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ABSTRACT

The first part of this document describes the formation of the Education Steering Committee for Basic Skills Coordination by the Education Department, consisting of representatives from six staff offices and "Head Start." The Committee's goals and accomplishments are summarized, including compilation and distribution of a legislative comparison of the laws governing basic skills programs. The author describes the difficulties encountered because of differing definitions for "basic skills." The second part of the document describes the need for coordination of basic skills programs among different levels of government. The author suggests including coordination needs assessment as an integral component of larger needs assessment processes to insure that coordination planning can become built-in to the organizational plan of all new projects. (JEH)

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The Education Steering Committee for Basic Skills Coordination

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The Education Department (ED) Steering Committee for Basic Skills Coordination includes twenty Education Department (ED) programs, six staff offices which impact directly on those programs, and Head Start from the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, Department of Health and Human Services*. The Steering Committee began life in November 1977, as a task force assigned to the Basic Skills Initiative. Three Commissioners have delegated the implementation of P.L. 95-561, Title II, Section 210 to the Steering Committee. Section 210 requires the Secretary to establish effective and efficient procedures for coordination between nine specifically named programs (including HeadStart) and other Federal programs that support the basic skills improvement of children, youth, or adults. The Director of the Basic Skills Improvement Office serves as Chairperson of the Committee.

The early task force accomplished two large tasks. The basic skills activities of all Federal programs were identified. A series of meetings was held around the country to gather views within and outside of education about problems and solutions pertaining to basic skills learning in the nation.

The Steering Committee has met monthly since January, 1979. Each program has selected at least one working representative. Attendance at the meetings has remained remarkably high. The philosophy for the meetings is that they are a necessary but not a sufficient step to coordinated actions by the basic skills components of member programs. Information concerning basic skills and coordination is exchanged at these meetings and plans are made. Detailed minutes are written and circulated immediately after each meeting for the reaction of all representatives. The representatives route the minutes to their program managers.

In large organizations such as the E.D. or State or local bureaucracies, the time required to promote change can be major. Changes needed for coordination are influenced by national events such as changes in leadership which require a reaffirmation by the new directors of the concerned programs, inflation and recession which induces funding cuts in coordinated programs, and new laws, regulations, and policies which change the direction of basic skills components of member programs. The Steering Committee has proceeded methodically to coordinate its programs since January, 1979, retracing its steps as necessary, but always progressing.

*The agency is referred to here as ED for convenience, although for the first two years of the Steering Committee it was OE.

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First the working representatives agreed upon a definition of basic skills. For the national coordination effort, they agreed upon a conservative definition based upon ESEA Title II: The basic skills are reading, mathematics, and effective communication, both written and oral, at all levels of competency.

Next, the constraints to coordination at the Federal level were identified. Identified constraints include lack of interprogram communication mechanisms; the collection of data which cannot be compared; the lack of rewards for staff who undertake coordination activities; changes of leadership which affect continuity of activities; the lack of priorities for program coordination as evidenced in program operations and in allocation of S and E; conflicting and inconsistent laws and regulations; differing definitions of basic skills; and different program policies concerning "supplement but not supplant" which directly affect coordinated efforts in the field. Identification of these constraints has given direction to the Steering Committee's priorities and activities. Constraints become areas for concentration while basic skills coordination proceeds in areas where there are fewer blocks.

The Commissioner's Directive was revised by the working representatives outlining the responsibilities of the Steering Committee. After four drafts, the Chairman visited the managers and deputy commissioners of each program to review the directive for feasibility. The fifth draft with the comment of the managers and deputies was forwarded to the Commissioner, who signed the sixth draft. The chief goals of the Directive are to coordinate basic skills components at the Federal level and to facilitate basic skills coordination at the State, school and instructional building level.

The Directive called for an annual plan of action from the Steering Committee. Activities were planned in the areas of communications, regulations, organization, monitoring technical assistance, case studies, and coordination plans developed by individual programs.

All of the Chief State School Officers (CSSOs) were invited to Washington in May, 1979. Implementation of the new Title II was considered. The Steering Committee observed the CSSOs' discussion on basic skills coordination and found them in a formal ceremony with Commissioner Boyer during which preambles to Title II were signed by most of the CSSOs.

An area for potential overlap at the Federal level is technical assistance for basic skills program. Representatives from the Office of Evaluation and Dissemination, The National Diffusion Network; ERIC; the NIE RDX program; the Interagency Panels on Research on Childhood, Youth, and Adults; the Council for Educational Development and Research; the eastern branch of Far West Lab; and the Office for Regional Liaison described their services to the Steering Committee. Their comments were recorded

and transcribed to provide a record of available services. The Steering Committee also worked with two agency-wide studies of technical assistance and more recently with a task force on technical assistance for the Office of School Improvement which encompasses eighteen programs.

Research and reports on past coordination, cooperation, linking, and interagency endeavors have influenced the growth of the Steering Committee. One common finding in the research on coordination is that top-down coordination is effective. That is, the decision-makers of organizations must make coordination policy and be engaged in some fashion in its implementation for coordination of programs to work. In July, 1979, Acting Commissioner Mary Berry appointed the program managers and the deputy commissioners of member programs to the Steering Committee, to meet twice annually in plenary session with their working representatives. She also established criteria for the appointment of the working representatives; (1) They should have decision-making responsibilities in their programs, (2) they should have basic skills responsibilities; and (3) they should have regular contact with their program managers.

A Comparison of Legislation Concerned with Basic Skills was compiled for the member programs. Their laws were compared -- 121 variables to define areas of commonality and difference. One finding of the comparison was that coordination mandates are not reciprocal in the legislation. That is, where one finds in a program's law the direction from Congress to coordinate with a specific other program, the same direction will not be found in the law of that specific other program to coordinate with the first program. Therefore, the second program does not develop regulations that mandate coordination with the first program; its program officers are not stressing coordination in their monitoring and technical assistance activities, and the first program finds it impossible to accomplish coordination despite its stress on coordination in its own regulations, field activities, and even its selection criteria for determining grantees.

The Steering Committee met with the offices of General Counsel, Policy Studies, Regulations Management, and Executive Deputy Commissioner for Educational Programs to write a general regulation concerning basic skills coordination in order to correct for the lack of two-directional coordination mandates in existing legislation. After almost a year of negotiation, the needed general regulation was included in the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) as Section 580 both for State formula (State administered) programs and for discretionary (direct grant) programs. In addition, Section 581 gives a definition of coordination in the form of some examples of areas for coordination.



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To encourage communication between the staffs of the member programs and to explore the level of knowledge and development of basic skills coordination in ED, the Steering Committee held a two-day seminar for ED staff. The seminar was repeated to allow more staff to attend. Over 120 ED program officers listened to presentations on ED coordination and then met in small groups to consider implementation of basic skills coordination. The group reports demonstrated overwhelmingly the willingness and concern of ED staff for coordinating their programs in order to provide effective and efficient service to the SEAs and LEAs.

All but two of the member programs from the Steering Committee were represented during a trip to the Maryland State Education Department Basic Skills Task Force and the Baltimore City Schools. The purpose of the trip was to discuss needed Federal supportive structures to aid State and local coordination of basic skills programs. Two levels of program coordination were found: institutionalized coordination with formal guidelines and job assignments, and informal coordination initiated by concerned program staff. Both types of coordination were working, but the informal coordination efforts were erratic, and dependent on the good-will and continued employment of particular staff members and their ability to fit these activities into their job-loads.

Differing definitions of basic skills is an on-going problem for coordination. It is clear that individual educators and members of the public use basic skills terms differently and are not necessarily aware that they are not talking about the same things.

The Steering Committee is cooperating with the National Institute of Education on a project to synthesize all of the different views of basic skills and the implications for teaching/learning of the various views. Two publications entitled Basic Skills: Issues and Choices are scheduled to be available in FY'81.

Far West Lab studied the cross-program communication needs of the member programs of the Steering Committee and recommended a plan of action for developing an information base on basic skills coordination within the Department and an information linking strategy. Implementation of these recommendations is on hold due both to the transition from the U.S. Office of Education to the new Department of Education and to current lack of funds.

In November, 1979, the first plenary meeting of the expanded Steering Committee met. Most of the deputy commissioners and program managers were in attendance or sent a close aide. There were many positive results from the meeting. For example, Thomas Minter, now Assistant Secretary for the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, initiated a basic skills coordination committee of the programs under his authority to articulate in-bureau efforts with cross-agency coordination.

In an effort to develop standard procedures in the field, ED established two task forces to write guidelines for monitoring State formula and discretionary projects. The Steering Committee worked with these task forces to ensure that coordination of programs will be monitored. In a move in this direction, two Steering Committee programs (Title IVC, Improvement in Local Educational Practice and Title IVB, School Libraries) have developed a pilot joint monitoring instrument which specifically directs the program monitor to record basic skills coordination activities in evidence at the site.

Twelve of the twenty-seven member programs and staff offices have developed individual basic skills coordination plans. Some of the plans are simply a review for the record of on-going coordination. Others are new concepts and directions in basic skills coordination. One of the best-known examples is the Teacher Corps/-Basic Skills/ESEA Title I eleven site project which is gearing up to demonstrate coordinated staff development in the teaching of basic skills. ESEA Title I and Title IV are coordinating with the National Diffusion Network to present dissemination workshops in several States featuring validated basic skills programs.

Case studies of coordination have been conducted to inform the member programs. A case study of the coordination of special education in the State Education Department and the Department of Health and Human Resources in Louisiana yielded six prerequisites for program coordination.

- (1) Standards must be set for services in each coordinating program;
- (2) The staffs of all coordinating agencies must be thoroughly familiar with the standards and services of their own agency and of the other agencies;
- (3) The operating staffs must plan together;
- (4) The staffs must act together.
- (5) The staffs must be delegated the authority to represent their agencies routinely in coordinated activities, and
- (6) Staff time must be allowed for coordination, especially during start-up.

FY'80 activities include the development of a procedural manual on coordinating basic skills programs for SEAs and LEAs; a review of methods of including points for project coordination in the selection criteria for choosing grantees of the member programs; including coordination duties in the position descriptions of ED personnel; the development of a cross-program basic skills information series for ED operational staff; the development of a

long-term evaluation of the impact of the Steering Committee activities on actual basic skills coordination in the SEAs, LEAs, and instructional buildings; and an in-depth examination of the basic skills activities of nine of the largest member programs.

With the transition from the U.S. Office of Education to the Education Department has come the need for a Secretary's Directive, reflecting the changes in organization and direction of the new Department. The Secretary's Directive is in its third draft and will soon be shared with the managers and assistant secretaries of member programs for comment and feasibility.

The members of the ED Steering Committee for Basic Skills Coordination are:

Adult Education	Grants and Contracts	Regional Liaison
Arts and Humanities	Headquarters	Special Education
Basic Skills	Indian Education	Strengthening Developing Institutions
Bilingual Education	Legal Counsel	Teacher Centers
Career Education	Libraries	Teacher Corps
ESAA/EEOP	Migrant Education	Title I (ESEA)
Evaluation	National Dissemination Network	Title IVC (ESEA)
Follow Through	National Institute of Education	TRIO
Gifted & Talented	Nonpublic Education	Vocational Education

A Basic Skills Coordination Strategy
for the Local Level

Ann Drennan
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Many studies speak to the development of coordination at the local level. The Scott-Gardner study, The Sure-All That Sometimes Works says the locals do it, but those at the Federal level are not aware of that. The Klugman-Lerner-Israel study Too Many Pieces say some teachers do it, and other teachers—apparently because of factors such as personality and view of curriculum as separate pieces—do not. The RAND study of demonstration reports those concerned in implementation and in receiving major altered services need to be in on planning if the demonstration/service is going to survive.

Coordination seems to be a logically defensible GOOD that happens in haphazard fashion at every level. Moreover, where it occurs, it seems to be short-lived and dependent upon individual energies and personalities. Coordination seldom seems to stay institutionalized over time.

It may be that coordination is viewed as goal displacement by teachers and administrators devoted to classroom and instructional building services. If so, coordination becomes "Not my job," to be dispensed with as soon as possible. Or it may be that coordination is not part of the preservice training or consistently part of the past work experience of educational personnel, so while a given staff may see the merits and perform the duties required by coordination, staff changes especially in management, eliminate coordination activities.

Both legislation administered by ED and (now) the EDGAR require coordination of programs at different levels (Federal with Federal; State, and local; local with local; State with all Federal; etc.), yet offer very little guidance in the particulars of coordination. Nor does a review of the 1977 and 1978 Hearings on the Education Amendments yield definitions of or expectations for coordination, although the term occurs in the transcripts of the Hearings with some frequency.

A case study of interprogram coordination of the Louisiana SEA's Special Education and Louisiana Vocational Rehabilitation showed that starting costs for coordination are high in staff time (and anxiety) and that the benefit do not become very clear for almost two program years. Given the pervasiveness of fiscal year thinking in education today, an investment which might consume as long as two years can become considerable hurdle or even barrier to implementation.

Right to Read and now Basic Skills have had an orientation toward planning. It is probable that other Steering Committee programs also have developed planning strategies with or without the community and the working staff representation recommended by RAND. It should be possible (a) to build a coordination component into the planning activities of new Federally-funded projects, and (b) an inservice experience into continuing projects.

New projects are generally required to do a needs assessment. Part of the needs assessment could be a staff discussion of needed coordination activities. Assuming there are many opportunities for coordination a chart might be developed (see below).

FIGURE #1

Coordination Needs Assessment

	Justification	Resources For	Barriers to
Basic Skills Activity That Might Be Coordinated			

Individual Federal programs could offer program-appropriate suggestions of basic skills activities which could/should be coordinated.

If the local staff found that the justification for certain coordination activities or methods were strong, (e.g. required by law, important to learners' achievement, reducing fragmentation of the teachers' time or of the curriculum, or simply wanted by the staff), but that barriers were also strong, there ought to be resources at some level—local, State, or Federal—to help think through alternative routes around barriers or to acquire or redirect resources to accomplish the desired or required coordination.

FIGURE #2

Resources for Coordination Could Be	Barriers to Coordination Could Be:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff desire 2. EDGAR 3. Legislation 4. Better use of staff time 5. Better use of funds 6. School board desire 7. State regulations 8. State legislation 9. Better use of staff 10. Staff development available 11. Community or media concern 12. Proximity to other programs/resources 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff resistance 2. Conflicting Federal program regulations 3. Legislation 4. Lack of staff time 5. Lack of funds 6. School board resistance 7. State regulations 8. State legislation 9. Lack of staff 10. Lack of know-how 11. Community (e.g. special interest group, or media) resistance 12. Distance (especially, but not exclusively, in rural areas).

When the specific coordination activities are decided upon by the administrative and instructional staff, a format might be provided to them such as Figure 3 to aid in pinning down the particulars. Each coordination activity would be plotted on a separate sheet.

Figure #3

BASIC SKILLS COORDINATION PLAN

1. Activity to be Coordinated? _____

2. Why? (Justification should be part of every plan and expressed in practical terms) _____

3. Who will do it?

Names	Positions	Work Phones	Work Addresses

4. What are the steps in coordination?

	Time Line
a. _____	_____
b. _____	_____
c. _____	_____
d. _____	_____
e. _____	_____

5. What are the data collection and evaluation procedures to determine ~~the~~ progress and impact of the coordination activities?

	Time Line
a. _____	_____
b. _____	_____
c. _____	_____
d. _____	_____