

Testimony

of

Seneca Highlands Intermediate Unit Nine

before

Subcommittee on Basic Education  
(J. William Lincoln, Chairman)

Monday, July 19, 1976

Intermediate Unit Staff Present

Frank Rackish, Executive Director  
Robert Stromberg, Assistant Executive Director  
Lyle Weissenfluh, Instructional Materials  
Services Director

I'll begin by expressing to Mr. Lincoln and other members of the Basic Education Subcommittee the appreciation of the Board of Education and staff of Intermediate Unit Nine for the opportunity to testify. Quite frequently, we in the big woods are either ignored or our opinions are considered unimportant. I must conclude this introduction with one sour note. There are no members of the Board of Education present because we didn't receive copies of the report for distribution until Thursday, July 15. The receipt of the reports and the timing of the hearings made attendance of Board members impossible. This evening, at our regular July meeting, I will ask Board members to read the report and invite them to write any thoughts which they have concerning it and forward those to Mr. Lincoln.

We have limited our observations to certain recommendations (p. 165) of the Report on the Pennsylvania Intermediate Unit System and a stirring conclusion.



1. Current state laws pertaining to the intermediate unit system should be amended. The major thrust of such changes should be to more clearly and centrally define the comprehensive role to be played by the intermediate units within the public school system. Included within this role definition should be more clearly stated limitations (if any such limitations are desired by the General Assembly) on the types of programs and activities to be engaged in by intermediate units.

Present laws governing intermediate units seem to be written specifically enough to limit services provided by the intermediate unit and generally enough to provide for reasonable interpretation. Working within present legislation, the Intermediate Unit staff can respond quickly to most school district requests for services without spending a disproportionate amount of time deciding whether they can or cannot comply. We can use our time providing services rather than explaining why we can't. It has often seemed to me that too many people in public service spend most of their energy developing arguments to explain why they can't do something; our goal is--and can be under present law--to spend our time working for school students, staff, and administration.

Because the twenty-nine intermediate units are different from one another, it seems to me that legislation must be written in broad rather than specific terms. At the present time, the intermediate unit is not a bureaucratic entity and can quickly respond to unique, local situations. New, specific, limiting legislation would require pages of implementing regulations, standards, and guidelines and could destroy the present vitality of the intermediate unit.

2. Consideration should also be given in the amending of the intermediate unit law to several issues of long term concern in relation to the intermediate units, such as (a) clarification of whether they can or cannot "own" motor vehicles and, if they can, under what circumstances, (b) possible provision of authority for the I.U.'s to "own" buildings themselves or development of a "simple" procedure to have I.U. buildings constructed and/or purchased in the name of member school district(s), (c) possible changing of the name of the intermediate unit system to a name more clearly identified with the public school system,

(a and b) The specific recommendations (a and b) cited could assist intermediate units--especially if the present law should be finally interpreted as it is by some solicitors who conclude that the restriction on ownership applies to office equipment, materials, and supplies. We, personally, do not object to leasing vans or buildings; but we have not made a careful cost analysis to determine whether owning or leasing is the more economical and efficient. We know that we could not have instituted a needed and successful vocational guidance and skill development program for handicapped students with federal funds under the Vocational Education Act if we had not decided to risk an audit exception. To provide the program in our region, we purchased three large movable classrooms.

Perhaps the restriction against ownership was placed into the law establishing intermediate units to prevent "empire building" and to make dissolution of intermediate units practicable. Now, an amendment to provide intermediate units a choice of leasing or owning equipment and vehicles to encourage economy and efficiency may be prudent.

(c) If the name Intermediate Unit is changed, we believe that the change should simply be to Intermediate Unit of Education. On our letterhead and office building, we presently use that appellation to provide people information about the kind of work which we do.

3. If the current "intent" of the General Assembly is to insure maintenance of a degree of active local control over the intermediate units and to prevent possible drifting of the intermediate units toward service as regional offices of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, any changes that are made in the current funding system for intermediate units (for example, an amendment to improve the predictability of projected I.U. revenues from the state during their annual budget planning process) should provide for continued, substantial local school district financial contributions toward the cost of basic I.U. operations.

In this recommendation, there are references to local control and basic operating subsidies for intermediate units. Our experience is that local districts have at least as much control of the intermediate unit as they have over their own operations. We have seen no evidence that staff of intermediate units want regulatory power over their constituent districts. The present relationship of the intermediate unit with the Department of Education and local districts seems most reasonable. It is true that, occasionally, the Department communicates with local districts through the intermediate unit; but the time required to assist the Department during the last five years has been minimal. Neither Department staff in principal positions nor intermediate unit staff have attempted to change the concept that our primary responsibility is to respond to services needed and requested by constituent districts.

To a degree, the cumbersome process mandated in law to approve the General Operating Budget of the Intermediate Unit guarantees local control. One of the steps--either approval of the budget by individual boards or by directors in convention--could be removed without affecting district control over the intermediate unit.

We agree that constituent districts should contribute to the intermediate unit, but we also believe that the present method of appropriating funds to

individual units should be changed. Our emphasis shall be on the formula presently used to allocate funds to each of the twenty-nine intermediate units. Through that formula and grandfather clause, the general operating subsidy to Intermediate Unit Nine was \$170,215 in 1971. For 1976-1977, our subsidy is still \$170,215. During the five years, the Consumer Price Index has risen by 44.9 points; prices have been inflated 36.86 percent. If our general operating subsidy had just matched the inflationary increase, it would now equal \$232,956, a dollar increase of \$62,741. During the same years, at the request of districts, we have expanded curriculum, instructional materials, and management services. Special education continues to demand more administrative and business staff time. To our original programs, we have added computer data processing services, federal program coordination, services to non-public school students, cooperative vocational education, and work study. We are also coordinating the establishment of an area vocational technical school. There are increasing demands on the organization. As school districts are requested to increase their contributions for intermediate unit services, their basic subsidies from the state have begun to decrease. Our position is that the general operating subsidy should provide funds for the organizational structure, incentive for encouraging new and needed programs, and some funds for maintaining existing valuable services.

Two major variables of the present formula are numbers of students and aid ratio. By formula, because of our sparse population, we would not receive an increase in subsidy until the appropriation for intermediate units reached \$13,600,000. Yet we are an intermediate unit consisting of relatively small districts who must cooperate to provide essential services. Intermediate Unit Nine is the kind of an area for which the regional concept

seems to have been tailored. We believe that a new subsidy formula or a system of categorical subsidies guaranteeing an increase in allocation to all intermediate units is needed immediately. (We have added an addendum showing our present programs, state and local costs, and salary changes of commissioned officers and program directors.)

#### Conclusion

If population projections are accurate, present small school districts will become smaller. Maintaining a full-range of educational services for fewer students will increase the cost per student. The intermediate unit concept may then become more important and be the means for small school districts to maintain some control over their schools.

As school enrollments decrease, tax bases in small communities shrink, and state subsidies stabilize or decrease, the need for cooperation will increase. School librarians and counselors, elementary supervisors, instructional advisors, and certain special teachers might be shared. The legislature should begin to consider a financial incentive to stimulate small districts to institute necessary services and to share supervisors and special teachers. There is now an established, credible agency through which districts can work cooperatively.

## Instructional Media Services

One of the important services of the Intermediate Unit is the Instructional Media Service. It was first established on a regional basis in the Commonwealth in 1950 with Federal George-Barden vocational funds and later reorganized to include all curriculum areas. This reorganization by the Bureau of Instructional Materials of the Department of Education, with the approval of the State Board of Education and the State Legislature, was written into the Pennsylvania School Code with the provision for state aid when funds became available. Unfortunately, state aid was not forthcoming although requests for such aid were submitted annually for many years. This state-wide system of Regional Instructional Materials Centers was the first in the United States and has been a model for many states since that time.

Regional Centers were originally established in spite of the lack of immediate aid from the state. Most school boards and administrators were quick to see their value and with the possibility of a future subsidy from the state entered into contracts with a Center. By the time the Intermediate Unit became a reality, approximately 95% of the school population was being served by these Centers--operating on local school district contributions and fluctuating federal funds. Federal money kept many Centers from becoming obsolete and/or ineffective. For example, from 1963 to 1970 the Seneca Highlands Regional Instructional Materials Center received \$122,480 from local participating school districts, and \$214,480 from federal sources. There was no state subsidy involved.

In 1968-1969, a PPBS study made by the McKean County office indicated that the services provided by the Seneca Highlands Instructional Media Center would be reduced drastically within five years unless new sources of funds were found. Factors considered were the costs of the purchase and maintenance of an acceptable media collection, developing educational technology, demands for additional services, inflation in the costs of materials, equipment, and fixed charges, the steady decrease in federal funds, and the decreasing ability of school districts to contribute.

The establishment of the Intermediate Unit provided an opportunity for new funds for the Instructional Media Services. In some Intermediate Units, including Intermediate Unit Nine, additional funds were provided; however, for most Centers, it is only a temporary reprieve. With the Intermediate Unit basic operating subsidy remaining static, and increased financial pressures upon boards of education, the money available for Instructional Media Services is shrinking. (Added to this problem is the dissatisfaction by some school districts with the formula which places an unequal assessment for services received. One school may be assessed \$12.00 per pupil while another is assessed \$2.00 per pupil for the same service.) The primary sustaining source of funds to replace materials discarded because of use and obsolescence has been federal programs. However, the demise of NDEA, IMS Appalachia Grants, Vocational-Technical Funds, and changes in ESEA Title I, II, III, and IV make the financial picture very bleak.

The Instructional Materials Services in Pennsylvania have enjoyed almost universal acceptance by teachers and administrators since their early beginnings. It is a service that involves every public school child in the



Commonwealth including kindergarten and exceptional children. Individually, few school districts could equip an adequate resource center; the cost of materials would be prohibitive. The Seneca Highlands Instructional Materials Service purchases, maintains and distributes 18 different kinds of media, covering all curriculum areas and all grade levels. In a geographical region that lacks wealth and population, it is an instructional service that enhances the legislature's goal of "equal education opportunities for all."

The Instructional Media Services in Pennsylvania must have additional funding if they are to remain the vital service they have been to teachers and school children. We should not overlook the fact that today's primary child is growing up in an audio-visual world dominated by a wide variety of insistent visual images. Experience has taught us that many students cannot learn well from printed materials or within an academically oriented learning situation. In fact, we know that most students respond more effectively to a broad variety of learning experiences using a variety of audio and visual media. Research results have provided good reasons for making audio-visual materials as familiar a part of the classroom as the printed word. The demands of modern communications media in every field are building inescapable pressures throughout the educational establishment. Schools have found that integrating audio-visual materials with the printed and spoken word allows greater flexibility in learning, helps the student acquire knowledge at a faster rate, and provides a variety of ways to tailor learning to the individual.

We have solved many teaching-learning problems through the Instructional Materials Services. There is much evidence to show that audio-visual materials and equipment are effective instruments for teaching



and learning when they are readily available and easy to use. The regional concept of services and the cooperative financial support by the state and local districts can insure that our children and teachers will get the right materials at the right places at the right time.

## Intermediate Unit Nine Services

1976-1977

Curriculum Development and Instructional Improvement (teacher in-service education, assist districts in completing Long Range Plan, provide research information service)

Instructional Media Services (provide 18 types of media, equipment repair services, in-service programs, audio and video tape duplicating, customized instructional materials for teachers)

Pupil Personnel Services (psychological assessment of non-special education students)

Management Services (provide and interpret information on state law and regulations, certification, etc., provide reports on intermediate unit teacher negotiations, conduct cooperative purchasing, cooperative policy development, administer mandated non-public school program)

Vocational-Technical Education (conduct cooperative vocational education and work study programs for districts, develop and operate area vocational technical school for ten districts)

Special Education (provide classes and services for fourteen districts in all areas of exceptionality)

Data Processing (provide computerized student scheduling, grade reporting, attendance reporting, test scoring, payroll, and budget-finance accounting)

Cooperative Title I (coordinate planning and operation of Title I programs for educationally disadvantaged in ten districts)

Program Staff

Services	Full-Time Staff		Part-Time Staff		Total		Percent of all Programs
	Prof.	Non-Prof.	Prof.	Non-Prof.	Prof.	Non-Prof.	
Administration	2	1	0	0	2	1	1.2%
Curriculum	1	1	0	0	1	1	.8%
Management	1	0	0	1	1	1	.8%
Instructional Media	2	6	0	0	2	6	3.2%
Pupil Personnel	1	0	0	0	1	0	.4%
Vocational-Technical Education	4	1	0	0	4	1	2.0%
Non-Public Schools	4	1	4	0	8	1	3.6%
Special Education	99	33	1	5	100	38	55.4%
Data Processing	1	0	0	0	1	0	.4%
Federal Programs							
Title I	25	9	3	36	28	45	29.3%
Title VI	1	0	3	3	4	3	2.8%
Total	141	52	11	45	152	97	100%

Salary Comparisons 1971 to 1976  
Commissioned Officers and Program Directors

	Executive Director	Assistant Executive Director	Special Education Director	IMS Director	Curriculum Director	Management Director	Total
1971-1972	\$ 22,000	\$ 20,000	\$ 18,000	\$ 18,000	\$ 18,000	\$ 18,000	\$ 114,000
1972-1973	22,000	20,000	18,000	18,000	18,000	16,500	112,500
1973-1974	23,000	21,000	19,500	19,000	18,700	17,500	118,700
1974-1975	24,200	22,200	20,700	20,200	19,900	16,500	123,700
1975-1976	25,600	23,600	22,100	21,600	21,300	17,900	132,100
1976-1977	27,300	25,300	23,500	23,000	22,700	19,300	141,100

Total dollar increase in six years (six employees) - \$27,100  
Average dollar increase per employee per year - \$ 752.66

Total percentage increase in six years - 23.77%  
Average percentage increase per year - 3.96%

State Subsidy Compared with Local Contributions  
1976-1977

	<u>State or Federal</u>	<u>Local</u>
Administration	\$ 120,881	\$ 19,869
Curriculum Services	24,008	17,662
Instructional Media Services	35,533	110,704
Management Services	18,298	4,805
Pupil Personnel Services	0	17,855
Vocational-Technical Education		
Area School Planning	22,094	22,094
Cooperative Vocational Education	25,000	28,110
Data Processing Services	0	46,965
Title I Coordination	0	33,559
Total Regular Services	\$ 245,814	\$301,623
Total Special Education Services 1974-1975	\$ 1,514,722	\$599,523

TUSCARORA INTERMEDIATE UNIT NO. 11

R.D.#1, Box 70-A  
McVeytown, Pa. 17051

TO: J. William Lincoln, Chairman  
Basic Education Subcommittee

RE: Legislative Budget and Finance Committee Report on the Pennsylvania  
Intermediate Unit System - May 1976

Mr. Lincoln and members of the committee present today for this hearing. We welcome this opportunity to respond to the report and express our appreciation to you. We regret that the press featured the negative comments of the report several weeks ago without due consideration for the positive findings by the users of our services.

We welcome the report and the findings of the study. It would also seem appropriate for other areas of government to have studies made of their services to the public.

EVALUATION FREQUENCY

The Act 57 study of last year was extensive and generally corroborates the findings of your survey team. Act 57 mandates annual studies of the intermediate units services on an annual basis until 1980. The annual requirement for a study seems to be too frequent for the short period of time mandated by the act. I would like to suggest that legislation revise the annual requirement to some longer period of time between reports. The number of reports need not be reduced. If this were done a longer period of accountability to the General Assembly would result.

The report includes responses by district board presidents and superintendents. In future studies, the Pennsylvania Department of Education personnel could be asked to evaluate the services delivered by the intermediate units to the school districts on behalf of it.

CONTROL OF INTERMEDIATE UNITS

The belief that intermediate units are controlled by the Pennsylvania Department of Education is erroneous. Act 102 enumerates seven general areas of

services which may be provided to schools by the intermediate units. The extent of these services and the ones provided to the school districts is determined by the local agencies. The intermediate unit board among other things approves the programs, prepares the budgets, employs the personnel, sets their salaries, and adopts guidelines for the services. There are projects, activities, and programs which the Pennsylvania Department of Education solicits our assistance in delivering to the school districts.

The two mandated services of intermediate units were legislated by the General Assembly. They are special education and aid to nonpublic schools (Act 89).

Statements have been made that additional federal programs are on the horizon for delivery by regional service agencies in the United States to the schools.

### DUPLICATION OF SERVICES

Quality and cost of services should guide the choice of programs and services by the school districts and intermediate units. If the larger school districts provide duplicate programs, less extensive programs and fewer personnel will be required to deliver the intermediate unit services. Districts should avoid initiating duplicate services unless the above criteria are applied to the service.

The housing of vocational education field staff in three regional offices creates some duplication of personnel and services to vocational schools. Because of the traveling costs and time lost due to it, I believe it is more costly than it would be to house a person at each intermediate unit office to service vocational schools and vocational programs in the districts.

### SERVICES FOR PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Following is a partial list of liaison services which we have done for PDE and the school districts: Long Range Plans, Educational Quality Assessment, Flood Damage Cost Survey, School Bus Operators Instructors Training School, Energy Crisis Survey, Building Inspections, ESEA, and Special Education Surveys.

### OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY

A study should be done at the state level to determine how much more costly it is to rent real estate, vehicles, and the more costly equipment than to own these items. Legislation should then be enacted to enable ownership of these items.

## EXPENDITURES AND FINANCING INTERMEDIATE UNITS

The general operating subsidy and capital subsidy have been constant for our intermediate unit since 1971. Our increased expenditures have been in the areas of special education and aid to nonpublic schools. These increases have been mandated by the General Assembly, State Board of Education, or the Consent Agreement.

Legislation should be enacted to provide increased general operating subsidies due to inflation and rising costs.

## BUDGET ADOPTION PROCESS

At the present time the budget adoption process is cumbersome. Adoption by the annual convention could be eliminated.

## SALARIES

The newspaper report of several weeks ago featured the number of salaries \$20,000 or higher. The reporter made no percentage comparison with the total number of employees in the intermediate units, other agencies, or the public sector.

## INCENTIVES FOR INTERMEDIATE UNIT BOARD MEMBERS

We have difficulty to get a quorum present at some board meetings. We believe this is due to travel distances and conflict with activities in their school districts. A small stipend paid to attend not more than twelve regular meetings per year, such as that paid former county board members, would help to overcome this problem which we presently have.

## WHERE TO FROM HERE

The services of the intermediate units are increasing in number, scope, and acceptance. Additional financial support is needed because of this. It is desirable for the intermediate units to continue to operate as they now do without tight restrictions on the scope of their services.

Thank you for this opportunity to appear here today.

Date: 7/19/76