analysis Corporation, the Berkeley district simply did not attach much importance to the program or its goal of "comprehensive change."

Although reasons for failure or success of any program are complex and often unique to a particular place and set of conditions, at least two factors seem to emerge from all these programs. Successful alternative programs usually rest on strong commitment by administrators and on insistence that alternative programs must cost no more than regular programs.

SOME ADDITIONAL HELPFUL IDEAS

Participants in alternative programs and educators who have surveyed their functioning have gleaned many facts, lessons, and practical ideas helpful to those instituting alternatives or wrestling with problems besetting their own programs. While it is important to remember that suggestions or ways of proceeding are not always transferable from one program to another, the following list contains some of the most helpful ideas distilled from both individual experiences and extensive surveys of alternative programs nationwide.

Direct quotes are enclosed in quotation marks in the following entries; otherwise material is paraphrased. Each tip is followed by the name of one who advocates it (along with school affiliation if any), but many of the suggestions have been echoed and reechoed by a number of experts.

How to Begin

Alternative programs should not be developed in a vacuum, but ought to respond to identified needs. "Programs which respond to identified needs are not only more likely to accomplish their educational goals; they are also more easily justified to those who must support them financially."

Lyn Broad

A good source of help in instituting an alternatives program is nearby districts who have relevant experience.

M. D. Barkhurst and W. C. Wolf, Jr.

The Eugene school district's seven-page list of procedures for those wishing to institute new alternatives stipulates that proposals must include such things as

- basic educational assumptions
- general goals in terms of aspects like pupil and teacher performance and instructional processes

- decision-making structures
- a time line
- a budget

Thomas Payzant (Eugene School District 4J, Oregon)

In 1977 the School District of Philadelphia stipulated that alternative programs "should be significantly different from what is currently offered in the main school." At that time, the district required that proposals include information concerning such things as a program's supplies and equipment, staff and staff selection criteria, student population served, and admissions procedures.

Philadelphia School District (1977)

For those interested in proposing alternative programs, the Los Angeles Unified School District has issued a publication that includes guidelines and a form to use when submitting a program plan. Unique aspects of the guidelines include the following stipulations:

- One person must be designated spokesperson for the alternative program.
- The program must be multicultural and multiethnic.
- Decision making must be shared with parents, students, and the school community.

Los Angeles Unified School District

A pamphlet published by the California State Department of Education provides administrators with information concerning alternatives in California, including definitions, statutory requirements of the Education Code, and basic do's and don'ts. Included are these statutory provisions:

- Students and teachers are to be selected from volunteers only.
- The alternative program should be funded and maintained at the same level of support as other programs.
- There will be no extra state apportionment for transpor-

tation for alternative schools.

California State Department of Education

When beginning an alternative high school; it is wise to select an established school as a record center to ensure that students will always have a source of accepted identity and evidence of graduation in case the school dissolves.

Bruce Howell (Tulsa, Oklahoma, Public Schools)

With a secondary school alternative program it is important to seek assurances from colleges that graduates seeking admission will not be penalized.

Douglas Watson

One important reason for success in Grand Rapids, Michigan, may have been the long and careful planning undertaken by this district. The twenty alternative programs the district offers were developed slowly over ten years. Some recommendations were made as long as four years before the program started.

Smith, Barr, and Burke

Gaining Community Support

One way to gain community support for an alternative program is to develop a human relations program, which may include information flyers, community speaking engagements, a slide-sound presentation, and newspaper press releases.

Jack Brown (Nova High School, Anaheim, California)

"The surest way to guarantee the failure of an alternative program is to impose it upon a community as the brainchild of a few school officials or education professors but lacking prior input from students, teachers, parents and other key groups whose role may be more important than is obvious at first."

Douglas Watson

Parent support can be gained with the institution of a community resource coordinator who creates volunteer programs and acts as a community liaison.

Judith Farmer
(SEA Project, Minneapolis)

Staff Selection and Training

Alternative schools, because of their small size, frequently must utilize staff members who are very versatile and can teach a number of different things.

James Hessler (Palo Alto Unified School District, California)

A useful technique for selecting staff who are expected to work in a team or group is to give applicants sample group tasks and observe their functioning.

Dr. Frank Arone (Teaneck Public Schools, New Jersey)

"The alternative school staff burnout phenomenon which occurs to most alternative educational forms must be countered by critical staff selection support and skill reinforcement and retraining."

Jack Brown (quoting Art Bosna, Principal, Nova High School, Anaheim, California)

"Another lesson learned from SEA is that teaching staffs can be sufficiently retrained to allow them to function effectively in new educational situations; and that this is true even of faculty who may not have been enthusiastic about assuming new roles."

John Davis (SEA Project, Minneapolis)

Inservice training may be provided by schools combining resources and expertise to form a network whose members design inservice programs and hold workshops at the participating schools.

Lyn Broad

Inservice training should

- be in response to a problem the school wants help with
- utilize consultants who have both a theoretical and practical understanding of the issues involved
- focus on a particular issue but directly relate to day-to-day realities
- involve consultants on both a regular and long-term basis

Michael Bakalis

In Minneapolis, a teacher center, begun as part of the Southeast Alternatives Project, now utilizes resources from the University of Minnesota and individuals with private grants to provide training and retraining activities for personnel. Rather than training staff and then disappearing, these trainers provide ongoing support and a place where educators can return for help with specific problems.

Fred Hayen (Minneapolis Public Schools/University of Minnesota Teacher Center, Minneapolis)

Financing

Alternative schools usually have extra start-up costs. It is important that the school board be committed to contributing enough money for the program to survive—not just start.

Elaine Kopischke-Trejo (Southeast Alternatives Free School, Minneapolis)

The Education School Aid Act provides federal funding for magnet schools. The United States Government has set aside $50 million for planning and operating (but not constructing) alternative schools.

George Krahl

"Once alternative programs are underway, most can operate within a district's normal range of per pupil costs." While expenses may be greater for staffing or transportation, there are often savings because average attendance is higher, flexi-

bility of scheduling and program may alleviate the need for new buildings, and community resources and volunteers may make possible a smaller staff.

Lyn Broad

Outside funds can be detrimental to an alternative school if the program is set up to depend too heavily on them.

Douglas Watson

Evaluation

Teacher evaluation in alternative programs often includes

- more discussion between teacher and principal
- evaluation by other teachers, students, or a master teacher
- a teacher review committee made up of administrators, teachers, students, and sometimes parents.

Michael Bakalis

When evaluating alternative schools, it is important that the school be evaluated on its own goals rather than on criteria designed for another school or program. It is equally important that alternatives to the regular means of evaluation, if they are to be used, be selected before school opens.

Lyn Broad

Unless participants in a program can convince the school board and state officials to accept other means of evaluation, they must be prepared to administer standardized tests.

Douglas Watson

Evaluation of students in alternative schools often involves direct observation, some use of students themselves as evaluators, and continuous evaluation of skill mastery.

Michael Bakalis

"5816.5. Each district operating an alternative school shall annually evaluate such school. The evaluation shall include pre- and post-testing of basic skills for student partici-

pants, and must identify the variables which may have affected student academic achievement. The process of evaluation shall also include teacher, parent, and student input from the alternative school itself. These evaluation reports will be sent to the Superintendent of Public Instruction on or before August 1st of the following year."

California Education Code

Alternative programs need to utilize evaluation that has

- as its purpose the improvement of the program
- as its primary audience the program participants
- evaluators sensitive to the needs of program personnel

A. Thel Kocher
(Southeast Alternatives, Minneapolis)

CONCLUSION

People who are absolutely sure they know which methods of education are the *right* ones probably are not very comfortable with alternative schools as they have evolved in the seventies. The fundamentalists think the open schoolers are doing irrevocable harm to children and to United States society. The open school advocates feel just the same about the fundamentalists. In between are a vast number who think both groups are misguided extremists.

But, for those who are a little less certain that there is one "best of all possible methods," today's alternative schools hold a lot of promise. For those who believe that different students learn and different teachers teach in different ways, alternative schools look like a good way to attempt to match student and teacher with appropriate educational technique.

That is not to say that there are not some problems yet unsolved. Alternative schools are too new not to have some implementation problems. Nevertheless, with new alternative schools springing up every year, and with students, parents, and teachers everywhere voicing enthusiasm for alternative programs, there is some reason to be hopeful that these problems are being solved and are worth further effort. For, as Fantini puts it, "Over time, we could emerge with a redefined system of public education that is diverse, self-renewing, and responsive to a pluralistic society."

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