PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICE IN THE U. S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

BY

RODNEY H. CLARKEN
AND
CASSANDRA ALLSOP DUNN

COLLEGE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

DECEMBER 1985
PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES IN THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

INTRODUCTION

Pupil personnel services in the public schools of the U.S. Virgin Islands play an important role in the education of the youth of those islands. It is designed to help the students with many of the aspects of education that facilitate learning, such as health, guidance, attendance, and counseling.

The U.S. Virgin Islands follow the American system of education and their pupil personnel services are also modeled after pupil personnel services in the United States. This paper will discuss the background, structure, and services of the Division of Pupil Personnel Services of the Department of Education of the U.S. Virgin Islands and offer recommendations for further development.

BACKGROUND

In 1961, the Department of Education was reorganized under the direction of Commissioner Pedro Sanchez and his deputy, Arthur Richards. The first Director of Pupil Personnel Services and Coordinator of Guidance, Vitalia Wallace, was appointed to administer programs under the Division of Curriculum and Instruction. The total public school enrollment was 7,624 that year (Sanchez, 1962).

The school population grew rapidly and increased by 5000
over the next five years. The staff of Pupil Personnel Services also expanded to include a director, a guidance coordinator, a testing counselor, three attendance counselors, a social worker, and sixteen guidance counselors. The pupil personnel services were centrally administered from St. Thomas with functions decentralized when necessary. Guidance services were made available to all grade levels. Great emphasis was placed on counseling potential drop outs as a number of students had already left to join Job Corps. Continuing education was also stressed and the Territorial Scholarship Program, now administered by the Virgin Islands Board of Education, was coordinated by pupil personnel services. At that time the school nurses were assigned through the Department of Health (Richards, 1968).

By 1970, with Charles Turnbull as acting Commissioner of Education, pupil personnel services had further increased with guidance, testing, and school nursing each having their own coordinators. Dental, medical, psychological, and some nursing services were still provided by specialists assigned by the Department of Health. There were two social workers for the entire territory with student ratios of 1:6,200 on St. Croix and 1:8,300 on St. Thomas/St. John. Teenage pregnancy was escalating as a problem in the schools and social workers assisted 29 unwed mothers to return to school that year (Turnbull, 1970).

Ten years after the Bureau of Pupil Personnel Services was established in 1962, there were 37 guidance counselors, 17 school nurses, nine attendance counselors, and four social workers
providing assistance in the public schools. There was great emphasis put on in-service training activities. The school population had tripled since 1962 to about 18,000 students (Haizlip, 1972).

The Hoiser vs Evans decision of 1970 stated that all children of immigrants from other islands were entitled to free public education. This decision resulted in the schools becoming very over-crowded, under-funded, and under-staffed. The Educational Diagnostic Center was established during this time, and along with other pupil personnel workers, assisted with screening and staffing for placement and remediation of special education students. The Division of Special Education provided medical, psychological, audiometric, and educational evaluation teams for the students with learning problems that were not receiving needed services.

By the 1977-78 school year, the Bureau of Pupil Personnel Services had seen six commissioners and many developments in its sixteen year history. In 1977, Pupil Personnel Services was designated an activity center in the Office of the District Superintendent, which then assumed full responsibility for program and budgetary matters (Kean, 1978). This state of affairs has remained until now.

As of November 1985, enrollment in grades K-12 was 25,384, a decline of 745 from the May enrollment figures and a decline of 930 from December 1984 data. The public school population represents approximately one-fourth of the total population of the Virgin Islands. The school population is made up of about one-fifth immigrant students and approximately 70 per cent
students born in the Virgin Islands.

Pupil Personnel Services on St. Croix handles continuous registration of new students, but on St. Thomas this function is done by another division. Children are required to attend school from the beginning of the school year nearest their fifth birthday until the school year nearest their sixteenth birthday (Education Laws and Regulations of the Virgin Islands, 1981). New students from other Caribbean islands are tested for grade placement by guidance counselors at their assigned schools.

STRUCTURE

The Department of Education, headquartered on St. Thomas, is both a local and state level agency. Even though it technically is one school district, it is divided for administrative purposes into two sub-units locally referred to also as districts. One district is St. Croix and the other is St. Thomas/St. John. The department is headed by a commissioner appointed by the governor. Each district is headed by a district superintendent, who has oversight responsibility for pupil personnel services in their district. There are two district offices that headquarter the central administration of services. The St. Thomas offices serve the islands of St. Thomas and St. John and the St. Croix offices serve only the island of St. Croix.

The head of Pupil Personnel Services on both islands is called the District Director. Gertrude Iles, a former junior high school principal, was appointed district director for St.
Croix district in September of 1985. St. Croix had been without a head of its pupil personnel services for over two years. This position was previously titled district coordinator, but was upgraded to district director with the appointment of Iles. Irene Williams, formerly a high school guidance counselor, has headed the St. Thomas/St. John pupil personnel services since January 1985. The directors have little input into the hiring of staff, although they can review all files and make recommendations. St. Thomas/St. John has more staff employed in pupil personnel services even though they service fewer students. Table 1 illustrates the professional staff employed in each district.

Insert Table 1 about here

Headquarters on St. Croix is in an old building that was condemned by Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) several years ago. The records of students who have left the schools more than five years ago are stored there together with old lesson plan books and attendance records.

The Virgin Islands Executive Budget, Fiscal Year 1985 describes pupil personnel as "responsible for providing leadership and assistance in developing, improving and expanding attendance services, guidance services and school health services for all public school students" (p. B-251). It is also responsible to make referrals for social work and psychological services.
The workload output for St. Thomas/St. John for fiscal year 1983 was reported as 12,088 students counseled, 13,715 received health services, six students received psychological services, 476 students diagnosed educationally, 3,434 investigated attendance violations, and 3,103 referrals to other agencies. Their budget for pupil personnel services in 1983 was $1,438,843, with all but $24,376 being for salaries and fringe benefits.

For the same year the St. Croix district of pupil personnel services reported 1,684 attendance violations investigated, 2,115 cases referred to the department of health clinics, 597 education and career planning sessions held, 300 students received educational psychological, speech, hearing and language evaluations, and 95% of the students health records were screened for immunizations. The budget for St. Croix district pupil personnel for 1983 was $1,480,982, with all but $17,337 being for personal services and fringe benefits.

The 1985 objectives set for the St. Thomas/St. John pupil personnel by the department include increasing by 35 percent the number of investigated cases of truancy, assisting 75 percent of all pupils with counseling, investigating 30 percent of the pupils referred for school social work, and screening 90 percent of the pupils in target groups for medical, dental, and educational assistance.

On St. Croix the objectives for 1985 were to improve programs of attendance, guidance, educational diagnosis and school health by making monthly on-site school visitations; increase by 20% the number of cases of truancy investigated;
screen 95% of pupils in kindergarten for vision and hearing; and hold five workshop sessions for administrators, counselors, school nurses and teachers to assist in placing students in appropriate learning situations (Virgin Islands Executive Budget, 1985).

SERVICES

The responsibilities of the Director of Pupil Personnel Services include the development, coordination, and evaluation of all pupil personnel activities and staff and providing the resources and information to facilitate the accomplishment of their goals. These services are primarily provided in the schools with the collaboration of administrators, teachers, and other specialized staff and agencies.

The services offered by this division will be discussed in the following sections: guidance and counseling, school health, attendance, testing and psychological, and social work.

Guidance and Counseling. Counseling in the Virgin Islands is essentially a female dominated profession with only seven of thirty counselors on St. Thomas/St. John and ten of thirty-eight counselors on St. Croix males. Counselors must possess a master's degree in counseling to be employed and several are becoming nationally certified in cooperation with the American Association of Counseling and Development.

There are many discrepancies at the various schools concerning the duties of a counselor. Guidance counselors do a variety of things that are not directly related to their work.
such as administrative and clerical tasks.

The elementary guidance counselors main functions are counseling, consulting, coordinating, and testing. The secondary counselors duties are listed as orientation, individual inventory, information, counseling, placement, and follow-up.

The collective bargaining agreement stipulates that guidance counselors should not have to score large scale standardized tests, should not have to do non-guidance functions, and should not have a case lose load of more than 400 on the elementary level and 300 on the secondary level. Guidance counselors receive $750 above the regular teachers salary and are to be provided with suitable space where individual counseling sessions are to be held, secretarial assistance, and aides when proctoring tests. Even with the above provisions written into the bargaining agreement, many of them are not followed or enforced. There is a need for clearly written job specifications, staff development, orientation of new staff, more space and privacy, more secretarial assistance, and more support in testing and diagnosis.

School Health. The school health program for the U.S. Virgin Islands involves providing health services, health education and instruction, and a healthful environment.

Health services are to include free medical and dental appraisals prior to entrance into the schools and at the fifth and ninth grades. Some school nurses feel this is not adequate and try to see every pupil at least once a year.

Health education and instruction varies from school to school. This duty is only partially the responsibility of the
school nurses, as health is taught as a subject by classroom and physical education teachers.

Maintaining a healthful environment is important in the schools. This task is under the direction of the Department of Health. Preventing the introduction and spread of communicable diseases is a challenge because of the inadequate health care for many of the students.

One school nurse stated her objective was to promote and maintain health with prevention as the best way to improve the health conditions. The role of the school nurse is changing. Because primary health care is so expensive, more students are being sent to school with an illness so that they may be referred to public health agencies.

Since 1973, when outside medical professionals stopped coming to the schools, dental and medical assessments have been unavailable. The Department of Education does not require annual medical check-ups for the students. Several years ago, school nurses were sent to train as school nurse practitioners. After two years of study, the nurses were to have interned with physicians so that they could assess the physical status of students, do lab work, and give immunizations in consultation with a physician. The Commissioner of Health discontinued this program because he did not believe in its philosophy.

Attendance. Children are required to attend school from the beginning of the school year nearest their fifth birthday until the expiration of the school year nearest their sixteenth birthday. Any truant student may be taken into custody until one or
both of his parents or guardians asks for his release. A student with problems of truancy may be referred to the Department of Social Welfare for Child Welfare Services. If the truant is deemed incorrigible, then a complaint is filed with the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Division of the Municipal Court.

Attendance officers are appointed in each district to compel student attendance. Truancy and drop-outs are major problems at the secondary level. Attendance counselors must overcome several difficulties in combatting these problems including lack of community awareness and concern, lack of transportation to make field visits and difficulty contacting the parents. Even though laws exists to punish parents or guardians who do not send their children to school, the courts generally only warn chronic offenders.

Testing and Psychological. There is only one psychologist at the Educational Diagnostic Center on St. Croix. St. Thomas/St. John has two psychologists employed. Both districts could use more, but the positions are hard to fill because the salaries are quite low. The testing and psychological services of the Department of Education are centered in the Educational Diagnostic Centers, which are almost exclusively involved with the evaluation and re-evaluation of students for special education.

There are two educational diagnosticians in each district. They are responsible for initial testing, follow-up testing, staffings and other support services. Testing is not score oriented, but geared to assess a student's approach to a task,
the student's emotional type, the influence of cultural background and what type of help would be best suited for the student. There seems to be poor continuity between diagnosis and follow-up. Sometimes the services never come or are long delayed.

Legislation mandates services for children ages 0-21 and the Educational Diagnostic Center must test those outside their regular public school case load. There is some concern that students who left the schools with skills acquired through special education will not find opportunities to use them in the community. There is a need for a bilingual staff person, sign language training, support networks for the parents, mobile information units for the community, transportation to carry out their duties, more staff, and better public relations and awareness.

School Social Work. St. Thomas/St. John has four school social workers and St. Croix has none. The duties of the school social worker are to serve on the child study teams for special education placement, work with students and families to improve school performance, and serve as a link between the various constituencies that serve the students. The social workers major problems are lack of transportation and too large a case load. Most of the cases focus on encouraging the parents to take responsibility for their child's welfare. The existing social and economic conditions require the services of social workers to assist the students and families adapt to the school requirements.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Is Pupil Personnel Services meeting its specific objectives and the needs of the students? The division is trying to meet their objectives, but much improvement need to be made. Many of the problems create frustration and low morale among the pupil personnel service providers and inadequate services for the students and school district. The suggestions and recommendations given here may be helpful in bringing about some of the needed improvements.

The Division of Pupil Personnel Services in both districts needs concise and clearly written descriptions of their objectives and duties. The Pupil Personnel Services Handbook (Gabriel, 1975) includes goals and objectives of pupil personnel services and the responsibilities of the pupil personnel workers. This document should be updated, its information given to all concerned individuals and its provisions followed as much as is practicable. A needs assessment could be conducted to better determine the needs of the students and the community and this information used to revise this important source of information on the goals and responsibilities of Pupil Personnel Services in the U. S. Virgin Islands.

Even with the current goals, objectives, job descriptions and contract agreements, there is no viable system to monitor progress or enforce standards or agreements. This area is vital to progress throughout the Department of Education.

The two directors should work cooperatively to develop needed programs and services. The directors must establish good
working relationships with the administrators, teachers, and other staff involved with their work.

The pupil personnel services providers must also serve as helpful resource bankers for those concerned with the welfare of the students. This can be done by keeping everyone informed of the latest developments in their areas of concern. Services such as substance abuse and drop-out prevention should be extended to more of the students. These and other social problems found in the Virgin Islands could be better addressed in the schools.

Regular meetings for the various groups of service providers should be scheduled so that an exchange of information can be facilitated. Also, the various members of pupil personnel should have the opportunity to meet with other professional to approach problems as a team.

The staff must be evaluated more systematically. Only high standards should be accepted with in-service programs held to improve performance.

Better relations could be established with other educational and social agencies and the public. This could be accomplished by supplying more information of pupil personnel services to those concerned. The assistance of other service providers and the public is essential to an effective program.

One recommendation mentioned in many annual reports to the Governor over the last twenty years has been to improve the physical facilities of the pupil personnel workers. Better, larger, and more private facilities with telephones are needed.

Transportation is a problem for every pupil personnel worker who has to travel to field sites. If no cars can be
gotten for their use, either by purchasing or borrowing them, then the government should at least live up to its contractual agreement to reimburse the employees for transportation costs incurred in performing their duties.

Some programs that have been eliminated should be reconsidered, such as the early prevention of school failure and school nurse practitioner programs.

The greatest need is for more and better trained staff.

This can be accomplished partly through increased salaries and improved working conditions. The recent hiring freeze has had a negative impact on this area.

Finally, the information management system of not only the division, but of the entire department of education needs to be improved so that accurate information is readily available to make decisions concerning the needs of education.

CONCLUSION

Pupil personnel services has come a long way in the U. S. Virgin Islands, but it still has a long way to go. It must maintain the advances it has made and continue to develop its services. The present directors of pupil personnel services are aware of the above recommendations and are in the process of addressing them.

In an annual report to the Governor about 30 years ago, it stated that the annual cost of educating a student was 140 dollars (Larsen, 1953). Today the cost is approximately 3000 dollars. Are the students getting the services they need to
function effectively in our ever-advancing world? Our main hope for progress is to work together for the betterment of the next generation. This is the challenge that faces the Department of Education and the Division of Pupil Personnel Services of the United States Virgin Islands.

References


Table 1. District Comparison of Pupil Personnel Service Staff, December, 1985

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>St.T/St.J</th>
<th>St.C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic Cntr Coordinators</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance Counselors</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance Counselors</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Nurses</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Psychologists</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Social Workers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Diagnosticians</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Office Secretary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>70</strong></td>
<td><strong>62</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>