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THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE IN A MULTIPLE-TEACHER AGRIBUSINESS AND NATURAL RESOURCES-FFA DEPARTMENT

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Introduction

As the program of vocational agribusiness and natural resources-FFA education has developed through the years, a combination of factors has developed situations which facilitate the establishment of an increasing number of multiple teacher departments. Several factors contributed to this shift from the traditional one-man department. School consolidation, the broader scope of training opportunities, specialized agribusiness instruction, enrollment of girls, young farmer education, adult farm management, veterans training programs in agriculture and increased demand for education in agriculture were among the major influences leading to the development of multiple teacher departments.

The advent of the multiple teacher department added a new dimension to the agriculture instructor's role. No longer was the teacher responsible for all activities and operations in the department nor did he/she receive all the non-economic rewards from teaching agribusiness and natural resources-FFA. With this division of labor and rewards—problems were eminent.

There were no written guidelines or procedures for the operation of multiple teacher departments in vocational agribusiness and natural resources-FFA in Minnesota. With an increasing number of these departments, a need for administrative guidelines and skills for operating a vocational agribusiness department with more than one instructor is surfacing.

ADMINISTRATION

Administration of vocational agribusiness and natural resources-FFA departments is a process concerned with creating, maintaining, stimulating, and unifying the energies of the agribusiness staff within the department toward the

realization of the predetermined objectives of the department. This does not just happen. The successful administration of a multiple-teacher department is dependent on the successful implementation of all of the above processes. The need for a team effort in meeting the departmental objectives is paramount.

Where else in public education does a commonness of philosophy and goals so intertwine the components of the educational process and the deliverers of that process? The successful administration of a multiple-teacher department is made much easier if there is dedication to the task and common departmental goals along with a written job description and individual operational requirements for each member of the department. Proper administration of a department avoids the problematic statement, "I assumed that you were doing..."

Most job descriptions for agribusiness and natural resources-FFA instructors read, "Teacher of Vocational Agriculture-High School, Grades 9-12, FFA, 12 month contract". What are the operational, functional, and administrative responsibilities of the position? Who does what in a multiple teacher department? These are the unanswered questions which often lead to contradiction, conflict and disunity in the department.

Administration is concerned with utilization of human energy and a successfully administered department will have activated and converted available human energy within the department to desired outcomes. This leads to the discussion of departmental philosophy and objectives—a place to start.

RATIONALE FOR DEPARTMENTAL PHILOSOPHY AND OBJECTIVES

Many departments in secondary schools (both vocational and non-vocational) seem to operate in a smooth and routine fashion without a written departmental

philosophy or visible common set of objectives for the department. However, even with a unique set of individuals in a unique situation, this seldom is the most efficient situation.

Vocational agribusiness and natural resources-FFA departments cannot subscribe to such illogical and haphazard methods in educational planning. Progressive, successful, and comprehensive departments strive to appropriately meet the needs of the students, the community, and the school through a program of year-round instructional activities. They incorporate approved supervised occupational experiences and the FFA into a comprehensive classroom and laboratory educational process and maintain compliance with the State rules and regulations for vocational education. They may also provide agriculture exploration in grades 7-9, adult and young farmer education and farm management instruction, enterprise meetings, meet with and coordinate the activities of the departmental advisory committee and implement an alumni FFA chapter. In addition, staff members complete their professional obligations in various teaching organizations and may even arrange for classroom substitute coverage.

Add to this the written expectations of the local district master contract and the unwritten expectations of fellow teachers in the school. How does the agribusiness-FFA instructor answer such queries as, "Why are you working Saturdays?" and "Why don't you ever come to coffee at 3:30?" Many teachers today interpret the master contracts minimum requirements to be the teachers maximum output.

A written philosophy or rationale for existence in the local community and education agency must be developed. If not, the vocational agribusiness and natural resources-FFA department may become a floundering, unmanageable and aimless program with duplication, discrepancies and obvious omissions in the tasks of education and administration.

Every district which has a vocational agribusiness department has a portion of its philosophy and objectives a section relating to the needs for such agribusiness training and a subscription to it. The philosophy of any department within an institution is a statement of beliefs and values used to guide the department in developing its objectives and guidelines for all activities. A philosophy also establishes a set of standards with the purpose of meeting the needs of the community. The standards are both "professed" and "prac-

ticed" by the departmental staff, school administration and local board of education. Care must be exercised in developing a philosophy which is actually implemented and not just talked about.

The philosophical statement and objectives of the agribusiness department must be developed by the professional agriculture instructors within the department. Input from past procedures, school administration, students, community, surveys and so on must be sought and used. After developing a written philosophy and objectives—which may include what the department will not do—there is a need for an implementation plan. This plan should include the adoption of the departmental philosophy and objectives by the departmental staff, the agribusiness advisory committee, the local administration and the board of education.

The philosophy and objectives of the vocational agribusiness and natural resources-FFA department must address at least the following:

1. Community and student needs.
2. Supervised occupational experience program.
3. FFA.
4. Classrooms and laboratory educational process.
5. Indicate compliance with state rules and regulations.
6. Professional obligations.
7. Other local needs and requirements.

It is important that the objectives be limited to those that can be implemented and accomplished. A department would not include "...the analysis of 42 farm account records from cooperating operators..." as an objective if provisions were not available to hire an adult farm management instructor.

RATIONALE FOR DEPARTMENTAL JOB DESCRIPTION AND OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Before discussing the reason for individual job descriptions for vocational agribusiness and natural resource instructors, one must consider some of the diplomacy facets of administration. Diplomacy is the skill of handling the interaction of people without creating hostility. An efficient agriculture teacher and/or department is usually diplomatic. Few other positions in or out of education require the skill in handling the interaction of so many different people or groups. Figure 1 indicates the interpersonal and political links of a typical department. A break or lack of meaningful communication in any one of

	Teacher			
	1	2	3	4
Department Chairpersons meeting	M*		S**	
Ag-Dept. Staff meetings	M	S		
Budget Control & Signing Requisitions	M			
Minutes of Ag Dept. Staff meetings			S	M
State Reports (both Dept & FFA)	M	S	S	S
FFA Business meeting	M			
FFA Degrees & Ceremonies & Education at meetings			M	
FFA Recreation at meetings & summer				M
Local banquet program & printing	M			
Local banquet meal	M	M		
Local banquet invitations & guest list			M	
Local banquet decorations & cleanup				M
State FFA Degree	M	S	S	S
Proficiency Awards	S	6(M)	6(M)	7(M)
Contests 1, 3, 7, 11 (Transportation, Substitute, Principal, etc.)	S			M
Contests 2, 4, 6 (Transportation, Substitute, Principal, etc.)		S	M	
Contests 5, 8, 9, 10 (Transportation, Substitute, Principal, etc.)	M	S		
BOAC Award		S		M
National Chapter & Safety Award	M		S	
Chapter Farm (test plots)		M		S
Greenhouse (daily management)	M			S
Greenhouse Activity 1				M
Greenhouse Activity 2	M			
Shop Cleanup & Maintenance			M	S
Classroom #1 Management	M			
Classroom #2 Management				M
Office Manager (phone, etc.)		M		
Concessions FFA	M	S	S	S
Seed Sales FFA	S		M	S
Fruit Sales FFA	S		S	M
FFA Week-Newspaper		M		
FFA Week-Faculty coffee	M			
FFA Week-Displays				M
Weekly Newspaper Article	S	M	S	S
Officer Training	M			S
Freshman Camp (Greenhand)				M
District FFA (Dept. Rep.)	M			
District MVAIA (Dept. Rep.)			M	
State Convention - Transportation, Registration - Meals & Lodging	M			
State Convention - P.R. & Principal	S		M	
State Convention - Classroom Substitute		M		S

Figure 2. Departmental Operational Responsibilities.

*Major Responsibility

**Support Responsibility

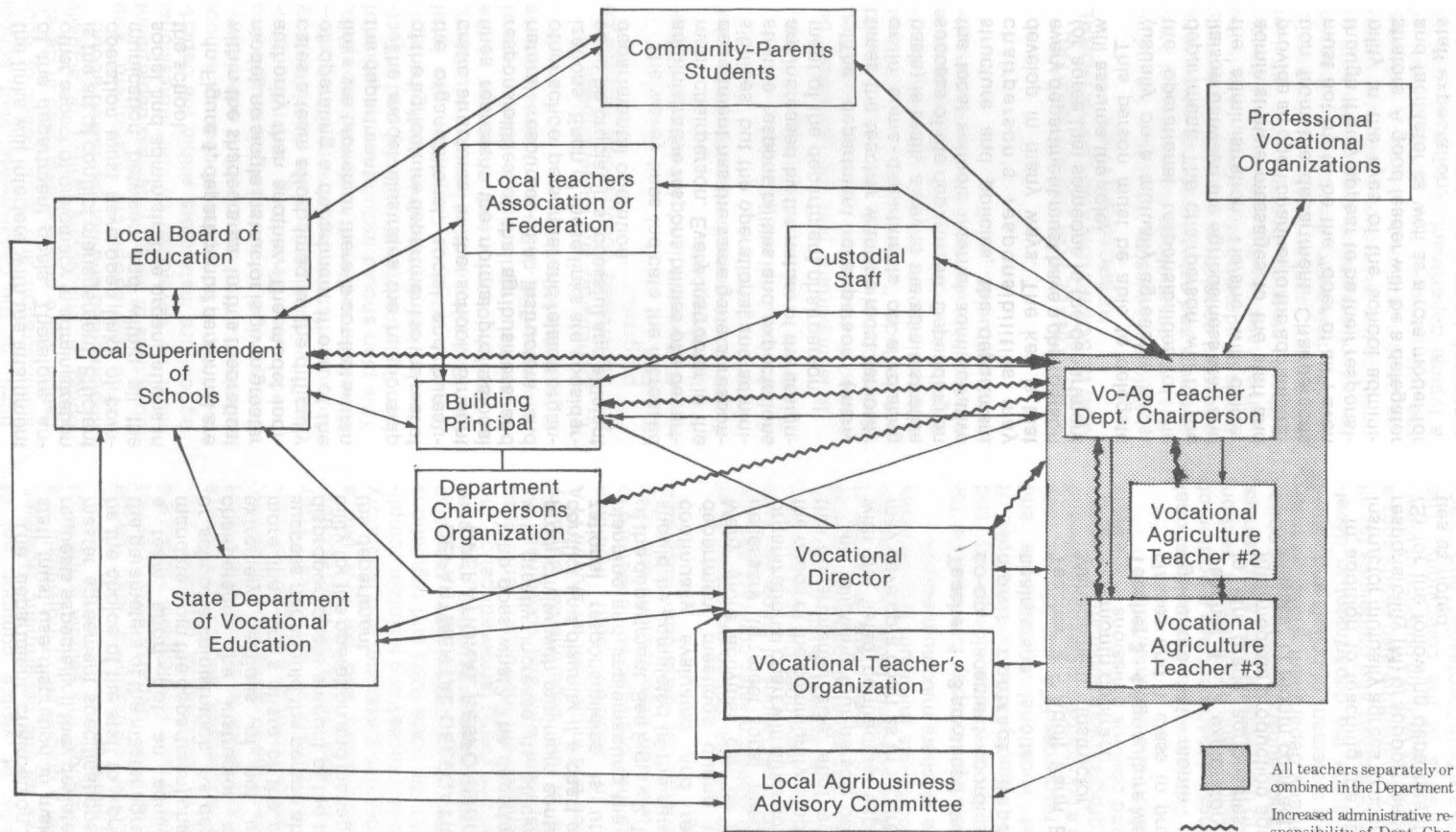


Figure 1: Theoretical Administrative Model of a Multiple-Teacher Vocational Agribusiness and Natural Resources Department

the links will interfere with the attainment of the department goals. Therefore, another aspect of diplomacy in administration is the art of conflict management. Efficient operation must have open links of communication between and within all the social and administrative organizations in the school.

In Figure 1, departmental personnel are within the shaded area. In this theoretical model, no single instructor is given greater authority than another. The model indicates a team effort. Imagine the difficulty of operating a department if one of the links are broken or there is conflict within the department.

The model illustrates the relationship of the agriculture department to the rest of the organizational, social and bureaucratic structures in the school. Straight lines represent the normal professional responsibilities of the agribusiness and natural resources-FFA instructors and other school personnel and related organizations. Each of these links are considered to be crucial in successful and efficient departmental operation.

The wavy lines indicate the increased administrative responsibilities of a department chairperson. Every instructor in the department has the same general responsibilities, but the operational and administrative responsibilities and expectations are increased by the nature of the assignment of the department chairperson.

The department chairperson (many times the teacher with the most seniority or in some departments on a rotating basis) is really a key to the administrative success of the department. Depending on the local schools internal administrative structure and policies, the department chairperson's responsibilities may develop in many ways. The key is that every department must have a chairperson (or agree that someone in the department will assume the role).

This person must be able to delegate (usually on a mutually agreeable basis) the operational responsibilities of the department. The chairperson will be the liaison between the agribusiness staff and the administration. He/she will deliver administrative messages to the staff and provide an open channel to the administration from the department. Chairpersons must not try to be the "doer of all", even though it may appear to be their responsibility in the eyes of the school administrators. A good leader will be a delegator and facilitator as well as a role model for staff expectation.

The department chairperson and the staff must use discretion in making staff requests especially if they deviate from the master agreement specifications. It must be the choice of the staff to work beyond the parameters of the master agreement—a team effort—not an administrative mandate from the department chairperson or school administration. As department chairperson, the instructor must be extremely cautious of not accepting more than one's share of the credit for success nor should the person shoulder a disproportionate amount of the responsibility for the operation and management of the department.

DEPARTMENTAL DELEGATION OF OPERATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Who does what? The department staff will greatly increase its efficiency and productivity with minimum contradiction, conflict and disunity if a chart of organizational responsibilities is utilized in planning and implementing the activities of the department. See Figure 2. This chart should be completed in the summer, but continually evaluated and revised in department meetings during the year. Many more activities can be added as necessary to meet local needs. Every organizational chart will differ considering the needs of the community, students, and the departmental size, staff and goals.

The following four-person department with the listed contractual expectations may develop a chart as in Figure 2.

Teacher 1 - 3 advanced classes and co-op placement coordinator, 11-month contract, department chairperson.

Teacher 2 - Adult Farm Business Management Instructor, full-time 11½ month contract.

Teacher 3 - 4 Agriculture Mechanics classes and 1 class in production agriculture, 11 month contract.

Teacher 4 - 2 exploratory classes in 9th grade agribusiness and 3 intermediate production agriculture classes, 11 month contract.

In addition to teaching the above, the instructor mutually agrees to accept major responsibility (M) or support responsibility (S) for the following departmental activities as noted.

PROCEDURES FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The procedure of staff development should be based on a systematic and rational plan for teacher in-service—both formal and informal. It is useful and necessary for the entire department to become involved in planning and developing the departmental philosophy, the course objectives, course content, facility utilization and sharing, departmental program of activities, administrative authority structure and responsibilities and the weekly or monthly departmental calendar.

Another useful approach to staff in-service training is to use an informal agenda and at least one formally scheduled (specific time and place) meeting per month for the entire department—preferably away from the school's physical setting. These meetings, along with informal meetings where policy or decision affecting the department, its staff and/or students, require a written record be provided for each staff member. An informed staff leads to smooth and efficient operation of a vocational agribusiness and natural resources-FFA department.

SUMMARY

With the increasing demand on teachers' time, the restrictions of the master contract, the extensive number of proposals, evaluations and reports, the staff peer pressure, and the needs of the instructors and their families, the need for an effective administrative structure in the multiple-teacher agribusiness-FFA department is becoming increasingly more obvious. Written guidelines heretofore were not available, nor is extensive training in departmental administration for multiple teacher departments.

Proper administration of a department will direct the energies of the personnel in the department toward meeting the

departmental objectives. Efficient and diplomatic administration of a vocational agribusiness-FFA and natural resources department must open avenues of communication between and within all social and administrative organizations in the school. Having one staff person assume the duties of department chairperson will facilitate the administrative process.

Operational responsibilities in the department must be planned and recorded. A listing of all departmental responsibilities with appropriate assignments should be determined locally to facilitate implementation of the objectives of the department. Continuous staff development through involvement in the planning, development and evaluation of the department is necessary. Formal staff meetings with an agenda and written records will improve the process of implementing an administrative structure in the multiple-teacher agribusiness-FFA department.

A systematic assessment, revision and updating of the administrative structure and processes, and departmental job descriptions should provide more efficient staff output with less staff time input.

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