

FORUM

In a recent newspaper account of a comment by Fulton B. Klinkerfues, president of the MEA, about the Domian report's conclusion that seventy-five per cent of the school districts have too few pupils to support the programs they need, he is said to have said: Curricula are "so meager that the small high school is failing to carry out the function of early secondary education -- that of exploration." We print the following two articles as encouraging commentaries on what cooperation between administrators and teachers can accomplish in overcoming the disadvantages that James Conant in his earlier report to the nation had already described, and that we in our state's Domian report are currently deploring. If there are those amongst Minnesota's small high school English teachers who would like to speak further about the advantages of small size, we invite their commentaries.

CURRICULUM PLANNING IN THE SMALL SCHOOL: A REPORT OF THE PROCEDURES AT CAMBRIDGE HIGH SCHOOL

By MELVIN W. NORSTED and BARBARA RAMSELL

- I. Mr. Melvin W. Norsted,
Superintendent, Cambridge
High School District 911.

Approximately six years ago, I was invited to Lincoln, Nebraska, to speak at a conference of school administrators regarding various subject matter fields. My particular talk at this convention was in the field of social studies. However, I happened to find time to visit some of the other discussion groups. One that greatly impressed me was the presentation of the English people of what was commonly known then as the Lincoln Plan. I saw some of this plan put into action in the actual classroom and was greatly impressed with its possibilities. Upon returning to my school at Cambridge, Minnesota, I called in Mrs. Ramsell, who is head of our English department. I discussed with her the possibility of calling the staff together in order to initiate a continuing curriculum study in the field of English. It was then that Mrs. Ramsell received her help from the University of Minnesota

Project English study, and, two summers later, from the NDEA Institute.

Our first problem in administering such curriculum study was to find the time and the money for the English staff to accomplish the work. A summer workshop type of program didn't seem to fit our system, both from the money standpoint and the fact that my staff was not inclined to remain on for summer work. As administrator of the school, I decided to free these teachers one hour a week and bring in some outside lay people, all of whom were qualified teachers, to take their classes during this hour. The Board of Education felt very kindly toward the project and agreed to go along with what I had recommended. The thing that impressed me most as an administrator was the enthusiasm of the lay people whom we brought in. They seemed to feel that they were definitely contributing something to the field of education.

At the end of the school year, Mrs. Ramsell, as chairman of the department, presented to the Board of Education as a whole, the work they had accomplished in their year of curriculum study in the field of English. This was very well received by the Board. As a matter of fact, the Board then proceeded to provide for a curriculum study in the field of history patterned after the English curriculum study. In successive years we have done a curriculum study, on somewhat the same basis, in the fields of science and mathematics. I might add that the Board was so impressed with the work of the English department's curriculum study that they agreed to pay the English department staff for a week's extra work which they did after the end of the school year. The following year the school board agreed to pay for the English department staff to work on Saturday mornings on their curriculum study, so it became a continuing thing.

I sincerely feel that any curriculum study in the high school has to have united support from all the agencies mentioned. I think this went a long way in making this study possible. We have now been engaged in this English curriculum study and other curriculum studies for a period of five years, and I am sure that none of the curriculum studies in the various fields has cost the district in this five year period more than one thousand dollars per year. I feel that this is a very small amount if we are going to keep up with the current trends and techniques that are being developed in the various academic fields. As a result of the curriculum study in the field of English, we have developed a handbook for all our English teachers which states the aims and objectives and outlines the program for their particular course of study. We have done this

in an effort to produce a program of vigor, interest, practicality and challenge.

In addition to this, the Board of Education has seen fit to give extra pay to all of the various department heads, so that there is some remuneration for their efforts in the way of curriculum leadership. I might also say that our English teachers this year are teaching only four hours a day. So we are giving them more time to do individual work and more time to spend with students. Interest in the new English curriculum was also responsible for at least two new teachers' decision to join our faculty this year.

II.

Mrs. Barbara Ramsell,
Chairman, English Department
Cambridge High School

This report of our four year English curriculum program is certainly not advanced as a model program. If any of the ideas which have worked for us can be useful to other small schools we will be pleased. But, since the basic tenet of planning such a program is that each school must adapt it to fit its peculiar needs, we urge caution in assuming that situations and experiences will be similar.

Probably our English curriculum study in Cambridge would never have gotten underway had it not been for the nagging of both men and ideas. One of the "nagging" men was our former high school principal, the late Mr. R.B. Ernst. He regularly greeted me in the halls of C.H.S. with the question: "When are you going to do something about the English department?" The other man was Mr. Duane Scribner, then of the staff of Moorhead State College, who blasted my comfortable alibis with information he gave at an MCTE meeting at the University of Minnesota. It was there that I heard about the NCTE check list for the evaluation of the language arts program appearing in the April, 1962, issue of the English Journal. It was there, also, that Mr. Scribner asked his fateful question: "If you haven't started a curriculum study, when are you going to?" Shortly after that, I heard about Project English at the University of Minnesota, and through participating in it as well as the NDEA Institute held at the University two summers later, I finally felt partially equipped to initiate an English curriculum study for grades 7-12 at Cambridge High School. That was four years ago.