

Schools Expect Gradual Change in Curriculum

Foreign Language and Physical Education Classes to Be Revised First, Say Educators

BY JOHN GROVER

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The Miller Act, which gives local school administrators much wider latitude in determining curriculum requirements, will have its major impact initially in the areas of foreign language teaching in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades and in daily physical education, say Valley educators.

The act, sponsored by Sen. George Miller Jr. (D-Martinez), repeals the Casey Act, which made the teaching of languages mandatory in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. The long-standing requirement for a daily physical education period no shorter than the academic periods was abolished, but school programmers still must schedule at least 200 minutes of P.E. in elementary schools each two weeks and at least 400 minutes in high school each two weeks.

Requirements Relaxed

The act also relaxes mandatory requirements imposed earlier by the Legislature on mathematics, social sciences, English and other disciplines but Mildred E. Hall, assistant superintendent for educational services in Glendale, suggested that major changes in these areas would come more slowly—probably not before Jan. 1. Other curriculum supervisors in the Valley generally concurred with her prediction.

It was pointed out that programming in the P.E. and elementary school foreign languages programs had caused educators the most difficulty under the old mandatory strictures, and hence first corrections will be made here. Educators objected almost unanimously to the mandatory elementary school teaching of foreign languages because the

state did not provide funds for the program and thus made it necessary to drain scarce local money from other areas of the curriculum to fund the languages program.

There was no such agreement among educators on the P.E. program. The mandatory daily P.E. requirement had caused a schism within the ranks of the state's P.E. teachers, as well as between P.E. instructors and those in the academic disciplines. But the State Senate Education Committee early in May hammered out the flexible 200-minute and 400-minute P.E. compromise to end the controversy that had blocked passage of the Miller Act since 1965.

Failed in 1965

It failed passage in 1965 when an active group of P.E. teachers was able to muster such big name opposition to abolition of daily physical education as Bud Wilkinson, former Oklahoma University football coach, and Dr. Max Rafferty, state superintendent of public instruction, currently the GOP candidate for the U.S. Senate.

Rafferty wrote to the California Assn. for Health, Physical Education and Recreation that automation and mechanization of modern life made daily physical education more necessary than ever before. Wilkinson told a press conference in Sacramento that it would be "tragic" to abolish daily P.E. requirements.

Lawrence Houston, physical education administrator for the Los Angeles city schools, and Bud Wise, athletic executive at California State College, Los Angeles, also opposed the abolition.

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The measure was supported by Fred L. Trott, program coordinator at West Covina, who complained that daily P.E. requirements made scheduling difficult and argued that longer periods scheduled less frequently would generate greater benefits. Walter Ziegler, former San Gabriel School District superintendent and Robert E. Jenkins, former Pasadena school district superintendent supported this position.

Superintendent's Views

Palmer G. Campen, Duarte superintendent, was among others who asserted that the Legislature could not properly impose rigid P.E. scheduling on any district, as the Legislature could not possibly know the local needs in each of 1,200 school districts.

The opposition P. E. block was able to prevent passage of the Miller measure, however, until the Senate Education Committee arbitrarily worked out its 200-and 400-minute compromise which both houses approved.

The P. E. group was not able to muster the votes to defeat the compromise. Nor could Sen. Miller enlist support for amendments to water down the compromise requirement. He finally admitted it was "the best we can get."

Schoolmen who felt the daily P.E. requirement was too inflexible and made scheduling difficult generally agree now that the compromise at least alleviates their problem, if it does not solve it entirely.

Trial Advocated

There seems to be a disposition on both sides of the P.E. question to give the Miller Act a trial and see how it works.

Carol E. Clark, physical education consultant to the division of curriculum and educational services in the office of the county superintendent of schools, reported that the compromise appears to be acceptable, pending trial, to both factions of P.E. teachers. (Not all physical education teachers supported the original battle to defeat the Miller Act.)

Ragene A. Farris, director of curriculum planning at Covina Valley Unified School District, gives this analysis of the Miller Act as it applies to the whole curriculum:

"The Legislature has given more recognition to the potential of local school boards and local school district staffs in determining local school programs. The Legislature has said in effect that society is demanding a higher yield from its educational institutions, so the legislators have given more latitude to local educational agencies to develop programs to produce a higher yield.

Tremendous Challenge

"It is a tremendous and stimulating challenge to educators."

There was general agreement locally among school officials that the main thrust of the Miller Act will not be felt until after Jan. 1. Elmer Ensz, director of instruction in the Alhambra Unified School District, explained, "After all, the classroom staff must be involved in any changes—we wouldn't think of imposing major changes administratively."

Several other program co-ordinators noted that most schedules and classroom assignments were completed before June 15 and said it is difficult to make wholesale program changes without extensive staff discussions. These cannot be held until the classroom staff returns to the campus.

After these discussions, specific recommendations must be prepared for submission to school boards for approval.

Studies Under Way

However, extensive staff studies have been under way for some time in many Valley school districts, and the outlines of probable changes in curriculum, according to the consensus of schoolmen in the area, are beginning to look like this:

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1—The trend is likely to be toward longer and fewer physical education classes, if only because many program co-ordinators pointed out that a daily hour is wasteful of time, as a third of it is spent dressing and showering. With longer P.E. periods, the ratio of shower time to actual exercise time will make for more efficient time use.

2—Foreign language instruction will likely become elective in the 6th, 7th and 8th grades, the survey suggested. Pasadena has already made the change from mandatory to elective foreign language instruction, on the heels of school board reduction of \$120,000 in the foreign language program.

The Casey Act provided that if only one foreign language was taught, instruction was mandatory

in all three grades. If more than one foreign language was offered, the courses could be offered only in the 7th and 8th grades.

It was explained that educators do not oppose early teaching of languages. They opposed the Casey Act largely because the failure of the state to provide funds to implement the program reportedly affected the quality of language teaching adversely.

John R. Pride, curriculum director in the El Monte elementary school district, said the new latitude will permit cutbacks in mandatory Spanish teaching, with concurrent expansion of the English instruction program, especially in remedial areas. Price said this will fill a greater need, and predicted—like many others—that language instruction in the elementary grades will become elective.

In the Covina Valley District, a choice between French and Spanish was already offered. When curriculum changes are finalized, they hope to provide additional options of German and Latin.

Edward Ryan, Arcadia superintendent, concurred with the majority opinion that permissible flexibility will argue for fewer and longer P.E. classes, and that the foreign language program would tend to become optional.

Ensz and Farris, among others, emphasized that restrictions school administrators have complained about have now been relaxed. But school men, it was suggested, now have a responsibility to make the most of this new flexibility.

Farris felt that the Legislature had shown its intention "to give more attention to performance criteria." In lay language, this can be translated as,

"Results are what count." Farris and Mrs. Hall in Glendale both noted that the legislature had retained mandatory requirements for academic testing at the 6th and 12th grade levels.