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DATE: November 8, 1972
TO: Higher Education Study Committee
FROM: Robert D. Benton, Ed.D.
SUBJECT: Role and Scope of Iowa's Merged Area Schools

Attached to this memorandum is a copy of a paper describing the role and scope of Iowa's merged area schools. This paper has been prepared in response to your request for this information by the members representing the area schools on the Advisory Board to the Higher Education Study Committee.

The time available to complete this assignment was insufficient for a paper to be developed and reviewed by the local boards of directors and State Board of Public Instruction. However, this paper does represent a collective effort to describe the role and scope of area school operations and has been reviewed by the area school superintendents.

We will be pleased to provide any additional information you may require.

Sincerely,

Robert D. Benton, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

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ROLE AND SCOPE

IOWA'S MERGED AREA SCHOOLS

"IT MUST BE RECOGNIZED THAT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A STATEWIDE SYSTEM OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES WILL CAUSE CHANGES WHICH WILL BE OF CONCERN AND EVEN TEMPORARY DISCOMFORT TO MANY INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS BECAUSE OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES FOR AND INTERESTS IN SPECIFIC SEGMENTS OF OUR PRESENT STRUCTURE OF EDUCATION WITHIN THE STATE, BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE. EVEN SO, THE NEED FOR THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE IS INDISPUTABLY CLEAR."

(State Superintendent of Public Instruction, December 1, 1962, from a statement to Iowa legislators accompanying the report Education Beyond High School Age.)

Introduction

Iowa's merged area community colleges and vocational-technical schools have been well prepared by events of recent years for the era of accountability in education.

A concerned Fifty-ninth General Assembly directed in 1961, through House Resolution 6, that a statewide plan be prepared for the development of public area community colleges, and to study and make recommendations concerning high school vocational and technical education programs. Researchers documented a picture of unmet needs for graduates of Iowa's secondary schools. The Sixty-first General Assembly in 1965 enacted Senate File 550 which has been hailed as a model law for the establishment of a statewide system of area community colleges and vocational-technical schools. Features in this law were ten distinct educational opportunities and services for which the new area institutions would be held accountable.

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The surprisingly rapid formation of merged area community colleges and vocational-technical schools (15 were formed within a year's time) and the experiences of those merged areas in the ensuing six years have provided convincing evidence that there was indeed a need for this new kind of educational offering in Iowa.

The area school legislation was developed to close an educational gap that existed in 1965. Important among the needs that area schools were anticipated to meet were:

- A continuation of the first two years of the baccalaureate degree program that had been offered for forty-seven years by Iowa's public junior colleges through absorption of this educational responsibility by the area schools. This was a particular need during this period since enrollments quadrupled in Iowa's public junior colleges in the decade 1955-1965.

- Geographic accessibility to provide program opportunities within reasonable commuting distance since numerous research studies had indicated that many potential students cannot avail themselves of opportunities that are beyond commuting distance.

- Low cost educational opportunities to better meet the needs of low and middle income people.

- Institutions that have open admissions policies rather than selective admissions policies. There were already numerous existing institutions with selective admissions policies that well suited the limited purposes of these institutions. However, area schools were intended to enroll those people who could profit from further education when it was offered in terms of their needs and interests rather than the needs of a limited educational program that required a selective admissions policy.

- Expansion of career opportunities to provide area schools as the major source of vocational and technical programs to better meet the needs of the great majority of Iowans who do not need a baccalaureate degree for entry level employment. These programs were intended to meet needs at either the secondary school level or the post-secondary school level.

- The educational needs of adults who were not being served either by the great majority of small local school districts or the existing institutions of higher education. An adult without a high school diploma or its equivalent is handicapped in the employment market as are those adults who require new skills or an upgrading of skills to remain competitive in the employment market.

Raw enrollment figures tell part of the story of the area schools. Prior to the authorization of the statewide system of area schools in 1965, post-high school occupational training was virtually non-existent in Iowa. In the fall term of 1972, enrollment in full-time vocational-technical programs at the area schools totaled over 12,300. Enrollment in college parallel programs totaled 11,236 and many of these programs, e.g., law enforcement, mental health technician, library science and community service aide, have specific career orientation.

Four of Iowa's fifteen merged areas have chosen to conduct educational programs that do not include the college parallel program. Eleven merged areas have obtained designation as community colleges under provisions of the law.

The law provides a definition of the term "community college." It states, " 'Community College' means a publicly supported school which offers two years of liberal arts, pre-professional, or other instruction partially fulfilling the requirements for a baccalaureate degree but which does not confer the baccalaureate degree and which offers in whole or in part the curriculum of a vocational school."

The law offers the following definition of the term vocational school:
" 'Vocational school' means a publicly supported school which offers as its curriculum or part of its curriculum vocational or technical education, training, or retraining available to persons who have completed or left high school and are preparing to enter the labor market; persons who are attending high school who will benefit from such education or training but who do not have the necessary facilities available in the local high schools; persons who have entered the labor market but are in need of upgrading or learning skills; and persons who due to academic, socio-economic, or other handicaps are prevented from succeeding in regular vocational or technical education programs."

Iowa's area schools are fulfilling the mission mandated by the 1965 legislature. The obvious benchmarks for such an assessment are provided in the very law which gave them birth.

The following report dwells heavily on the ten educational opportunities and services specified in Senate File 550. In addition, the report will show that the area schools have dramatically increased educational opportunity beyond the high school level in Iowa.

Role and Scope

Chapter 280A, Code of Iowa, states: "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the State of Iowa and the purpose of this chapter to provide for the establishment of not more than seventeen areas which shall include all of the area of the state and which may operate either area vocational schools or area community colleges offering to the greatest extent possible* educational opportunities and services in each of the following, when applicable, but not necessarily limited to*:

*(underlining added)

1. The first two years of college work including pre-professional education.
2. Vocational and technical training.
3. Programs for in-service training and retraining of workers.
4. Programs for high school completion for students of post-high school age.
5. Programs for all students of high school age who may best serve themselves by enrolling for vocational and technical training while also enrolled in a local high school, public or private.
6. Student personnel services.
7. Community services.
8. Vocational education for persons who have academic, socio-economic, or other handicaps which prevent succeeding in regular vocational education programs.
9. Training, retraining, and all necessary preparation for productive employment of all citizens.
10. Vocational and technical training for persons who are not enrolled in a high school and who have not completed high school."

This rather specific law comprised in itself an ambitious set of goals for the new area schools at their outset during the 1966-67 school year. Certainly the continuing role for the area school system must be to carry out "to the greatest extent possible" the specific missions detailed in Chapter 280A.

Those same goals prescribe the scope of responsibility of the area schools for providing education and training to residents of Iowa. A review of the statement of policy expressed in Chapter 280A gives clear indication that the area schools were intended to fulfill "for all citizens" the education and training needs left wanting by the existing elementary-secondary and four-year college systems of education. In essence, Iowa's merged areas, identified generally as the communities served by key center cities, bring post-secondary educational opportunities to each individual's doorstep. The 1961 study committee found

testimony indicating that two to three times as many students of junior college age residing in communities where a public junior college was available would attend those colleges than would residents in those communities which do not afford such educational facilities.¹ Research on student characteristics at the area schools now shows that this has definitely been borne out by their experience. This research reveals that two of the most important factors in selection of an area school are low cost of attendance and closeness to the homes of students.

How well have the area schools succeeded in accomplishing the ten-point mission assigned to them?

1. Any evaluation of their performance must acknowledge the existence of differences in merged area needs.
2. Each school, because of the provisions of Chapter 280A for local control and local direction, has taken on its own identity by developing programs and services related to the needs of its own merged area.
3. This flexibility must remain as a distinguishing feature of the area schools.

Following is a brief review of area school development and accomplishments as related to each of the ten points enumerated in Section 280A.1, Code of Iowa:

1. College Parallel Programs

The eleven merged areas which have received designation as community colleges are now offering a full complement of college parallel programs. As many as 200 course offerings are available at some area schools for the student aiming to transfer to a four-year institution.

¹Encyclopedia of Educational Research

As of September, 1972, thirteen of the fifteen area schools had obtained some recognition from the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, the regional accrediting agency. Four area schools had achieved accredited status, while the remainder were either in correspondent status or recognized candidates for accreditation.

Progress has been made in efforts to gain recognition of the two-year Associate of Arts degree by four-year colleges and universities. Many four-year institutions now offer blanket acceptance of the two-year degree including transfer of credits earned by the transferring student.

Substantial progress has been made in developing career lattice programs in college parallel divisions. These programs, frequently paraprofessional programs in the human services, enable students to prepare for immediate entry level employment while also retaining the option to transfer to baccalaureate programs if they later choose to advance in their occupation.

In 1965 the sixteen public junior colleges operated by local school districts enrolled 8,271 full-time and part-time students in their college parallel programs. In 1972, the fall enrollments in college parallel programs in Iowa's eleven area community colleges totaled 11,236. This total is approximately 400 less than the fall enrollment in 1971, and includes almost four times the number of part-time students in the 1965 enrollment, additional evidence of the progress of area schools in serving those who were not previously being served.

2. Vocational and Technical Training

A state committee studying the need for public community colleges in 1962 found a total of ten post-high school technical training programs being conducted in eight scattered locations. By the fall of 1972, the

number of full-time occupational training programs in Iowa had risen to over 365 sections at the fifteen area schools, and these programs served 12,293 students. ONLY 839 STUDENTS ENROLLED IN CAREER EDUCATION PROGRAMS OFFERED BY IOWA'S PUBLIC JUNIOR COLLEGES IN 1965.

Two very important facts emerge from a study of enrollment figures dating from the time when Iowa's area schools came upon the scene.

These are:

1. Pursuit of educational opportunity beyond high school by high school graduates has increased greatly. Only 43% of Iowa's 1964 high school graduates entered post-high school institutions in 1964, compared with over 59% of the graduates of 1970.
2. Most of this activity has been in career training. Vocational enrollment in Iowa's area schools has risen from 839 in 1965-66 to 12,293 in full-time programs in 1972-73 (1300% increase) while college parallel population in the area schools rose from 8,271 to 11,236 in the same period (35% increase) and 1,013 of these students are in occupational programs designed to prepare them to meet employment needs.

Enrollments in area schools have grown significantly since the inception of area schools during the 1966-67 school year, AND THIS GROWTH HAS LARGELY BEEN IN OCCUPATIONAL PROGRAMS WHERE THE GREATEST NEED EXISTED.

Although the growth of vocational and technical training in area schools is impressive, there are still obvious needs to be met. Commissioner Sidney Marland, quoting from a Department of Labor report, states that by 1980, 80 percent of the work force will not require a baccalaureate degree, and that currently only three of ten students in high school will go on to academic college work, and that even of those, one-third will drop out and not receive a baccalaureate degree. Current projections for fiscal year 1973 in Iowa indicate that only 21,096 of 307,419 secondary students or 6.9 percent of all secondary students, will be enrolled in preparatory career education programs.

3. In-service Training and Retraining of Workers

Area schools conduct training in plants and factories, or hold training classes on the school campus for industrial employees. The schools conduct training on special topics such as the new Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). Training of industrial workers in groups is sometimes accomplished through the New and Expanding Business and Industry Training (NEBIT) program offered statewide with the help of state assistance.

An effort sometimes overlooked in assessing the value of area schools is the part-time vocational training available through evening classes sponsored by adult education divisions. These are generally non-credit classes, are vocational and are intended to upgrade the skills of employed persons. The State Department of Public Instruction reported 2,793 such classes with an enrollment of 47,971 during the 1971-72 school year; and an additional 5,461 enrolled in special programs in farm management, MDTA and consumer education.

Although short in length, the above-mentioned night classes provide adults with skills permitting them to retain employment and to upgrade themselves in preparation for changes in their occupations.

The latter preparation is particularly important to the economic and human needs of Iowa at this time when the Department of Labor reports the average worker can expect to change careers at least seven times during his working lifetime.

4. High School Completion

High school completion studies are now available in nearly every section of Iowa through the area school system. In research compiled at the outset of the area school movement, it was learned that slightly

more than 53 percent of Iowa's adults over age 25 had not yet completed high school studies. The 1970 census showed a dramatic reduction in this figure to 41.0%, an accomplishment which certainly resulted in significant part from the high school completion programs offered by the area schools.

There is still much to be done in this area. According to the 1970 census there are more adults age twenty and over in Iowa who have not completed high school than there are students currently enrolled in all local public elementary and secondary schools in the state. During the last school year in Iowa for which information is available, 7,829 secondary school students withdrew before completing high school. This is more than twice the number of people who received high school equivalency certificates in 1971-72, providing ample evidence of the need to expand opportunities in this area.

5. Vocational-Technical Training for High School Students

The inadequacy of career programs in the majority of Iowa's high schools was recognized by the authors of Senate File 550. The area schools have a mandate to assist our secondary schools by providing vocational-technical training for those students "who may best serve themselves" through area school programs. Some area schools are currently providing a limited range of opportunities in career education for high school students, but this mandate remains as a major challenge for the immediate future.

Projections for the 1972-73 school year indicate that the six preparatory career education programs for secondary school students in Iowa will enroll less than 200 students and the 15 pre-career programs will enroll less than 450 students.

The closest type of coordination between secondary schools and the area schools will be required as this goal is pursued. Concerned cooperation, rather than protection of existing practices, must mark Iowa's efforts to carry out this mandate.

Work toward this goal is now proceeding in each merged area with local school district personnel meeting with area school personnel to assess needs and resources of the merged areas in preparation for the implementation of new programs.

6. Student Personnel Services

This term refers to counseling, student records, registration, student activities, placement and student aids -- all forms of outside-the-classroom activities available to area school students.

The area schools have been innovative in providing student personnel services for the widely-varied student population. Most schools have deserted the "counseling suite" concept in favor of de-centralizing counseling services. Human potential seminars offered to staff and students alike are designed to stimulate individuals to full use of their potential.

Increasingly, student personnel programs are designed to provide variable entry and exit for vocational training programs, allowing students to begin and end their training at their own convenience. Financial aid offices strive to provide grants and loans for more than 46 percent of the student population in area schools receiving financial assistance. These aid programs are instrumental in enabling large numbers of economically disadvantaged students to attend the area schools.

Through student personnel services, area schools provide specially trained staff and resources to serve the large number of military veterans enrolled, a number now equal to at least twenty percent of the total enrollment in some area schools.

7. Community Services

Some important progress has been made toward this goal. The area schools, while meeting many other priority needs in their rapid growth, have engaged in community services largely centered around adult educational programs. Almost 93,000 registrations occurred in adult continuing and general education courses during the 1971-72 school year. This response emphasizes the need and desire of adults to pursue their education as a lifelong process.

The pressures created by general public acceptance, however, are leading area schools to assume new roles of community service. Increasingly, area schools are being regarded as community centers, where logically many of the cultural, avocational and informational activities of the merged areas take place. This concept has been further developed by the leadership of area schools in promoting the community school concept. Of the 452 public school districts in Iowa, at least 80 percent have cooperative agreements with area schools in offering adult education opportunities. This cooperation has resulted in an expansion of community services and a utilization of facilities at times when many formerly stood idle.

8. Vocational Education for Handicapped Persons

Progress is being made toward providing "vocational education for persons who have academic, socio-economic, or other handicaps which prevent succeeding in regular vocational education programs."

Some area schools operate rehabilitation centers, or skill centers, in meeting this goal. People come to these centers for job conditioning and other preparation for their return to productive working roles in society. Other programs are designed to assist Iowans who are institutionalized. These programs include academic and career opportunities for residents of the Men's Reformatory at Anamosa, the State Penitentiary at

Fort Madison, and the Women's Reformatory at Rockwell City.

All fifteen area schools have cooperative agreements to provide rehabilitation counseling and services within their merged areas, thereby providing better access to services for the approximately 85,000 handicapped and disadvantaged Iowans who can benefit from such services.

Special educational and counseling programs for students with special needs are being developed and all area schools now have special needs coordinators to assist in this development.

9. Training, Retraining, and All Necessary Preparation
for Productive Employment of All Citizens

This general mission is the basis for many of the area school programs. It will, of necessity, serve as a continuing challenge in the future as the schools seek out new alternatives to enable citizens to experience productive employment and personal growth throughout their lifetime.

Many programs administered by area schools, such as the Des Moines Skills Center, Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA) programs, Career Opportunities Program (COP), the educational component of Model Cities, Concentrated Employment Program (CEP), Work Incentive Program (WIN), Career Exploration Center, and programs funded by the Environmental Protection Agency provide unique opportunities for preparation for productive employment.

10. Vocational-Technical Training for Persons not
Enrolled in High School and Who Have not
Completed High School

The "open-door" policy of Iowa's area schools has made them readily available to students with a previous record of low achievement or academic failure. In accepting these students, the area schools have also accepted the obligation to re-orient the students' approach to learning. Those students who have recollections primarily of failure must be shown that new and attainable opportunities exist in the area schools which will enable them to earn a better living and to achieve a better life style.

This role is being expanded through the use of student services, outreach programs and special basic educational programs utilizing individualized instructional techniques.

* * * * *

Iowa's area schools have made a significant beginning in meeting the challenges given by the legislature in Chapter 280A. Residents of Iowa not previously served by post-high school training institutions have found opportunities for educational and training experiences leading to gratifying personal growth and occupational readiness.

These opportunities must be expanded and improved if the full intent of Chapter 280A is to be realized. Only then can the claim be made that our area schools are "offering to the greatest extent possible," educational opportunities and services as outlined in the policy statement of that chapter.