Superintendents' perceptions of cooperative educational service agencies in Massachusetts.

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SUPERINTENDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES IN MASSACHUSETTS

A Dissertation Presented

by

WALTER JOSEPH POPPER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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SUPERINTENDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES IN MASSACHUSETTS

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By
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ABSTRACT

Superintendents' Perceptions of Cooperative Educational Service Agencies in Massachusetts
(August, 1982)

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During the past twenty years regional educational service agencies have been used to supplement limited school district resources by providing specialized services at a low cost. In Massachusetts, legislation was passed in 1974 to allow districts to form voluntary educational collaboratives for this purpose. Three hundred and eleven districts are currently members of 42 collaboratives.

This exploratory study reports superintendents' perceptions of the collaboratives to which their districts belong in regard to availability and extent of use of services, factors related to service use and prospects for continued collaboration. A random sample of 38 superintendents was selected for a telephone interview using a semi-structured twenty-two item questionnaire developed for the study.

The study shows that collaborative services are available primarily in special education instruction for students in need of a substantially separate program, although in most districts fewer than
a quarter of students in this category are served through collaboratives. To a lesser extent, districts use collaboratives to provide other instruction, in-service training and management support services. The majority of districts with access to collaborative services use those services to some extent.

Three factors were found to be characteristic of collaborative member districts: positive assessment of available collaborative services, perceived need for additional collaborative services and positive school official attitude toward inter-district cooperation. A statistically significant relationship was found between the size of a district and the perceived need for additional services, with smaller districts more frequently expressing a need for both instructional and non-instructional services. The major advantages of collaboratives were found to be cost effectiveness and organizational flexibility. The major disadvantages cited were lack of local control over services and duplication of administrative responsibility.

Superintendents perceived a trend toward moderately increasing use of collaborative services by their districts in the next five years. The two principal factors believed to be related to this trend are declining enrollment and reduced financial resources.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Since the early years of public education in this country, small local school districts have been involved in joint efforts with districts in neighboring towns to improve the quality of education, to expand the areas of instruction available, and to reduce the cost. At first, these efforts were as simple as sharing the cost of one full-time teacher among two or more village schools. Later, village schools joined a common administrative unit or school district serving an entire town. Still later, towns joined together for the purpose of constructing and operating a high school or a trade school, or hiring a single school superintendent.

The combination of schools or school districts into a single administrative unit has been known, at various times, as regionalization, or consolidation, or unionization, or more generally as school re-organization. The pace of re-organization has varied, with the most rapid change in recent history occurring in the years immediately following the Second World War. One measure of re-organization, the change in the total number of school districts, is illustrative. In 1931 there were 127,244 school districts nationwide; by 1973 the number had decreased to 16,698 (Kimbrough, 1976).

While the trend to re-organization has continued in recent years, with a further decrease of local districts recorded by 1978, the rate
of change has slowed significantly. Mack and Stephens (1979) report that in the 1950's there was a decrease of 52% in the total number of school districts in the nation, and in the 1960's there was a further decrease of 55%. Between 1970 and 1978, however, the additional decrease was only 4%. However, at the same time that administrative re-organization has slowed, a new trend has developed. Local and regional school districts have begun to join together in area-wide agencies known as intermediate education agencies, educational service agencies, or intermediate administrative units. This type of agency, while not generally responsible for the day-to-day instruction of the large majority of students, provides some specialized direct instructional services and a wide range of educational and administrative support services to its constituent districts. Existing in only four states before 1963, the educational service agency can be found today in thirty-one states, each state with its own legal structure defining the role of the agency in the educational system. By 1979 there were 659 of these agencies in the nation (Stephens Associates, 1979).

Educational service agencies appear to provide needed programs and services to school districts in a geographical area without, in most cases, exercising direct control over the districts or taking direct responsibility for the education of all students residing in the districts served. They typically provide services which are appropriate for relatively few students, services such as special education or vocational training. On occasion they have provided a
central facility for instruction in cases in which such a facility was beyond the financial means of individual participating districts. Elsewhere they have provided indirect staff support services such as staff training or curriculum development or coordination of remedial resources. Finally, these agencies have provided management services including data processing, cooperative purchasing and research and development.

Educational service agencies are organized in a variety of ways, according to the legislation which authorized their formation in each state. In some state these agencies have been established as regional extensions of the central state education agency. They receive operating funds from the state and are responsible to the state for delivering services. Local districts are recipients of services but have no direct role in the governance of the service agencies. In other states, in contrast, these agencies are established as cooperatives in which local school districts are members and are represented on the governing board. Cooperative educational service agencies are intended to be responsive to local needs. They generally depend on a local definition of priorities in planning and providing services.

The cooperative model is used, for example, in the state of Massachusetts, where legislation passed in the early 1970's authorized school districts to establish educational service agencies known as voluntary educational collaboratives. According to a recent study,
(Demers, 1981) the development of collaboratives was relatively rapid in the years following the passage of enabling legislation. By 1977, three years after collaboratives were legally defined, there were forty-two of these cooperative educational service agencies in the state, serving among them more than two hundred school districts. This represented more than half of all districts in the state. Four years later, in 1981, the number of collaboratives, and the number of member districts, remained approximately the same. In response to a new state law and related state policies, a significant number of school districts had made the decision to participate in these voluntary collaboratives over a number of years.

The creation of cooperative education agencies in Massachusetts has taken place in the context of a national long term trend toward school district re-organization and inter-district cooperation. In many states the state education agency actively structures, financially supports and regulates a system of educational service agencies which are a permanent part of the school system. However the model established in the Massachusetts General Laws (1970, 1974) has specifically reserved for local school committees all the decisions related to cooperation among districts including the decision to join a collaborative, which one to join, and how long to remain a member. Unlike the situation in other states, in Massachusetts the agencies established as collaboratives are temporary according to law, with member towns retaining the right to withdraw at the end of any fiscal year and the right, within the year, to use collaborative services only
to the extent to which they wish. Each local school district, in this model, is a consumer of educational services provided by the collaborative of which it is a member. The district is represented on a governing board and can in this way influence collaborative policy, but the district is not legally required to participate nor to purchase collaborative services. The state has no role in collaborative operations, policy making or financing.

The voluntary model of inter-district cooperation in Massachusetts is best understood in the historical framework of school district re-organization in New England. There is a strong tradition in the region of local autonomy and a strong preference, among citizens and educational professionals alike for keeping school districts under local control. Many towns have resisted the formation of regional districts, over the years, even when the state provided significant financial incentives to regionalize. Others joined secondary school regions, recognizing the benefits of the specialized instruction available in these schools for older students, while maintaining local control over the primary schools. It is consistent with this ambivalence toward regionalization that the model adopted for Massachusetts collaboratives was one in which membership was to be entirely voluntary.

As a result of the temporary and voluntary nature of collaboratives, these agencies have been particularly sensitive to changes in the perceived needs of local districts and in the
organizational environment in which these districts function. Collaboratives operate in a semi-structured market in which they offer services, for a fee, and individual school districts purchase these services if the cost is competitive with the cost of the alternatives.

Background

During the period from 1976 to 1982 the author of this study worked as a department administrator for a cooperative agency serving twenty-two towns in western Massachusetts. In this position he was responsible for designing and implementing an alternative vocational education program for secondary school students from member districts. Since the agency program offered school credits, and since it was supported in part with local funds, communications with school administrators and school committee members was an important part of the job. School officials regularly reviewed both the course of study and the budget and annually made decisions regarding the participation of students from their district for the following school year. It was through close contact with these officials over the years that the author came to appreciate the unique role of the collaborative as a cooperative service agency in the educational system.

The cooperative agency in Massachusetts is established by legislation as a public agency directly responsible to a Board of Directors. This Board, in turn, comprises representatives of each of the member
district school committees, and the members of these committees are public officials elected by voters in each district. Frequently school committee members choose one of their number to sit on the cooperative agency Board, and this was the case in the agency where the author worked. In other agencies the superintendent of schools or the special education director may represent the school committee. Whatever the system of representation, the school committees of the member towns have the final authority in setting agency policy and are perceived by school, agency and state officials as having the last word in decisions related to inter-district cooperation.

However, for the committees to exercise their authority in a meaningful way they would have to have full information regarding the cooperative agency and its functions. This is not the case, in the experience of this author, for a number of reasons. First, the collaborative is not easily accessible geographically to school committee members. Its office is located in one town, its programs are dispersed in several other towns. Second, collaborative services are typically offered in only a few of the many areas of concern to local school committees: special education for students with severe disabilities, in-service training for school staff, coordinated out-of-district transportation and similar services.

Instead, in all but the most general policy issues, it is not the school committees or their representatives on the school committees or
their representatives on the agency Board who make decisions, but the agency management and staff. These decisions are made in the framework set by Board policy and are often made only after consultation with school administrators in member districts. It is these local school officials, if anyone in the local district, who have direct knowledge of the collaborative program and who are in a position to influence decisions regarding cooperative programs.

Among these officials it is primarily the director of special education and the school superintendent who have the motivation to undertake the often time-consuming activities involved in participating in a cooperative venture with other districts. The former is responsible for providing state-mandated services to students with disabilities, many of whom require highly specialized services which would be extremely costly if offered by the district to relatively small numbers of students. The latter is responsible for providing a constant level of general educational programs, including special education services, with limited if not decreasing financial resources. In many collaboratives the role of these two officials is formalized in the organizational structure in the establishment of advisory groups, one for superintendents and one for special education directors, with each group reporting directly to the Board. The other way in which each superintendent can exert influence on issues related to collaboration is to communicate directly with his or her own school committee.
The formal organizational connections between school districts and the collaborative of which they are members explain only in part the relationship between these two components of the educational system. Beyond minimum responsibilities of members, such as payment of an annual fee, districts which are members of the formal collaborative organization are free to pursue or to forego participation in the programs provided by that collaborative. Collaboratives and school districts, while organizationally connected, function at the same time as if they were autonomous agencies, the collaboratives as service providers and the school districts as service users, with the two related through contractual agreements.

In the agency where the author worked, all member districts had the right to request and use collaborative services in each program area. However, not all districts chose to use services to the same extent. Some participated in all program areas; others used only a few services and those only to a minor degree. This discrepancy was a constant source of challenge to agency staff members who were attempting to expand services while decreasing costs and who were therefore eager to encourage each district to make maximum use of each service. Certain factors varied among districts, such as the need for services, the availability of local alternatives, the relative ability to pay for services and the accessibility of services to the district due to geography, scheduling and other variables. The agency staff
members were frequently engaged in discussions with member district officials over district use of collaborative services, attempting to convince local decision makers of the benefits of using these services.

In effect, the collaborative was operating in a marketplace, selling its services to members districts and then negotiating individual contracts for these services. Since the school superintendent was one of the people most knowledgeable about the collaborative and also the school official responsible for final budget and program recommendations to the school committee, it was ultimately the superintendent who represented the district in these discussions.

During the early years of collaborative operations in the state, between 1970 and 1978, this market aspect of the relationship was present but not central to the collaborative process. At that time state and federal funds were available to underwrite many of the collaborative programs, particularly in areas in which innovative services and models were considered. With outside funds available, a program might be developed and implemented before even a single member town had expressed a firm commitment to participate. Also during these years, particularly after 1974, the use of collaboratives to provide state mandated services in special education was so extensive that it tended to obscure discussion of other planned or real areas of collaboration. And in special education during those years, with the state reimbursing a significant proportion of local funds spent for services, there was little incentive for local school officials to
attempt to lower their costs by bargaining. Most superintendents were pleased just to have an easy way to handle some hard-to-educate students for whom, before 1974, the school districts did not believe they were responsible.

By the late 1970's, however, new forces were at work in the environment in which school officials function. Enrollment had been declining for some time in the schools and then, through a series of state and local measures, funds available to school districts began to decrease. With a shrinking population and with decreasing financial resources, not to mention a change in the political climate in regard to educational services, school officials began to think differently about the decisions they were asked to make in general. Their decisions in regard to collaboratives, in particular, were based increasingly on cost considerations, and they began to question more frequently the commonly shared assumption that collaborative growth, in size and in range of services, would automatically benefit member districts. Some towns expanded involvement while others decreased their use of collaborative services, each superintendent acting in what she or he perceived to be the best interests of the local district.

**Problem**

The development of Massachusetts collaboratives has taken place at a time when a number of needs have become increasingly apparent to local school district decision makers. The first, and in retrospect
the most closely related to the evolution of collaboratives was a result of the passage of legislation as part of the Massachusetts General Laws (1974) giving school districts the responsibility for educating children with special needs. The law, known as Chapter 766, required that school districts provide services well beyond those previously provided for children with disabilities. Included in the population to be served were children with severe disabilities who required intensive instruction, often in a setting substantially separate from that in which their able-bodied peers were educated.

The relatively low incidence of special needs students in the school population, about 12% of enrollment, combined with the high cost of providing individualized instruction led many school officials to consider the need for providing an alternative to educating these children within the local district.

One common alternative was to pay tuition for these students to attend private schools with appropriate specialized programs and services. Another alternative, and one which had the strong support of special education officials at the state Department of Education, was to join with nearby towns in forming a collaborative to provide special education services through cooperative programming. The voluntary educational collaborative provided for many districts an organizational structure well suited to meet the need in special education. The large majority of the collaboratives existing in Massachusetts at the time of
this study were established during the three years following the
passage of Chapter 766, and almost all of these agencies had as one of
their purposes, or as their only purpose, the provision of
instructional services for students with severe special needs.

Another school district need, one which became increasingly
apparent toward the end of the 1970's, is the need to maintain a
constant level of educational services given a decline in enrollments
and a decreasing budget. As a result of a series of state and federal
budget reductions, and more directly as a result of legislation known
as Proposition 2 1/2 limiting the allowable increase in local taxes in
Massachusetts, school administrators have been forced to reduce or
eliminate programs, reduce teaching staff, close school buildings and
generally become far more conscious of the costs of educational
services and the lower cost options available for their students.
Collaboratives appeared to some educators to provide a cost effective
alternative in certain specialized areas including vocational training
and programs for gifted students and a number of districts began to use
their collaboratives for a broader range of services.

Other developments in the organizational environment, occurring
almost simultaneously, had the opposite effect on collaboratives,
making inter-district cooperation more difficult. With the increasing
cost of gasoline throughout the 1970's, for example, the cost of
transportation of students to any out-of-district program became more
difficult for a local district to justify. Even in special education,
where a state mandate set the standards of service, it often became more cost effective to operate a low enrollment high cost program locally than to transport students at great expense to a low cost collaborative program in another town.

It is significant that the state, through its Department of Education, has taken only a minimum role in the implementation of collaborative legislation. After the Department supported enabling legislation for collaboratives, it provided for the filing of official collaborative agreements, and for dissemination of information on school district membership in collaboratives. The Department developed a general policy statement regarding collaboratives, approved by the Massachusetts Board of Education (1977), but this policy was developed only after the formation of most collaboratives by member districts throughout the Commonwealth. More recently, the Department has arranged for one of its own representatives to sit on the Board of each collaborative as a non-voting member, to provide information and assistance when appropriate. The role of the Department in regard to inter-district cooperation has been that of facilitator rather than organizer. The Department has not taken a leadership role in this area.

This position has been particularly evident in contrast with the attention and organizational resources given to the Regional Education Centers, six regional offices of the Department of Education created
during the same years in which collaboratives were established. The Centers are designed primarily to monitor the expenditure of state funds, enforce laws and guidelines related to schools and provide more convenient access to Department of Education services for school districts throughout the Commonwealth. The Centers provide no direct instructional services to students. Regional Center funding is a regular part of the Department budget and the Centers are established as permanent offices staffed by state employees. Leadership in designing, implementing and managing the Centers has been centralized in the Department with little involvement of local districts. Given the open-ended definition of the role of collaboratives in the state education system and the absence of directives or constraints from the State Department of Education, the terms inter-district cooperation through collaboratives will continue to be set at the local level.

The Massachusetts experience with educational service agencies provides an interesting opportunity to study the circumstances under which school districts will cooperate with each other in providing educational services and the ways in which various factors in the organizational environment are related to the extent of cooperation. Since Massachusetts law makes membership in collaboratives voluntary and defines collaboratives as temporary agencies whose members have the right to withdraw at the end of any given year, decisions regarding cooperation are being made in hundreds of local school districts every year. Questions of whether to use collaborative services, which services to use and how extensively to use them are debated by school
committees, school superintendents and school administrators. Decisions are made and acted on, and as a result the prospects for collaborative services rise or fall. It is clear that in Massachusetts, and in other states, there has been a trend toward increased inter-district cooperation in recent years. The reasons for this cooperation and the circumstances in which it can be effective constitute the problem to be studied here.

**Purpose of the Study**

This is a descriptive study undertaken to explore the relationships among a variety of factors in the organizational environment of a school district and the extent to which that school district uses the services of the voluntary educational collaborative of which it is a member. The study is intended as a first step in the development of a model which can explain the circumstances in which voluntary collaboration among school districts takes place.

The study identifies the areas of service in which collaboration is likely to appear attractive as an alternative to the more traditional, local system of service provision. It explores the costs, benefits and other factors considered by school superintendents in deciding whether or not to use collaborative services. It discusses the perceptions of superintendents regarding their own role, the role of the school committee, the school special
education director and the State Department of Education in promoting collaboration. Finally, this study addresses the question of the prospects for future collaboration.

In any area of education in which rapid development has taken place, initial studies are necessarily exploratory. Voluntary educational collaboratives have developed in Massachusetts relatively recently and rapidly. The few studies conducted to date are descriptive of the development from the perspective of the state or the collaborative agency. None of these studies focuses on the perspective of collaborative member school districts, and none explores the extent to which local districts participate in their collaboratives. The current study is intended to complement previous descriptive studies in the field by providing a profile and analysis of the perceptions of local school superintendents of the collaborative process. The study has been guided by the following questions:

1. What are the services available from voluntary educational collaboratives, and to what extent do local school districts use these services? The study will profile the perceptions of school superintendents regarding the extent of local district use of collaborative services. These data will complement previous studies which have described collaborative services available but not explored the extent of use.

2. What factors influence the decisions of a school superintendent to collaborate in providing educational services? The second question is an attempt to identify those factors, among many
previously studied in research on inter-organizational cooperation in general and educational service agencies in particular, which are related to cooperation by the school districts studied here. Factors considered include the local need for services, the economic costs or benefits resulting from collaboration, the comparative quality of collaborative programs, the intangible benefits resulting from cooperation and the administrative effectiveness of the particular collaborative serving each school district studied. An attempt is made to explore, in addition, the degree of support for cooperation among local school district administrators and local school committees, as perceived by school superintendents. Previous research on the implementation of educational policy by local school districts (Farrar, 1976) indicates that these two groups often influence the local response to a state or federal policy initiative such as that which established collaboration as an option for Massachusetts schools. This question also addresses the role of the superintendent in school district decisions regarding collaboration. While superintendents have been identified by collaborative directors as the most influential representatives of member districts (Demers, 1981), there has been no attempt to describe the range of objectives superintendents have in their districts in regard to collaboration and the activities they undertake in achieving these objectives. The action taken by superintendents both within the district, in relation to staff and school committee, and outside the district, in relation to the collaborative director and other superintendents, is itself a factor in
decisions related to both the extent of current collaboration and the prospects for future collaboration.

3. What are the prospects for continued collaboration? The final question deals with the expectations of superintendents for future collaboration by their districts, both in service areas in which collaborative services are currently used and in new areas. In particular, the study reports superintendents' perceptions of the effects of state- and federal-imposed budget constraints on the prospects for collaboration, and the effects of declining enrollment.

The study relies heavily on the perceptions of local school superintendents in collaborative member districts. This emphasis has been chosen for a number of reasons. First, there have been few prior studies of educational service agencies from the perspective of the user of services: the local school district. The superintendent is the single most knowledgeable school district staff member in the small and medium sized districts which predominate among collaborative members. If, as implied in authorizing legislation and state policy, collaboratives are intended to respond to local needs in providing services, then a profile of user perceptions is essential in developing an understanding of the collaborative process.

Second, numerous studies in policy implementation in education over the past ten years have stressed the importance of research on local factors related to implementation. The perceptions of local school officials, the existence of local needs and constraints, the actions of local school committees or school staff are all related to
the way in which public policy evolves into school district procedures (Farrar, 1979). These studies stress the complex nature of the implementation process at the local level and the importance of exploring the ways local officials adapt state and federal policies to meet local needs. The implementation of state policy on school district collaboration is presumably no exception. Here, once again, school superintendents are in an excellent position to provide both information and insight.

Third, The personal experience of the author in a Massachusetts educational collaborative over a five year period, 1976-1981, has been a setting for numerous observations consistent with the studies cited above. Superintendents' perceptions regarding both the factors related to school district participation in the collaborative and the services provided by the collaborative appeared to weigh heavily in decisions by local school committees to use collaborative services. Equally important, collaborative services were frequently initiated, modified or terminated in direct response to the requests of superintendents, either through the collaborative governing board or through the agency director. Superintendents repeatedly influenced the agency, directly and indirectly, and an understanding of superintendents' perceptions proved essential in building an effective program. There is every reason to believe that the same understanding is necessary in describing collaboration among other districts across the state.

A number of assumptions have been made regarding the superintendents' knowledge and objectivity. The first is that the
school superintendent as the chief executive officer of the school district, has both an awareness of the potential benefits of cooperation and the authority necessary to implement cooperative activities, once the school committee has made the decision to affiliate formally with a cooperative agency. Both awareness and authority are assumed here to contribute to the central role apparently played by superintendents in the development and implementation of collaboratives in Massachusetts. It is the centrality of superintendents in the collaborative process, in turn, which justifies the reliance in this study on the perceptions of superintendents as the primary source of data regarding the extent of collaboration, the factors related to collaboration and the prospects for future collaboration. Superintendents will also be asked to comment on their own role in the collaborative process, and their response will serve, in part, to test the validity of this assumption.

The following additional assumptions are made: First, that superintendents have adequate information concerning the extent of collaboration by their local districts to answer the questions of the study accurately and completely. Second, that superintendents will report objectively their perceptions of the collaborative process: their own role, the effectiveness of the collaborative agency with which they are involved, the perceived opinions of their staff and their school committees.

The study is particularly timely in light of the pressure brought on many school districts in the early 1980's by declining enrollments
and declining school budgets. Both at the federal level and in many states, public funding for education is being reduced. In Massachusetts, the passage of Proposition 2 1/2 has resulted in decreased local budgets as well. With almost every school official in the state facing the prospect of budget reductions, the availability of cost effective alternatives for providing services has become a significant issue. If, as many educators claim, inter-district cooperation provides such an alternative, it should have an increasingly important role in local school administrators' planning.

This study is, in effect, a survey of consumer attitudes on inter-district cooperation. The perceptions of school superintendents reported here provides, for the first time, descriptive data for local school officials responsible for deciding under what circumstances cooperation can be an effective alternative to strictly local educational programming.

In Massachusetts, the results of this study will be of interest at the state level as well. First, two professional organizations have indicated an interest in the issue under examination. The Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives and the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents have, in the spring of 1981, formed a joint committee to study the prospects for collaboration and made recommendations to the Massachusetts Department of Education regarding change in state policy which would make collaboration more effective. This committee may be able to use the results of the study in preparing and defending its recommendations.
Secondly, the Massachusetts Department of Education may be able to use the study directly in its continuing effort to provide support for voluntary collaboration by local districts. The results of the study will be useful in presenting the perceptions of local school officials regarding collaboration and in providing state officials additional information to use in judging the effectiveness of implementation of state policy and legislation in this area and make appropriate changes.

Finally, the study is significant in providing for future researchers an improved model for explaining inter-district cooperation. A study of this size can constitute only one step in the effort to understand the tendency of school districts to cooperate increasingly in providing certain services. Previous studies have addressed the historical development of educational services agencies, the characteristics of these agencies and the perceptions of agency directors. The current study of school superintendents' perceptions proposes and tests a model for the understanding of the process of cooperation as it affects the user: the factors which influence decisions and the extent of services resulting and likely to result in the future. The model developed in this study will be a significant contribution to further studies. For example, studies will be needed in which larger numbers of respondents provide information on a greater range of local districts. In addition, in-depth studies of cooperation, as it has developed historically among a few school districts, will be helpful in better understanding the trend described here. For subsequent research, the descriptive data gathered here will
provide background information and the model developed here will suggest specific research questions.

Definitions

The term **regional education service agency** (RESA) is used in this study to mean an intermediate agency, between the local education agency (LEA) and the state education agency (SEA), which provides instructional or non-instructional services for school districts within a defined geographical area. The term will be used interchangeably with intermediate unit, service agency and regional agency in the study. Regional agencies are defined by law, in states where they exist, and operate either as autonomous public agencies, as regional offices of the state department of education, or as cooperatives under the jurisdiction of member local school districts. In Massachusetts, both Regional Education Centers and voluntary educational collaboratives are regional education service agencies.

A **voluntary educational collaborative**, for the purposes of this study, is a regional education service agency organized under the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Chapter 40 Section 4E. A collaborative formally organized under this legislation has a statement of purpose on file with the Department of Education indicating that it is either a single purpose of a multi-purpose collaborative. Each
agency so organized has a definite membership of local school districts, each of which is represented on the governing board of the agency.

The regional education centers in Massachusetts are regional education agencies which operate as offices of the State Department of Education. There are six regions defined by the department encompassing the entire state, and there is a center located in each region.

The term educational services has been used here to mean all organized activities conducted by the public school system. These activities include both instructional services which benefit students directly and non-instructional services such as in-service training of the school staff or transportation of students on school buses. The latter are assumed to benefit students also, but only indirectly. In Massachusetts, collaboratives have provided both instructional services, primarily in special education, and non-instructional services in such areas as cooperative purchasing of school supplies and in-service training of teachers.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations in this study which necessarily affect the conclusions which can be drawn and the degree to which generalizations can be made from the results.

First, there are limitations in the decision to study a complex phenomenon such as inter-district collaboration from just one
perspective. This study addresses only the perspective of member
school districts. It does not consider the perspective of the
collaborative, whose staff member and administrators may have an
entirely different view of the extent of collaboration and the factors
affecting collaboration in a particular member district. Nor does the
study include the perspective of the State Department of Education,
whose officials may have their own assessment of collaboration. Even
within the school districts sampled, responses are limited to those of
school superintendents since it is likely that the people in that
position are both the best informed about collaborative operations and
the most influential in school district decisions related to
collaboration. A more ambitious study might seek to check the
perceptions of superintendents against those of others in the local
district with knowledge of the collaborative, such as the director of
special education or the school committee representative on the
collaborative board. Due to constraints of time and resources, such a
perception check was not undertaken as part of this study.

Secondly, the study is limited in the degree to which the data
gathered applies to all school districts rather than just to those with
membership in a single public educational collaborative. For example,
districts which are not members of any collaborative were not sampled,
so that the discussion here of the extent of collaboration does not
include the case in which there is no collaboration at all. Neither
have districts been included here if they have membership in more than
one collaborative, or if their single membership is in a private
non-profit cooperative rather than a public Chapter 40 Section E collaborative. And the sample is limited, of course, to districts in the state of Massachusetts so that the discussion here does not necessarily apply to educational service agencies organized according to different laws in other states.

Third, the study is limited to a narrow context. It does not treat the interactions among school districts which made up a collaborative or those between member school districts and the collaborative agency. It is limited, too, in its historical perspective on collaborative development as its focus is on the events of the past twelve months only. For a more refined description of interactions across organizational lines, the case study could be a more useful methodology. For a more accurate view of the history of collaboration, a longitudinal study is necessary. There is a need for both kinds of studies in this field, but neither would be directly relevant to the objectives which the current study is designed to address.

Finally, certain factors have been excluded from consideration here, due to the author's assumption that their effects are indirect. These include the socio-economic characteristics of the districts, the geographic and demographic factors which might affect access to educational services, and the age and educational characteristics of respondents. These variables are excluded not because they are thought to have no effect, but rather because of the need to focus limited resources on factors which are more directly related to collaboration.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The complex process of inter-district cooperation has been the subject of a number of studies and reports over the past fifteen years. It is the purpose of this chapter to review this literature and develop a more thorough understanding of the process and the historical context in which it has taken place, as well as to compare the particular type of cooperation found in Massachusetts with that found in other states.

The four major sections of the chapter have been designed to address the major issues raised in the main part of this study. The first section discusses studies related to the need for regional educational services and the range of regional services currently available both nationally and in Massachusetts to meet that need. It reviews some of the goals set by educators for these agencies, the service categories commonly used in describing available services, and the common characteristics of the services.

The second and third sections examine previous studies of the factors related to the use of services. Section two discusses the sources and types of support for educational service agencies at the local and state level. The state role in defining service agency structures and functions through legislation is discussed, as well as
the possibility for state financial support. Section three summarizes and discusses previous work on the criteria for service agency effectiveness in regard to strategy, operations and service delivery. It includes also a consideration of other, non-cost benefits of cooperation as well as disadvantages. The findings of these two sections are used to develop more fully the framework for understanding the factors taken into consideration as school districts make their decisions on inter-district cooperation.

In the final section those studies which have examined cooperation in a historical context are reviewed in order to identify long term trends which may be related to the prospects of cooperation in the future. In particular, this section considers the relationship between the move toward school district regionalization and the development of service agencies and explores the possibility of certain common underlying needs addressed in both developments.

**Need for Regional Educational Agency Services**

The need for regional educational service agencies is frequently discussed in the literature in terms of a number of factors including the small student population of many school districts, the increasing demands on these districts to provide services and the decreasing ability of many of the districts to pay for these services.

The problem of small school districts has long been discussed in education as part of the debate on school district re-organization. State education agencies have tended to encourage towns to join larger
districts, citing the benefits of large scale instruction and administration. The studies and policy papers on service agencies repeat many of the same arguments. Stephens and Spies (1968) in a paper summarizing the functions of these agencies, find that there is a need for cooperation among small districts in addressing four problems: inadequate enrollment, insufficient financial resources, deficiencies in staffing and inadequate programming. Isenberg (1967) finds a positive relationship between school size and the quality of programming as well as the variety of curriculum, especially at the secondary level. Similarly Stephens (1973) argues that small school size has an adverse effect on the scope of the K-12 program, the range of services for students with low incidence special needs, the hiring of specialized staff and the cost per pupil ratio. There may be in addition be a relationship between small school size and low academic achievement, although a review of the literature on this subject by Stephens and Spies (1968) found that the relationship was assumed rather than clearly established. In exploring a similar relationship, the Massachusetts Advisory Council on Education (1974) found evidence in a study of 24 school districts that small districts sent proportionately fewer graduates to four year colleges than large school districts. This study also found differences in staff training, central administrative and support services, and economy in purchasing and transportation. Finally, there are studies which have found specific differences in the cost of staffing (Fitzwater, 1967) and general administration (Manat and Natusil, 1968).

In spite of the long term trend toward larger districts, many
school districts remain well below the levels of student population which planners claim are optimal. The Massachusetts Advisory Council, in a review of ten studies on ideal school district size, found that seven of the studies recommended a population of ten thousand or higher. By these standards the Council concludes that 80% of the 18,000 school districts existing in the nation in 1966 had insufficient enrollments to provide services at an acceptable level without incurring excessive costs. Fitzwater (1968) used data from the United States Census of 1967 to demonstrate the problem. During that year 52% of the school districts nationally had an enrollment of 600 or fewer. The enrollment in these districts comprised only 4.4% of the total national school enrollment.

In these extremely small districts, students have unequal access to educational services particularly if they have the need for specialized instruction or other services, or if the subjects in which they need instruction are not appropriate for most of their classmates (Massachusetts Advisory Council, 1974; Mack and Stephens, 1979). The district itself and all its students, are at a disadvantage in responding to state mandates (Southwest Cooperative Service Unit, 1980) and in implementing new technologies and curricula (Firestone and Wilson, 1981; Stephens, 1973; Emerson, 1975). The changes demanded of school administrators are rapid and unpredictable, and come both in the form of community- and student-perceived needs and in the form of state and federal regulation. Whether the need is for more computers in the classroom or a new state-required computerized bookkeeping system, small districts will likely find the specialized staff and equipment
costly, at least initially, and may well benefit from cooperating through a service agency. Small districts can in this way improve existing services through increased coverage, addition of curricula and more efficient operations, while also adding services not otherwise available for students with specialized, low incidence needs. In some cases the local district may after a period modify to its own services, as a result of participating in a cooperative venture, and revise its curriculum, teaching methods and even organization (Kemp, 1976).

Discussing the need for intermediate level educational service agencies more broadly, Stephens and Spies (1968) identify three classes of functions performed by these agencies: articulative, coordinative and supplementary service. Articulative functions comprise those service agency activities which further the implementation of state plans for education and assist the state education agency in achieving compliance with regulations. In many states the agency is supported primarily with state funds and operates under close state supervision, with the result that this function is a major one. The coordinative function includes communications, facilitation and leadership in local efforts such as regional policy development, long range planning, research and development, evaluation, elimination of regional inequities, effective use of state and federal funds, and resolution of regional/state differences (Stephens Associates, 1979). The supplementary service function is that for which educational service agencies are commonly known since it is this function which is carried out on the largest scale.
The range of services provided by educational service agencies nationally is extensive, covering almost every conceivable aspect of school district operations. Kemp (1976) has developed a useful scheme for identifying and characterizing these services in three dimensions: type of beneficiary, type of service agency involvement, and type of service provided. Her analysis of the service beneficiaries in one agency found that the three groups receiving the most hours of services were teachers, administrators and students enrolled in school. Others receiving services included pre-school children, young people not attending school, parents and other adults in the community. In the same study, service agency involvement was categorized as either direct service, coordinative/administrative service or technical assistance. Direct services included all cases of agency staff providing instruction, training, counseling, therapeutic and similar professional services. Coordinative/administrative services were those for which agency staff had no direct contact with beneficiaries but provided support, direction, resources and supervision for direct service providers in local school district. Technical assistance comprised all planning, facilitating, research and development functions carried out on an intermittent schedule by agency staff to assist local school staff in performing more effectively. Whitt (1968) has a more detailed division of functions he proposes as appropriate for service agencies: general advisory/consulting role, accounting, building and bus maintenance, purchasing, training, transportation, data processing and research and development. Stephens Associates (1979) suggests still
another grouping; instructional services, support services, management services, state agency services and private school services.

Among collaboratives in Massachusetts the major emphasis in service provision has been in special education, both in instructional and support services (Demers, 1981). This emphasis has persisted since the beginning of collaboratives in 1974, in spite of repeated statements of the part of state officials suggesting that there may be advantages in multi-purpose collaboratives (Massachusetts Advisory Council, 1974; Massachusetts Board of Education, 1977), and in sharp contrast to the wide range of services offered in other states. The following list of data from the studies cited above and from Goldberg, (1976), Stefonek (1976), and Thomas (1978), provides an overview of the range of services available through educational service agencies nationally, using a classification scheme combining several of those found in previous studies. According to Stephens Associates (1979) the greatest number of service agencies nationally offer services in special education, followed by media services, staff development, curriculum services, information services, planning services, evaluation services, gifted and talented programs, and vocational training.

When the possibility of obtaining cooperative services of this type arises through the mechanism of voluntary collaboration, each district must in effect choose which, if any of the services it wishes to see established through the collaborative. Through a joint decision making process with other member districts, a collaborative direction is charted and services are developed. Once again, each district
Services Provided by Regional Educational Service Agencies

I. Instructional Services
   A. Special Education
      1. Group
         Pre-school Development
         Severely Mentally Impaired
         Trainable Mentally Impaired
         Educable Mentally Impaired
         Emotionally Impaired
         Hearing Impaired
         Visually Impaired
         Physically or Health Impaired
         Homebound or Hospitalized
         Learning Disabled
         Speech or Language Impaired
         Headstart
         Gifted/Talented
      2. Specialist
         School Psychologist
         School Social Worker
         Curriculum Resource Consultant
         Consultant Services
         Mentally Impaired
         Physically or Health Impaired
         Emotionally Impaired
         Consultant Services
         Visually Impaired
         Hearing Impaired
         Learning Disabled
         Occupational Therapist
         Physical Therapist
         Psychological Clinical Services
         Psychological Assessment/Diagnosis Services
         Speech and Hearing Clinic
         Instructional Media Specialist
         Parent Support Systems
         Media and Materials
         Counseling Services
         Placement Services
         Special Education Supervisor
         Vocational/Special Education Coordinator

   B. Other
      1. Regular
         Reading
         Mathematics
         Social Studies
Science
English
Art
Music
Physical Education
Adult Education
Basic Education
Community Education
Instructional Strategies
  IGE
  Glasser
  Team Teacher
  TABA
  Other
Counseling and Guidance
Instructional Media
Second Language
Career Education
2. Vocational - Group
  Automotive Mechanics
  Auto Body Repair
  Carpentry
  Drafting
  Electronics
  Electrical
  Data Processing
  Health Occupations
  Food Service
  Plumbing
  Painting/Decorating
  Agricultural Occupations
  Machinist
  Metal Working
  Sheet Metal
  Cosmetology
  Clerical Occupations
3. Vocational - Specialist
  Job Placement
  Vocational Counseling
  Follow-up Studies
  Shared-Time Coordinator
  Curriculum Consulting
  Instructional Consulting
  CETA Youth Employment
  Vocational Assessment
  Instructional Media Development
4. Remedial or Compensatory
  Reading (not Title I)
  Preschool (not Title I)
  Alternative (dropouts)
  Juvenile Home Programs
Bilingual
Pregnant Pupils
Adult Basic Education
Outdoor Education
Recreational Programs
Cultural Development Programs
Social Development Programs
Substance Abuse
Title I Programs
Summer School
School Dropouts

II. Non-Instructional
A. In-Service
   Instructional-Professional
   Instructional - Para-Professional
   Administrative
   School Committee
   Other Non-instructional
B. Management
   1. Administrative
      Bookkeeping Services
      Payroll
      Financial Consulting
      Information Services
      School Plant Planning
      Budget Preparation
      Reporting (Financial and Statistical)
      Negotiations
      Student Attendance Registrars
      Interpretation of Directives
      Development of Equipment Specifications
      Substitute Teachers
      Teacher Recruitment
      Administrative Recruitment
      Administrative Support for Primary District
      Consulting and Assistance in Reorganization
      End of the Year Reports
      October 1 Report
      Special Education Reports
      Public Relations
      Analysis of Judicial and Legislative Developments
      In-Service Administrative Staff
   2. Operational
      Equipment Repair
      School Bus Inspection
      School Bus Routing
      School Lunch Planning
      Development of School Calendar
      Printing and Duplicating
      Graphic Illustrating
      Inventory Control
Property Management
Records Storage
Legal Assistance
Data Processing
Pupil Health Services
School Lunch Preparation and Distribution

3. Evaluation
State Assessments
Needs Assessment
Staff Evaluations
Instructional Program Evaluation
Cost Studies
Literature Review (ERIC)
Curriculum, Enrollment and Follow-up Studies
must decide to what extent, if any, it will use the services. The studies reviewed above do not directly address this decision making process, nor is it clear from the literature why some services are more likely than others to be provided through the alternative of cooperation. Since school superintendents and other school decision makers are guided, at least in part, by their perceptions of the best interests of the district, an understanding of the perceived advantages and drawbacks of cooperation as a service alternative is necessary in order to understand the decisions involved. The next section will summarize studies focusing on those factors which seem to have some relationship to the decision to use cooperative agency services.

Criteria for Service Agency Effectiveness

The benefits to a school district of using services provided by a reginal agency and of cooperating in other ways in the operation of the agency can be thought of according to the various aspects of the agency's purpose. Agency objectives, if they are met, can prove advantageous to constituent districts, and the effective implementation of agency goals in the interest of both constituent districts and the state. Kemp (1976) suggests that agency objectives can be classified as strategic objectives related to the role of these agencies at the state level. The latter refers to more immediate objectives, including those related to provision of services and the structure, processes and governance of the agency. Operational objectives include, as a special
case, cost effectiveness objectives for services provided.

Equal opportunity is one of the major strategic objectives set for service agencies both by the state and by constituent districts (Emerson, 1967; Carithers, 1976; Massachusetts Advisory Council on Education, 1974). It follows directly from studies of small school districts that students in those districts do not enjoy an equal opportunity to receive a quality education, since specialized programs, facilities and instructors are less likely to be available to them. From another perspective, students from the less wealthy towns in a district may have less access to high quality, costly educational programs than students in nearby more affluent communities. In both cases, a regional strategy for providing at least some services will tend to overcome these inequalities.

Another strategic objective in the improvement of coordination between state and local education agencies Stephens (1973) recommends designing service agency boundaries of state government departments' regional offices to facilitate coordinated services. From the point of view of state officials, there is a potential advantage in having service agency staff help interpret and implement state policies as they change. From the viewpoint of local districts, it may be advantageous to coordinate contrasts with state government in order to improve the chances of obtaining state and federal funds for the region.

Increasing administrative span is a third strategic objective (Isenber, 1967) and one that relates the present purposes of regional
service agencies to the purpose of reorganized school districts in previous decades. These agencies may be helpful in providing economy of scale in administration while maintaining some degree of autonomy for local school districts. Carithers (1967) argues that to achieve this end, service agencies must be small enough to assure good communications yet large enough to provide efficient services and attract qualified staff members. Several studies have suggested that services agency size, in pupil population served, should be at least 10,000 but not more than 125,000 with 30,000 to 50,000 mentioned as the optimal range. (Gearheart 1978; Inman, 1968; Hughes and Achilles, 1971) Other considerations of size are number of member school districts, for which Gearheart suggests a maximum of twenty five, and a maximum driving time between the agency and the district farthest removed. One hour is generally recommended. A survey conducted in 1976 among 400 educational services agencies shows that more than 63% of them served a population over 10,000 students, and that they number of constituent districts was less than 25 in approximately 83% of the cases (Goldberg, 1976).

A final strategic consideration is the possibility of regional agencies serving as a catalyst for program development and educational charge at the local level. Isenberg (1967) advocates the spin-off model in which the regional agency initiates and operates a program which is perceived as risky, provides the initial funding and staffing and then turns the programs over to constituent districts. Hughes and Achilles (1971) discuss this model in relation to high risk ventures
which may fail or which are at first controversial. By operating these programs, first at some distance, through a regional agency, a local district can share the risk and limit the cost of failure.

At the strategic level, there are a number of disadvantages, which Stephens (1973) discusses with great clarity. His presentation is summarized here. Regional agencies, by increasing administrative span, function as as to perpetrate marginal school districts which should perhaps be consolidated. Were it not for the regional agency, district re-organization might succeed in eliminating such district. Secondly, regional agencies tend to duplicate staffing in administration, creating an unnecessary new layer of bureaucracy between the local and state education agencies. Rather than facilitate communications, they block them (Mack, 1979). Third, regional agencies compete with local districts for state and federal funds and prevent worthwhile local projects, small in scale but of high quality, from receiving financial support. Fourth, these agencies can become independently powerful and can eventually escape the control of local districts or the state education department. Agency administrators, operating with minimal oversight of a governing board, can build an empire. Finally, certain legal constraints and inherent instabilities limit the efficiency of these agencies. Many programs and even agencies themselves are viewed as temporary, subject to annual approval by constituent districts. This review process makes the agency more responsive to local needs but paradoxically results in a lack of incentive on the part of some districts to use regional services, since the duration of any given
services may be short. The review process leads also to high staff turnover, since the most qualified professionals will be dissatisfied working in a insecure position over a long period. Purdy (1967) sites the additional disadvantages of local resistance to regional control of any aspect of schooling and in particular resistance on the part of local district staff and administrators who feel their jobs may be threatened.

Several studies have been conducted to determine what organizational characteristics, at the level of operations, are desirable for effective service delivery by regional education agencies. The comments contained in one of the more comprehensive studies (Stephens, 1973) are summarized here, along with references to other studies in which these views are supported.

A major area of concern for Stephens is the overall operational effectiveness and stability of the agency. He suggests that clear definition of agency membership and geographical boundaries is essential in establishing the agency and in implementing an effective program. An organized system for governance and a plan for financing are also essential. The emphasis in these organizational criteria is to establish the agency with a stable, independent base of operations and a reliable system of long term financial support. He points out elsewhere that staffing with highly qualified professionals, including a chief executive officer, and encouraging continuity of employment with the agency are also necessary for stability, and that these characteristics are found most commonly among agencies operating in
states where the legal framework or a regional service strategy is adequate (Stephens Associates, 1979). Staff training and previous professional experience are also desirable (Goldberg, 1976). Uniform rules and procedures at the state level are mentioned by Henry and Wendel (1978) as helpful in maintaining agency stability. These authors suggest, too, the possibility of state involvement in operations in two other ways: through a regular program evaluation conducted for all regional services agencies, and through financial support to cover minimal operating expenses.

A contrasting and potentially contradictory concern is for agency flexibility in meeting the changing needs of both state and local education agencies. Stephens (1973) emphasized the importance of responding to identified local needs with flexible programming and staffing. Regional agencies are ideally suited to implement state policies as appropriate in each region, with consideration for regional differences in availability of resources and in need for services. These agencies can also respond to individual district differences within a region. As their constituent district identify new needs, agencies can begin to provide new services in many cases more quickly than a local school district, due to the generally more flexible nature of staff contracts, agency decision making procedures and agency budgets. In some states these agencies are flexible even in their composition, operating under statutes giving member districts the right to withdraw from an agency on six months notice should the need for regional services no longer be present, or should funds for these
services be unavailable. Massachusetts is perhaps an extreme in this regard, having created as regional agencies voluntary educational collaboratives which are, by intent of legislation, a temporary vehicle, solely dependent on member districts for their continued existence (Massachusetts Board of Education, 1977).

An overlapping set of criteria is that concerned with the external relations of the service agency with its constituents, with the state and with the public. Regional agencies can be effective to the extent that they provide supplemental services and address local, regional and state needs while maintaining local district autonomy. They must be operated so as to respond to local perceptions of educational needs, and they must remain accountable to local school districts decision makers. Effective agencies will adopt local priorities as their own and will operate so as to complement rather than compete with local district operations. Agency staff members will be reliable and accessible to local school district staff, and local district staff in turn will be involved in both advisory and decision making roles in the regional agency. To maintain local support, agency staff and program quality should be at least equivalent to, and if possible superior to, their local counterparts (Stephens, 1973). Another study, while supporting these finding, adds concerns for effectiveness of operations in the specific case where agency and local district activities coincide in time or space (Burello and Sage, 1979). For example, the two may share a school building, or jointly conduct an instructional or staff training program. In these cases effectiveness depends on the
compatibility of the systems used by local district and agency staff, including scheduling, calendars, students records, supervision and evaluation of staff and program policy. Administrative responsibility for each aspect of any jointly conducted program should be clearly assigned to either local district or regional agency administrators. Finally Squires (1976) finds that positive relations with the public and with parents of students served both affect the level of external support of agency operations and contribute to the effectiveness of the agency.

Probably the most widely used criterion for effectiveness in service agencies, now even more than in previous years, is cost effectiveness. Low cost of services, along with high quality of services, has long been presented by advocates of regional services as an advantage to be gained from inter-district cooperation, according to Burello and Sage (1979). The study these authors conducted of the development of New York's Bureau of Cooperative Educational Services, known as BOCES, found that economics was an important factor in early decisions to cooperate. However, the economic benefits were claimed and perceived rather than fully documented. Kemp (1976) agrees that cost effectiveness is a central criterion, but finds that it is difficult to define and that few previous studies contain any measure of this variable. With the possible exception of comparative purchasing, little data is available in this area, in part because service agencies tend to provide new programs where non previously existed so that there is not valid basis for cost comparison. Local
district have been reluctant to replace existing local services with new cooperative services (Hughes and Achilles, 1971). Some recent studies have called into question the assumption of cost effectiveness. In regard to the BOCES system, Volp and Greenfield (1978) found that superintendents of constituent districts perceived administrative costs as being high given the uncertain utility of the services provided and the tendency of the BOCES to lead to inter-district conflict over the use of limited resources. The New York State Board of Education, in an earlier study (1973) had similarly found that the system had not demonstrated cost effectiveness in any of its major service areas: vocational and special education, management services and data processing. In addition, the study found that several BOCES had accumulated large cash surpluses in a general excess and deficiency account and had not returned these funds to member districts.

The case of cooperative purchasing is of particular interest, since it may present the clearest opportunity for services agencies to demonstrate, with objectives data, their success in saving their constituents' money. The few studies which touch on this issue assume that cost effectiveness is at least a possibility in this area (Gearheart, 1974; Bryant, 1978). However, as Kemp (1973) points out, purchasing is a decision which involves a number of factors, so that the difference of purchase price alone is not a sufficient measure of cost effectiveness. Other factors to consider are local purchasing capabilities, the importance of meeting exact specifications for items purchased and the arrangements for delivery of items purchased.
cooperatively. In a similar vein, the issues of storage for bulk purchased items, clerical and administrative costs of cooperative systems, the availability of county, state or informal alternatives for cooperative purchasing, quality and control, and transportation of cooperatively purchased items must all be considered. A search for a comprehensive study of the cost effectiveness of cooperative purchasing was not successful.

Sources of Support

It is a common finding in the field of educational policy implementation that new state policies succeed in part as a result of local support (Rand, 1974). In the case of educational service agencies, both the establishment of new agencies and the continued effective operation of existing agencies are facilitated by the support of local school district administrators. Demers (1981) in his study of Massachusetts collaboratives found that school superintendents and special education directors were central participants in the process of collaborative formation in 70% of the agencies in the study. In contrast, school committee members were involved in the early stages only in 18% of the sample. The support at these three levels of the school district hierarchy continued during the subsequent implementation phase at the same rate, according to the study, and in the areas of agency governance the proportion of agencies in which school committee members were directly involved increased to 52%. The involvement of school committee members or their appointed
representatives, usually superintendents, in collaboratives is a matter of state policy as approved by the Massachusetts Board of Education (1977). Other studies confirm the widespread involvement of local district representatives in service agency initiation and governance in other states as well. Flynn (1975), Wain (1977) and Nachatilo (1978) have all found that school superintendents and school committee members have are supportive of the educational service agencies from which their districts receive services, with superintendents' attitudes slightly more favorable than those of school committee members.

From the point of view of service agency effectiveness its is particularly important that top level school district administrators be involved, informed and supportive of the agency, since cooperation across district lines often depends on a personal relationship among the decision makers (Waller, 1976). The role of the superintendent in this setting is a political one, complementing her or his role as the chief executive officer within the district. Even after the agency has been established and has operated for some years, as in the case of New York's Bureaus of Cooperative Educational Services, the political processes of negotiations among member district superintendents often determines what services are offered and to whom (Volp & Greenfield, 1978). Even from the perspective of the state, superintendents' involvement and support are desirable. Hughes and Achilles (1971) point out that service agencies are seen by many observers as a means of achieving the coordination necessary among school districts while maintaining local control. This end is possible only with top level
local administrative involvement in the service agency, and continued support for the agency among local decision makers.

Support from the state for service agency development is equally important. In some cases the degree of support depends on the personal beliefs of state officials (Kemp, Waller & Sconlon, 1976). Elsewhere legislation has established the form and extent of support to be provided, with some form of legislative framework in thirty one states (Gearheart). In these states service agencies functions as the middle level in what Fitzwater (1967) has labeled a three tier system, with the local education agencies at the first level and the state education agency at the third. In this framework, some educational service agencies are in effect decentralized state agencies, others are enlarged local education agencies and still others are semi-autonomous regional agencies, serving local districts in regions defined across political boundaries (Stephens, 1976; Waller, 1976).

In the case of a majority of educational service agencies now in existence the state department of education, often in cooperation with statewide professional groups, conducted a study of the benefits of inter-district cooperation a year or more prior to the formation of the agency (Goldberg & Grimes, 1976). In many cases these studies were related to the continuing discussion of school district re-organization and they recommended a range of actions including establishing or enlarging cooperative units, maintaining current levels of cooperation, providing a local options on participation in service agencies, and even in some cases abolishing any agencies at the intermediate level
Such a study was conducted in Massachusetts (Fitzwater, 1968), and during the two years following its publication comprehensive legislation on educational collaboratives was passed (Massachusetts General Laws, 1974) and 80% of the collaboratives currently in existence were formed (Demers, 1981). In an example of a similar sequence of events at the regional level, the Massachusetts Department of Education in the early 1970's contracted with the University of Massachusetts to study the feasibility of establishing a cooperative services for vocational training in the northern Berkshire region (Ertel, 1973). In the years following the study, school districts in the region worked with state department personnel to implement the recommendations of the study, and the collaborative agency established as result continues to this day to provide vocational education to member towns.

State involvement in service agencies appears to have both advantages and problems. Lindstrom (1980) reviewed the findings of previous studies of school superintendent and school board chairperson attitudes toward state involvement and determined that there was support for state leadership in this area, particularly in the realm of legislation, as long as the laws remained permissive rather than mandating cooperation and provided that the local role in planning and implementation was retained. These findings were supported in his survey of superintendents and board members in twenty-five local districts in South Dakota. In another study (Waller, 1976) similar results were obtained and the further recommendation was made to
maintain service agency flexibility by keeping the state out of the policy determination role. Kloster (1978) has another critique of state action, namely that most statutes governing service agencies are fragmented and lack a unifying plan, having been developed largely in reaction to specific events rather than as part of a systematic effort to re-organize the educational system and guide the development and growth of these agencies. Massachusetts appears to be a case in point, in that collaborative enabling legislation was passed in segments, over a four year period from 1970 through 1974, and even the final version of the laws provided no clarity on a number of crucial operational issues including teachers' retirement benefits, unionization, tenure, fiscal reporting and eligibility for certain state reimbursement (Demers, 1981).

Educational service agencies have benefited from another source of support from outside their regions: public and private educational research and development agencies such as the government sponsored regional laboratories (Hughes and Achilles, 1971) and the non-profit school development councils (Clarke, 1974). The former have been involved in promoting school district cooperation, in some regions more actively than in others, since the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 proposed cooperation as an effective strategy for innovation. The Northeast Regional Laboratory and the Appalachian Educational Laboratory have been particularly active, providing both technical assistance and funding. In Massachusetts, the New England School Development Council helped at least two groups of
school districts begin cooperative ventures in a similar fashion, providing a forum for discussion and assisting in developing a funding proposal.

The support of the federal government in this area has been significant too, especially in calling attention to the regional service model and providing a financial incentive for school districts to cooperate in several titles of the 1965 federal education law (Isenberg, 1967; Hughes and Achilles, 1971). That law included cooperative administrative and service agencies among those organizations eligible for funding as well as specifying cooperation as an approach to designing projects under Title III, innovative practices. It is not just coincidence that the majority of the 39 states which now have educational service agencies established these agencies between 1965 and 1970 (Squires, 1973).

The sources and extent of financial support for service agencies vary according to state policy. One study found that local funds comprise 28% of the budget of service agencies in the Appalachian states (Waller, 1976), with the balance coming from state and federal sources. However, the state and federal funds available to the service agencies studied represented only between 0.4% and 2.4% of all state and federal education funds available in the region. This study makes the recommendation that educational service agencies should receive greater financial support, since coordinated services they provide appear to be more cost effective. A similar finding and recommendation for the state of Wisconsin, where voluntary cooperative services have been
established, is reported by Stefonek (1976). He indicates that state financial support for basic operating expenses is necessary for two reasons. First, cooperatives are an essential part of the state educational system and towns should be given a financial incentive to join them. Second, a secure source of financial support is essential in assuring continuity in the central administration of these voluntary agencies which live with systematic uncertainty of the level of local district participation from year to year. One model for outside financial support was developed by the Appalachian Regional Commission to provide an incentive for cooperation while encouraging local ownership and support of the resulting service agency (Kemp, 1973). The Commission awards five year grants in a decreasing proportion of the total cost of the project, assuming 75% of the cost for planning and 90%, 75%, 50% and 25% in subsequent years. Stephens (1975) reports in a larger scale study of service agencies in twelve states that in all twelve these agencies are eligible for federal funds, in eleven they receive direct state appropriations, in seven they have the authority to hold property and in three they have taxing authority. In all twelve states in the study these agencies also receive local funds under service contracts with their constituents.

Educational service agencies are intended in principle to serve local needs, but they have been established and continue to operate with a combination of local, state and federal support, both financial and non-financial. Constituent local districts pay a share of the costs of cooperation, they contract for services and their school
officials express favorable attitudes toward cooperation. But does the support for cooperation extend to action, to changes in the way local services are organized or the way schools are operated, changes which would demonstrate cooperative behavior? The studies reviewed have given no indication of supportive behavior, beyond paying the bills, on the part of local officials. It is not clear to what extent the local districts are supportive of cooperation. It is unclear, too, whether cooperative service agencies would survive if federal and state funds were drastically reduced, especially since their period of rapid growth coincides so closely with the period of increased federal funding for education.

**Historical Trends**

Intermediate educational units, primarily in the form of county-wide administrative units for school administration, have been a common part of the educational system for years in many states. These county units most often consisted of a school superintendent's office and a large number of schools, each with one or more teachers and most at the elementary level. As high school education became a greater part of the standard school experience in many parts of the country, in the early years of the twentieth century, these administrative units became ineffective in providing management for growing school staffs (Emerson, 1967). Regional districts became more common and took over
administrative functions from intermediate units. Fitzwater (1967) has found that in 1945 there were intermediate units in 28 states, but that in subsequent years many of these units were either abolished or changed, in form and purpose. The new form was the regional educational service agency, and the new purpose, implied in the name, was service. This focus replaced administration as the primary activity of the intermediate level in the education system.

In general, the new units are larger than previous county units (Fitzwater, 1967), and they were intended to be separate from, but coordinated with, local districts. In Pennsylvania, for example, the changes described above took place between 1937 and 1967, resulting in a statewide network of Intermediate Units for special education, curriculum and research and development services (Christmas, 1967). In Michigan, in a similar pattern, Intermediate School District with service responsibilities replaced county administrative units (Kloster, 1978). In Texas, following a number of statewide studies in the 1950's, Regional Educational Media Centers were established by law in 1965, and these agencies soon developed into multi-purpose service centers (Brockette, 1967). A similar trend is projected for Massachusetts Collaboratives, in a study by Intriligator (1978).

The trends from small to larger units, from administration to service orientation, and from single- to multi-purpose structure are noted in several historical studies, as are a number of other changes over time. Hughes and Achilles (1979) identify a trend in New York toward fewer BOCES agencies, the number having decreased from 90 during
the 1960's to 46 in 1979. These authors also see a change in the characteristics of member districts, from districts in primarily small, rural towns to larger town and suburban districts. The legislative framework in New York has changed also, from a law permitting cooperation to one requiring participation in cooperative agencies.

The population shifts and organizational changes underlying these trends are long term. The development of service agencies has been taking place over several decades. However, as with most historical developments there have been forces which stand out as critical in the process. The 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act is one example. In that Act, the federal government for the first time provided substantial financial assistance for school districts servicing special populations, such as economically disadvantaged students, and provided financial incentives for the development and diffusion of innovations among local school districts. In several Titles the Act gave specific recognition to the strategy of inter-district cooperation, the first such recognition at the national level. Title I allowed cooperation for regional planning, Title III encouraged cooperation for innovation, and Title IV broadened the definition of Local Education Agency, for the purpose of the Act, to include both service agencies and re-organized regional administrative agencies (Huges and Achilles, 1971).

The provisions of Title III, and the subsequent response on the part of school districts applying for grants for innovative projects, are illustrative of the power of federal legislation to influence local
district decisions. During the initial funding period, Isenberg (1967) reports, 217 proposals were approved by the Office of Education for funding. Of these, 105 were submitted by multi-district consortia and almost half of those consortia were regional educational service agencies. Isenberg notes that in several states federal aid prompted the establishment of a statewide system of service agencies, and that in many regions the consortia first organized to apply for federal funds evolved into formalized regional service agencies. This same pattern was noted in the formation of a number of forerunners of collaboratives in Massachusetts in the late 1960's (Demers, 1981).

In the years following the 1965 law, there was a rapid growth nationwide in the number of states with legislation providing a framework for these agencies. Federal and state legislation regarding services to handicapped students further encouraged inter-district cooperation (Education for All the Handicapped Act, 1975; The Comprehensive Special Education Law, 1974) and in Massachusetts, there were a number of studies and reports emphasizing the potential for serving low-incidence special needs students through educational collaboratives (Levin and Sanders, 1974; Cook, 1972; Massachusetts Advisory Council on Education, 1974; Sheehan, 1977).

The trend toward more inter-district cooperation through regional service agencies, culminating in government studies and new legislative provisions at the state and federal level, is related to several changes in the environment in which schools operate (Stephens Associates, 1979). After years of school districts re-organization,
the political limits may have been reached, with local districts resisting further consolidation. Nor are the economic benefits of scale demonstrated clearly enough to justify further politically costly efforts on the part of state government to force regionalization. At the same time schools have been expected to take on new responsibilities, including the assurance of equal opportunity for all students, the maintenance of a high standard in the quality of instruction and the operation of a cost-effective system of education.

There is more concern than in the past for the use of the newest technology, for the development and adoption of new methods, and for more effective evaluation. Given these expectations, the existing model of conducting educational through autonomous local education agencies, a great proportion of them relatively small and geographically isolated, appears in some respects to fall short of the model of a rational, coordinated system envisioned by state and federal level planners. Yet there is a conflicting set of preferences, those of local communities and many of their educators, in which the value of local control and decentralized decision-making, even at the expense of duplicating the efforts and the mistakes of others, is regarded as a principle worth fighting for.

Regional educational agencies, while they most likely will be a permanent part of the educational system, survive to some extent as a compromise between the advocates of centralized, coordinated state level systems and advocates of a decentralized, autonomous locally controlled district model (Burello and Sage, 1979). The regional
agency is likely to continue to focus on specialized services, to depend on state and federal support both politically and financially, and to be seen as an accepted but not entirely equal member of the educational establishment. Federal and state support have both been necessary to assure the establishment and survival of regional agencies. Local districts have been increasing their use of regional services over the past fifteen years. They will most likely continue to do so, particularly in specialized areas which many educators view as peripheral to their main concerns. In the future, the needs and preferences of constituent districts will be a major determining factor in the effectiveness of regional agency services as both federal and state funding sources become more limited. Regional agencies will be forced to function in an entrepreneurial fashion, identifying the needs of their constituents and marketing services which meet those needs.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The four sections of this chapter describe the sample, the research design, the research procedure and the instrumentation used in the study. In the first section the population under study is defined, the size and other significant characteristics of the sample are discussed, and the method used in selecting the sample is explained. The second and third sections discuss the choice of research design in relation to the purpose of the study and the steps taken in collecting data, along with the problems encountered in this component of the study and a summary of corrective actions taken in regard to each problem. The final section is a discussion of the instrument developed for the study, the steps taken in conducting a pilot of the instrument, and the procedure used in scoring the responses and analyzing the data.

Sample

There are, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, a total of 380 school districts organized as autonomous districts, superintendency unions, regional academic districts and regional vocational districts. Since 1970, when legislation was first passed to allow school districts
to form voluntary educational collaboratives, numerous districts took the actions necessary with the result that there are now 42 operating and officially recognized collaboratives in the state.

The population sampled in this study is the superintendents of school districts which belong to voluntary educational collaboratives in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In order to be officially recognized by the Commonwealth, each collaborative must file with the Department of Education a Collaborative Agreement listing member school districts. Department personnel regularly amend their list of collaboratives and collaborative member districts. It was from a Department of Education list amended on March 1, 1982 and comprising 281 districts that the population used in this study was identified.

In addition to each district's collaborative membership three other factors were considered in defining the population. First, in order to assure accurate data, the decision was made to eliminate from the population any towns which were members of more than one collaborative. The purpose of the study is to examine factors which may be related to the extent of use of collaborative services. It is possible that some of these factors are specific to a given collaborative. For example, range of services provided, or cost of services, are both factors which may be related to the extent of use of services, and both are specific to a given collaborative. For a school district which is a member of two or more collaboratives, questions regarding collaborative services would result in ambiguous data unless these questions were repeated for each collaborative. That option
would result in an excessively long instrument. There were 56 towns with multi-memberships, representing twenty-five percent of the original list. The elimination of these districts from the population did not appear to introduce any bias in the sample, since relatively few districts were involved and since, according to the characteristics measured, there appeared to be no difference between these districts and those with membership in only one collaborative.

Second, there was a potential problem in that a number of school districts on the list share a superintendent through a regional or superintendency union form of organization, while maintaining their autonomy as school districts. As a result, on any list of school districts, a given superintendent's name may appear more than once. The current study depends on the perceptions of superintendents, and this over-representation of some superintendents in the population presented a dual problem. It might lead to excessive demands on the time of certain superintendents who represented more than one district, in that a separate interview would be needed for each district drawn and any given superintendent might then be interviewed twice or even more often. It might also bias the results by weighting more heavily the perceptions of these same superintendents. To avoid these difficulties, the population was further narrowed by defining the population as comprising superintendents rather than districts. This was accomplished by noting which districts in the population shared a superintendent through a union or regional form of organization and marking the list accordingly. In drawing the sample, each union or
region was represented only once, by the first town drawn.

Finally, since the author has worked closely with the superintendents of eleven school districts in one collaborative and since these eleven were involved in the pilot study, the population was further reduced by eliminating these superintendents. The size of the population from which the sample was drawn, following this series of reductions, was 147. The chart below summarizes the numerical effect of each of the reductions discussed here.

Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Districts in one or more collaborative</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Districts in only one collaborative</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents of districts in only one collaborative</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendents, exclusive of those in pilot study</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once the population was clearly defined an alphabetical list of districts was obtained and each district was assigned, in sequence, a three digit number. Random three digit numbers were than taken from a table of random numbers and matched with the three digit identification number. Whenever a match was obtained the indicated district was drawn for the sample. The procedure was repeated until a sample of 45 had been drawn. In the course of data collection this number was reduced,
as follows: three districts removed from sample because the superintendent had been in office less than nine months and was not considered to have full knowledge of the issues under study, one district removed because of membership in more than one collaborative, one district removed because the superintendent declined to participate in the study, and two districts removed due to the unavailability of the superintendent during the four weeks in which data collection took place. The final sample size for this study was 38.

The sample can be described according to two sets of characteristics, one related to the school districts whose superintendents constitute the sample and the other related to the collaboratives to which these school districts belong. The school district characteristics were compiled from data provided by the Massachusetts Department of Education and include geographical distribution, form of school district organization, population, and wealth based on equalized taxation. Collaborative characteristics were compiled from data provided by the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives and by collaborative directors and include service orientation, size of annual budget and proportion of budget supported by local district funding.

The sample was chosen from a statewide list of school districts and is itself distributed across the state, with twenty-six districts from eastern Massachusetts, nine from the central region and three from the western part of the state. The population of the districts in the sample, determined from the July, 1981 End of the Year Report, ranges
from 483 to 10,353, with a mean for the sample of 3447. Twenty-nine districts sampled are single town districts while nine are regional districts or superintendency unions.

Several characteristics descriptive of the collaboratives to which these districts belong may be helpful in understanding the sample. The collaboratives range in the size of their annual budget from $180,000 to $3,000,000, with a mean of $1,150,000. Twenty-five of these towns belong to collaboratives with an annual budget under $900,000. The collaboratives vary, too, in the proportion of the budget which is supported with local funds as opposed to state or federal grants and contracts. Thirty-two of the towns sampled are in collaboratives in which more than half the annual budget came from member districts. Most of these collaboratives are single purpose agencies with provision of special education services as their primary objective. Even in those collaboratives identifying themselves as multi-purpose, the primary purpose in almost all cases is special education. In short, the collaboratives to which sample towns belong are relatively small agencies, supported primarily with local funds and operating primarily to provide special education services.

Research Design

This is an exploratory study designed to present primarily qualitative data related to three guiding questions: What is the extent to which school districts use collaborative services? What are
the factors related to the decisions of school superintendents to use collaborative services? What are the prospects for collaboration in the near future? The study is intended to provide some insight into the complex process of inter-district collaboration by describing the perceptions of school superintendents who have first-hand knowledge of the collaboratives in which they have been involved. In one service area, special education, some quantitative data are introduced to complement superintendents' perceptions of the relation between various factors and the extent of collaboration.

The exploratory study was deemed appropriate here for a number of reasons. First, inter-district cooperation is a relatively recent phenomenon nationally and an even more recent development in Massachusetts. As a result there are a limited number of studies on this topic in the literature and the work that has been reported to date is almost entirely exploratory itself. There is a lack of conceptual clarity and even common terminology, both of which would be necessary in designing a more quantitative study (Patton, 1979). This is not surprising, given the complexity of the phenomenon of inter-organizational cooperation. School systems and educational organizations themselves have been noted for their complexity. Weick (1976) discusses schools as "loosely-coupled" organizations in which multiple actors, motivated by multiple factors, make decision-making difficult to assess using rational, linear decision-making models. Cooperative service agencies are no different in the degree of complexity. If anything, they may be more complicated. Complex
organizational behavior can best be described using qualitative measures, especially during the early states of research. Carefully conducted studies of this type can be used as a framework by later researchers for designing more structured examinations of issues which emerge as important.

Secondly, most previous work in the field has been conducted from the perspective of the cooperative service agency or the state education agency rather than the local school district. If the process of inter-district cooperation is to be more fully understood, the views of school district officials, as users of cooperative services, must be explored and their perceptions taken into account. School superintendents have been identified as the most influential local district officials in regard to inter-district cooperation (Kemp, 1976). This study was designed to complement a study by Demers (1981) in which collaborative directors in Massachusetts were asked to describe the services provided by their agencies. Here school superintendents will be asked to describe the extent of use by their districts of these same services.

In designing the study, the author found that his experience as a collaborative administrator was helpful in providing familiarity with the process of cooperation and in suggesting areas for inquiry. The model which emerged from that experience, and from preliminary discussions with education officials was that of the superintendent as a decision maker in each collaborative member district, choosing whether or not to use collaborative services in a variety of program
areas and then contracting with the collaborative to provide certain services. The superintendent, in this model, is influenced by a number of factors including the need for services, the cost and benefits of cooperation, the sources and type of support for cooperation both within the local district and at the state level, and the effectiveness of the collaborative in question as an educational service agency. To the degree that the factors are favorable, the local district will expand its use of collaborative services. These items have been used in constructing the survey instrument used in this study. A review of the literature makes it clear that quantitative measures of the extent of cooperative service use and of the costs and benefits of cooperation are difficult to make and unlikely to be comparable across districts. For the purpose of this study, however, a modest attempt was made to quantify the extent of collaboration in special education, the one service area for which some basic numerical data is available from the State Department of Education. The statistical relationship between extent and several measures of needs and other factors were then analyzed for significance.

Research Procedure

The method chosen for the study was the standardized semi-structured telephone interview (Kerlinger, 1973) with superintendents of collaborative member school districts comprising the sample population. The interview method was chosen because the data
desired were available only from representatives of the school
districts rather than in any central location, and because these data
were in large part perceptions of the complex phenomena under study
(Patton, 1979). A survey promised to provide data within a relatively
brief time period, decreasing the likelihood that any event which might
effect the respondents' perceptions would occur during the data
gathering phase. The survey was planned for the month of March, a time
when in most school districts the budgets for the following year have
been completed at the Superintendent's level and when any major
decisions regarding inter-district cooperation for the following year
have been made.

The semi-structured format was chosen to meet the need for
gathering several types of data. The majority of questions were closed
end, fixed-choice type. Questions with fixed-choice answers were used
in areas in which the review of literature in the field, along with the
results of the pilot and other pre-study activities, provided an
indication of likely response categories (Macoby and Macoby, 1954).
The data required in these areas were frequencies and per cents from
the statewide sample. These fixed-choice questions had the additional
advantage of saving interview time and were developed in response to

suggestions of several superintendents who participated in the
pilot. These participants emphasized the need to make respondents feel
that the questionnaire was organized and that the respondents' time
would be used efficiently. Using fixed choice format also allowed the
interviewer to rate responses at the time of the interview, reducing
the possibility of scoring error and increasing the opportunity for attending to respondents and asking probing or clarifying questions.

When appropriate, the fixed choices included as a final choice the response "other" as a way of providing another type of data, the unusual or less frequent response which might provide insight into the process of cooperation. The use of this response category provided an opening for the investigator to probe the insight and experience of respondents in cases in which superintendents had an unusual or unexpected response or had a perspective which was at variance with that of other respondents (Kahn and Carnell, 1953). The major reasons for choosing school superintendents as the subjects to be surveyed were the superintendents' unique access to information about the collaborative process and their position as the key decision makers regarding school district use of collaborative services (Demers, 1981). The "other" category, and accompanying probes, made it possible for each respondent to go beyond the expected categories and to expand on responses given, while still providing data within the larger framework established for the study.

The telephone interview was selected as the best means of administering the survey. This format had been used with success by Waller (1976) in a study of 22 regional service agencies in Appalachia. It had a number of advantages over the two other commonly used survey methods, the mail questionnaire and the face to face interview (Dillman, 1978). First, in relation to the mail questionnaire, the telephone interview was more likely to allow the combination of
questions in the semi-structured format designed for this study. Clarifying and probing questions and full descriptive responses would not have been possible in a written format. The telephone format also increased the likelihood of a high response rate among subjects and a high rate of individual items completed. The investigator was able to encourage item response by following any lack of response with an immediate restatement of the question. The telephone survey further increased the likelihood that the superintendent, rather than some other school official, was the primary source of data in each case.

In comparison to the face to face interview format, the telephone had other advantages, the chief among these being time saving and cost saving. The investigator was able to conduct the study of the statewide sample with no travel time or cost and with limited telephone cost by using an in-state Wide Area Telephone Service line. Even missed interviews presented only a minimal problem, since re-scheduling was just a matter of arranging another time to make a phone call. Respondents in the pilot survey expressed satisfaction that the questions presented over the phone were clear and the answer choices unambiguous. One of them pointed out that in his experience most communications between a school district and collaborative took place by telephone, so that respondents would be quite accustomed to this format in regard to the subject of the study. Finally, it is probable according to Dillman (1978) that respondents in a telephone survey are less likely to give socially biased responses, due to the neutralizing effect of the technology and the fact that the interviewer is not
physically present. Since the investigator was not known to any respondent prior to the study, and since some of the questions may have been perceived as touching on controversial issues, it was important to minimize any bias of this type.

The steps used in gathering data followed closely those suggested by Dillman (1978) for telephone surveys. Care was taken at all levels to keep in mind several underlying assumptions about the motivation and behavior of respondents in studies of this type. First, superintendents are busy and will be most willing to cooperate if the interview process is well planned and efficiently managed in a minimum time. Second, superintendents are public figures and may tend to avoid controversial areas unless they can be assured of anonymity. Third, superintendents, as professionals, are motivated to assist in studies which have a clear purpose related to the improvement of school system effectiveness, even if the potential benefits of the study are long range rather than immediate. It was assumed, also, that many superintendents had themselves conducted studies as part of a graduate degree program and would be willing to spend time helping with the present study, just as other professionals had helped them in the past.

Data gathering began with the recording of background data on individual answer sheets for each case in the sample. For each school district the K-12 population and the type of the district, town or region, name of superintendent, phone number, region of the state, name of collaborative and services offered by the collaborative were recorded, having been obtained from the State Department of Education.
and the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives. A phone call was then made to each school district and the specific information was confirmed with the staff of the superintendent. In addition, it was confirmed that the superintendent had been in office a minimum of nine months. The investigator identified himself by name at the beginning of each call and stated the purpose of the call: the conducting of a study about educational collaboratives.

At this point the investigator asked to speak with the superintendent. If the superintendent was not available, an appointment was arranged for at a time when the investigator would call back, generally within the next three days and, in all but two cases, within the following two weeks.

If the superintendent was available the investigator began by identifying himself and explaining the purpose of the call. Each respondent was given a short justification for the study, a list of potential benefits and an assurance that the time required was brief and that the responses would be anonymous. Each was then asked whether he or she would be willing to participate in the study, and whether this was a convenient time. If the time was not convenient, an alternate time was scheduled and the investigator called back.

The survey itself was then conducted, with the investigator reading each question in order and recording responses on a prepared, pre-coded response sheet. If a question or group of questions was not applicable, those items were omitted from the interview. If data was given by the respondent out of sequence, as part of the answer to
another question, the data was nevertheless recorded in the appropriate space on the answer sheet. The investigator noted in longhand any clarifying comments and additional information provided by respondents. If a particular area appeared promising to pursue, either because of some experience a respondent referred to or some opinion or insight a respondent had, the investigator returned to that area at the end of the section of the interview in which it appeared. At the end of the interview the investigator asked for final comments, once again taking notes, and then thanked the respondents and offered to send them a summary of the study. The interview length ranged from twenty to forty minutes, and all interviews were conducted in a single session.

There were several possibilities in this study for problems to develop as a result of the procedures used. The first set of problems were those which might have affected the rate of response, proportion of questions answered or accuracy of the answers given. In each case, a corrective action was taken to minimize the possible problem. If a superintendent was not available, or if the timing of the interview appeared to be inconvenient, even if an appointment had been made in advance, the investigator suggested that he call back and another mutually agreeable time was set. Certain times on certain days of the week seemed to be problematic for most respondents, so no interviews were scheduled at those time. Friday afternoons, noon until 1 p.m. daily and the days immediately preceding holidays seemed to be difficult times. On the other hand snow days and school vacations, and early morning or late afternoon hours for certain superintendents,
seemed to be excellent for this purpose. When possible, the investigator asked the superintendent's secretary to avoid scheduling an appointment during the several days preceding school committee, collective bargaining, budget or other public meetings for which preparation would most likely be necessary making it difficult for the respondent to devote his or her full attention to the interview.

A second set of potential problems was related to the content of some of the questions and the possibility of a respondent's lack of information. A number of questions referred specifically to the use of collaborative services by the district over the past six months. Some superintendents responded at first by suggesting that the interviewer obtain the information from the director of the collaborative, or from other administrative staff members in the local district. This response was not common, but was found in several of the larger districts in the sample, where the superintendent had apparently had less direct involvement in the collaborative than was true in the majority of cases. The investigator assured the respondent that most of the questions did not require detailed knowledge of collaborative services but rather an overview of collaboration and a knowledge of school district needs and the ways in which collaboration might be used to meet those needs. The investigator repeated that the purpose of the study was to obtain the perceptions of superintendents, whose viewpoint concerning collaboration was of great value in making recommendations to improve the effectiveness of these agencies. He suggested that he could omit the few detailed, factual questions and ask these in a later
phone call to a person on the staff with more immediate knowledge of the subject, in most case a director of special education or a business manager. This response resulted in the agreement of all superintendents to complete the interview. In five cases, additional factual information was obtained from other local school district administrators.

Other questions referred to factors perceived by respondents to be related to inter-district cooperation, including but not limited to cooperation through the formally organized collaborative. In probing for more detail concerning such factors during the pilot, the investigator realized that some districts in the sample, while members of only one formally organized collaborative, were simultaneously involved in other cooperative ventures including several private non-profit collaboratives, a cooperative teacher center, some informal collaboratives and two state-wide cooperative purchasing arrangements. As a result, the wording of certain questions was clarified and during the interviews appropriate comments were added to indicate which questions referred to the single, Chapter 40 Section 4E collaborative and which referred to inter-district cooperation more generally.

Finally, the design posed a possible problem in regard to the length of the interview. The number of complex questions had been divided into a series of simpler questions, for ease of understanding over the telephone, and as a result the total number of questions became larger than had been originally planned. For those respondents who had substantial experience with collaboratives or strong opinions
on the subject, many questions seemed to lead naturally to detailed and lengthy answers. While it was gratifying to the investigator that his questions prompted such serious consideration, there was a danger that long answers to early questions might exhaust the limited time a respondent had reserved for the interview and result in little or no time for the later portions of the questionnaire. The investigator therefore made an effort to obtain all the required data in each section in as efficient a manner as possible and to return to topics in which more open-ended responses were likely only at the end of the section. Another time-saving strategy, developed during the pilot, was to determine with a general question early in each section whether any major groups of questions did not apply to a particular respondent and to omit the detailed questions in those sections entirely, marking the responses "does not apply".

Instrumentation

The questionnaire for this study was developed over a one year period during which the author conducted in-person interviews with ten superintendents using an open-ended question format to develop an understanding of the perception of superintendents regarding collaboration. The guiding questions of this study, as well as some of the specific questions and response categories, arose in that series of discussions. The author also attended six regular monthly superintendents' advisory committee meetings at one collaborative
between September, 1981 and March 1982, the six months immediately prior to the telephone survey. These meetings were helpful in clarifying factors likely to be perceived by superintendents as affecting their decisions to use collaborative services.

The final form of the survey questionnaire was developed using the guiding questions of the study as general areas within which specific survey questions were needed. The questionnaire consisted of 61 items, using a combination of closed-ended ordered choices, closed-ended unordered choices and partially closed-ended questions. The latter each had a set of fixed choices followed by the choice "other." Of the 51 questions the major portion, 43 in all, dealt with beliefs or perceptions of the respondent, 7 dealt with actions taken and one was an attitude question. The time frame for all questions was the period from September, 1981 to March, 1982. Where appropriate, short answer responses were followed with a probe to elicit a fuller response, but these latter responses were not coded with the main portion of the data. They were used instead by the investigator to gain some insight into the subject of the study and were reported in an anecdotal format only.

The first general area addressed in this instrument is the extent of use of collaborative services by the local district. Following a review of literature on the range of services provided nationally by educational service agencies, the investigator adopted categories used by Stephens (1979) which appeared best to represent the range of services used in Massachusetts. A distinction is made between
instructional and non-instructional services, and each of these groups is further divided into instructional, special education; instructional, other; non-instructional, in-service; and non-instructional, management support. Questions 1 through 8 assess the extent of use of services in each of these categories. Question 18 further assesses the extent of use of special education services for serving students in the 502.4 prototype, in substantially separate classrooms.

The second area, and the more complicated to measure, is the factors which each superintendent perceived as bearing some relationship to cooperation by the local district. The investigator, prior to the study, conducted a series of preliminary, open-ended discussions with superintendents with whom he had worked over the past several years and who were not to be part of the sample. The conversations revealed the following clusters of factors as having some possible relationship to superintendents' decisions to use or not to use collaborative services: 1) the need for a particular services offered or potentially provided by the collaborative, 2) the effectiveness of the collaborative in providing service including both a cost/benefit consideration of specific services and an assessment of advantages and disadvantages of participation in a cooperative service agency as a whole, and 3) the degree of support expressed for the collaborative as an agency by various influential individuals and groups in the local district and by the state department of education. These clusters of factors are neither well defined nor easily measured,
so the investigator made an attempt to isolate specific aspects of need, effectiveness and support by carefully reviewing previous studies in the field.

The need for collaborative services was assessed indirectly in questions 9 through 22 and in question 24, by exploring the service alternatives available and the perceived need for expanded collaborative service. First respondents were asked to comment on alternatives available in areas in which collaborative services were not reported as currently used, respondents were asked to describe the alternative source of services or to indicate whether there was little or no need for service. For special education, an area in which almost all respondents did report using collaborative services a hypothetical question asked for each respondent's perception of the most likely alternative, if collaborative services should no longer be available. In areas in which collaborative services were reported as currently used, respondents were asked to describe their most likely level of maintenance of these services, were the collaborative no longer able to provide services in each area. Second, respondents were asked to indicate whether they perceived the need for additional services in either instructional or non-instructional areas and to identify specific services when applicable.

The effectiveness of the collaborative in providing services to the district was explored in questions 25 through 35. Cost effectiveness, including both cost and quality considerations, were assessed only for special education since the pilot study indicated
that it was only in this area that cost data would likely be available. Non-cost benefits, along with disadvantages, were explored not for specific services areas, but for the agency as a whole. Management and organizational effectiveness were not evaluated in detail in the instrument, since the focus of the study was on factors directly related to superintendents' decisions to use collaborative services. However, a number of organizational factors were included in this set of questions as areas in which benefits or disadvantages might be identified.

The degree of support for the collaborative from a variety of sources is explored in questions 36 through 51. Each respondent was asked his or her perception of the attitudes of the school committee, the special education director, and the staff of the Regional Education Center of the Massachusetts Department of Education. In each case in which respondents perceived a favorable attitude they were asked to describe two specific actions taken by the group or individual in question demonstrating that attitude. Finally, the superintendent was asked to characterize his or her own attitude and, if the attitude was positive, to indicate any actions taken in support of the collaborative.

The last area to be measured was the prospects for continued cooperation with other districts. While previous questions had been phrased to refer specifically to the single collaborative of which the respondent's district was a member, questions in this section were more general, referring to inter-district cooperation including but not
limited to the particular collaborative agency. Question 52 asked directly whether superintendents perceived a trend to increasing or decreasing cooperation. In questions 53 through 55 respondents were asked to assess the effects of two factors cited repeatedly in the literature, declining financial resources and declining school enrollments, on the extent of use of cooperative services. Question 55 asked respondents to identify the single most important other factor which, in their opinion, was related to the trend in cooperative service use. The last six questions, numbers 56 through 61, asked each respondent to recommend actions which the state, the collaboratives and the superintendents of collaborative member districts might take to make inter-district cooperative service agencies more effective in the future.

In addition to the descriptive data to be gathered by interviewing, the design called for some basic quantitative data to be gathered for certain factors thought to related to collaboration, and for the extent of participation in special education. The two factors chosen were those demographic characteristics for which data were readily available and which, according to previous studies (Colwell, 1976), might be expected to show a relationship with the extent of collaboration, namely school district size and wealth.

Size was measured by the officially reported grade K-12 average daily attendance for 1980-81. Previous studies have reported that the small size of many school districts has been one of the principal factors contributing to the need of those districts for regional
cooperative services. It was expected, therefore, that district size would be in an inverse relationship with the extent of collaboration. Wealth was measured according to the index developed by the Massachusetts Department of Education to determine each district's relative ability to pay for schooling, based on per capita equalized assessment of property values. Previous studies have reported that cost reduction is perceived as one of the main benefits of the use of regional cooperative services, and for this reason it was assumed that less prosperous districts might be more likely than wealthy districts to attempt to save money through use of collaborative services. It was expected that the lower a district's ability to pay, the greater would be its extent use of collaborative services.

For a numerical approximation of extent of service use, the area of special education was selected, for three reasons. First, it is this area in which data can most likely be compared across school districts, since 90% of the collaboratives in Massachusetts offer special education services (Demers, 1981). In no other area are services offered by such a great proportion of collaboratives. Secondly, it is in special education, of all the service areas, that funds are most commonly transferred from school district to collaborative on the basis of the amount of services used, in the form of tuition. This fee for service arrangement provided an opportunity for measurement using objective data.

Third, the State Department of Education requires annual reporting of this data in the financial section of the End of the Year Report and
keeps a computerized file of these reports. The state's standardized
procedures for the preparation of this report increased the likelihood
that the data can legitimately be compared across school districts.

The measure created for the extent of use of services was based on
cost figures reported by school districts in the End of the Year Report
for the 1980-81 school year for special education students in
substantially separate classrooms. A ratio was calculated by dividing
tuition to a collaborative, line 3159, by the total cost to a school
district, line 3120 added to line 3160, for this group of special
education students.

A pilot study, using a first draft of this interview, schedule was
conducted in the summer of 1981. Four superintendents who were not part
of the final sample participated in the pilot and made comments,
following the interview, on the meaning and clarity of the questions,
the length of the interview and the areas not covered by the original
questions. The first draft pilot used face to face interviews with
superintendents known to the investigator to allow maximum opportunity
for full discussion. The first draft of the instrument was reviewed
also by four collaborative administrators and two officials of the
Massachusetts Department of Education, each of whom made comments
helpful in the revision of the questions.

A second pilot was conducted among four other superintendents by
telephone, using a revised instrument and testing a number of question
formats for suitability for telephone communications. A scoring sheet
was developed during this phase to allow precise scoring of all 51
items during the interview. Final changes were made in the answer choices provided. A check was conducted for inter-rater reliability by having a colleague of the author's, with the permission of the respondent, listen to an interview on a telephone extension and independently record the answers to all questions. Subsequent comparison of answers showed an agreement on 100% of the answers.

During the second pilot an attempt was made to determine the validity of the instrument in measuring the concepts under study. Following each interview, respondents were asked to describe in their own words the concepts they believed were being addressed in each group of questions. The descriptions were noted and later compared with the intended focus of each question group. In each case the perceived intent and the actual intent were the same. The validity was checked further, in the course of the study, when the responses given by ten superintendents were compared with responses given by five special education directors and five collaborative directors to selected questions. In each of the ten cases, the superintendents' response and those of the other respondents were identical in regard to the items chosen: questions 1 through 8 on the extent and 24 through 28 on the effectiveness of collaborative services. Remaining responses, being dependent on the perceptions of the individual superintendent, could not be as easily checked for validity.

All responses were coded during the interviews on a response sheet designed for the purpose. Following each interview the investigator spent approximately ten minutes clarifying notes on responses, checking
all response spaces for missing data and making additional notes on the tone and content of the interview.

Subsequent to the completion of the 38 interviews, responses were transferred in numerical code onto computer coding sheets and then entered in a computerized data file. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a report was prepared to show frequency distributions, for all questions. For several quantitative variables tables were prepared to show the joint distribution of pairs of factors. Inferential statistics were not used in the analysis of data, due to the skewed distribution of those sample characteristics for which measurements could be obtained and the qualitative nature of the data.

The data were discussed as descriptive of the phenomena under study, in keeping with the research design, with anecdotal material reported to support and enrich the findings. Data are reported and discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into three sections, each organized around one of the three primary questions under study. In the first section the data on the extent of use of collaborative services are reported. Discussion of these data includes a consideration of the kinds of services available through collaboratives as well as the extent to which available services are used. The second section reports the data on factors which may be related to the decisions of school districts to use collaborative services, including the need for services, the perceived benefits and disadvantages of collaboratives in providing services and the degree of support for collaboration within the districts and at the state level. The third section reports perceived trends in cooperation and discusses the prospects for continued growth of collaboratives in the future.

Extent of Use of Collaborative Services

To measure the extent of use of collaborative services in the state and to describe the patterns of collaboration in various service areas, two sets of data were gathered. The first were data indicating the areas in which services were available from collaboratives and which districts made use of the services to which
88 they had access. The second were enrollment and cost data related to the use of special education services.

In judging the extent to which member districts are using collaborative services, the availability of those services must first be determined. Not every collaborative offers every type of service. For the purpose of this study, four categories of services were defined: instructional services in special education and other (non-special education) areas, and non-instructional services in in-service training and in management. To determine the availability of services in each category, the study asked respondents to confirm the status, "available" or "not available", of each category as reported by the collaborative director in earlier studies. In addition respondents were asked to describe briefly the nature of services provided in each category and the extent to which they used these services. The results are summarized in Table 1.

**Availability.** Respondents indicated that almost all collaboratives offer special education instructional services, with 37 of 38 districts reporting the availability of services in this area. Other instructional services, in contrast, were reported available in only 7 districts. In the two non-instructional areas, services were reported available in management in 18 districts and in in-service in 16 districts. In these two categories, however, services related primarily or solely to the support of special education make up a substantial portion of the total. In the in-service category, 9 of the 16 districts reporting services
available have access to services primarily for special education staff. In the management category, 15 of the 18 districts have access to services primarily for special education support. Follow-up questions indicated that almost all of this latter sub-group had access to coordinated special education transportation as the principal management service. In summary, the available services in all categories were predominantly special education services. Only 7 districts reported non-special education instructional services, only 7 reported non-special education in-service training and only 3 reported management services primarily in non-special education areas.

Use of Services. Respondents were also asked to what degree their districts make use of the services available from the collaborative. In the case of special education instruction, 70% of the districts in which services were available reported making substantial use of those services. In other instructional areas, although the numbers are smaller, the proportion of districts making substantial use of available services is almost the same, 71%. The number of districts reporting the use of specific instructional services were as follows: occupational education, 7; instruction for gifted students, 3; pre-school instruction, 2; and adult education, 1. As these numbers indicate, several districts use more than one instructional service.

In in-service and management the ratios of use to availability are 87% and 100% respectively. In management, 15 districts use
collaborative services in special education transportation, and in all 15 this was the primary use of services in the management

Table 1
Availability and Use of Collaborative Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>Availability</th>
<th>Use Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Available</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td></td>
<td>Substantial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Instructional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-service</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Of districts reporting use of In-service services, nine indicated these services used for special education only. Of districts reporting use of Management services, fifteen indicated these services used for special education only.

Source: Respondents' confirmation of results of survey of directors of collaboratives conducted by Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives, March, 1981, and supplemented by phone calls to directors not included in original survey in March, 1982.

category. In addition 6 districts participate in collaborative purchasing and 4 in other management services.
In the area of special education, cost and enrollment data were gathered to determine the degree to which districts used collaborative services in comparison to services from other sources, both local and out-of-district. Since collaborative special education services are used by districts primarily for those students who need a substantially separate program, it was data on those students which were used. First, Massachusetts Department of Education statistics were obtained for special education expenditures for students in substantially separate placements for each district in the sample. The amount reported paid to a collaborative was divided by the total amount expended by each district, including all tuition plus all local expenditures. The resulting ratios were then recorded for each of the 30 districts for which data were available. Only 5 districts reported expending less than 20% of their funds in this category for collaborative services. For another 5 districts, collaborative expenditures were more than 60% of all expenditures in this category. For the remaining 29 districts, the collaborative expenditures were between 20% and 60% of the total.

In order to determine whether smaller districts tend to use collaborative special education services proportionally more than larger districts a comparison was made among the ratios calculated for small, medium and large districts. Districts were grouped according to K-12 population, based on state data on average daily pupil enrollment during the 1980-1981 school year, the most recent year for which this data was available. The results are presented in
Table 2. Approximately equal

Table 2

Collaborative Proportion of Special Education Funding by School District Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size Funds (K-12 Enrollment)</th>
<th>Collaborative Proportion of Special Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-1,999</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000-3,999</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,000 and over</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education End of the Year Financial Report, Fiscal Year 1981, ratio of tuition to a collaborative to total school district expenditures for special education students in substantially separate (502.4 and 502.4i) programs.

numbers of districts were represented in the three groups. A chi square test was used to check for a significant relationship between district population and proportion of funds paid to a collaborative for special education services. No statistically significant relationship was found.

As a final indication of the extent of collaboration in special education respondents were asked approximately what proportion of their students in substantially separate programs were enrolled in the collaborative. The large majority of districts, 25, reported that fewer than half their substantially separate students were in collaborative programs; 21 of these districts reported the proportion
was less than one quarter. Ten districts reported more than half their students in collaborative programs, and 2 did not know the proportion. The distribution of these results by size of district confirms the finding reported above, that there is no indication of a relationship between district K-12 population and the proportion of special education students enrolled in collaboratives.

Discussion. The services available to school districts through membership in collaboratives are primarily in the area of special education. The data reported here, confirming the findings of several previous studies, indicate that relatively few districts have access to collaborative services in non-special education areas. If anything, previous studies may have underestimated this predominance of special education services since management and in-service programs have previously been reported as belonging to service categories distinct from special education when in fact a large proportion of services in those areas is provided in support of special education and could legitimately be considered special education services.

Even within the area of special education instruction, collaborative services appear to be rather specific to one group of students, those in need of a substantially separate placement. The majority of districts use collaboratives for less than half of that group, narrowing still further the effective range of collaborative services. This narrow focus of collaborative services is in marked contrast with the policy statements and advisory council
recommendations officially adopted by the Massachusetts Board of Education, encouraging collaboration to meet a wide range of needs existing in common among member districts. It is in contrast too to the range of services made available by educational service agencies in other states.

The special education focus of many collaboratives is in keeping, however, with the expressed wishes of many of the superintendents interviewed in this study. A number of respondents pointed out that the collaboratives to which they belonged had been started as agencies with a special purpose and that they, as superintendents, believed that those agencies should be limited to pursuing that purpose rather than attempting to expand into general education. This was not a majority opinion, and several superintendents expressed just the opposite view, that only by expanding beyond special education could collaboratives survive. There is apparently sufficient disagreement at this time that most collaboratives are continuing in the direction in which they began, that of special education.

It is significant that the extent of use of available services was reported to be relatively high in all service areas, with the data for the non-instructional areas indicating almost full use of available services. This pattern confirms the assumption that collaboratives exist to meet the needs of member districts and therefore only those services will be offered which the districts want and will use. The pattern is consistent, too, with the data on
collaborative sources of funding as reported by collaborative directors, indicating that half the districts in this study are members of collaboratives in which 90-100% of the funding is from local district budgets. The districts appear to be selective in the services they are buying from collaboratives, and they appear to be making extensive use of those services.

Factors Related to Collaboration

Data were gathered regarding three factors thought to be related to the extent of collaboration by a school district: the need for collaborative services, the relative advantages and disadvantages of obtaining those services from the collaborative rather than from some alternate source, and the degree of local and state support for the collaborative system for providing services.

Need. Information about the need for current services was obtained indirectly, by asking several hypothetical questions. Respondents were asked to estimate the maintenance level for services currently provided through the collaborative were the collaborative no longer able to provide these services. The majority of users of special education services (81%) projected maintenance of services at the current level; only 19% projected a decrease. In all other categories only a small proportion of users projected maintenance at current levels; the majority projected a decrease; 88% of other instruction users, 64% of in-service training users and 77% of
management service users responded in this way. However, as far as eliminating services, no special education users and only a small proportion of non-special education users projected this result (see Table 3 for a summary).

Asked in more detail about service alternatives in special education, respondents indicated that, were the collaborative no longer able to provide instructional services in this area, more than half the districts would most likely find or create another cooperative program to serve the same purpose as the collaborative. Only 21% anticipated relying on local services as an option for these students and the remainder anticipated public or private tuition placements.
Table 3
Service Maintenance and Alternatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Type</th>
<th>Level of Maintenance</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintain</td>
<td>Decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. %</td>
<td>No. %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>29 81</td>
<td>7 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>7 88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Instructional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-service</td>
<td>3 21</td>
<td>9 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>1 6</td>
<td>13 77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: If the collaborative were no longer able to provide any services, would you maintain, decrease of eliminate services in each area?

Alternatives (Special Education)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local District</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other District, Tuition</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Cooperative, Tuition</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: If the collaborative were no longer able to provide special education instructional services, what would be your most likely alternative source of services?
As another way to determine the need for services, respondents were asked whether they perceived a need for services in addition to those already provided by the collaborative. The response was favorable to additional services, with 68% of respondents perceiving the need for more instructional services and 60% perceiving the need for more non-instructional services (Table 4). The most commonly mentioned instructional services were advanced academic instruction, including such special subjects as foreign languages and advanced placement mathematics, mentioned by 11 districts; instruction for gifted students, mentioned by 11 districts; occupational and industrial arts, mentioned by 5 districts; and computer instruction, mentioned by 4 districts. The most common non-instructional services mentioned were cooperative purchasing, 10 districts; in-service training, 10 districts; and special education transportation, 4 districts. The data give a clear indication of perceived need for additional collaborative services, both instructional and non-instructional, among a majority of respondents.
Table 4

Additional Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Instructional</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: If the collaborative were able to add services to its current offering, would you like to see instructional services added? Non-instructional services?

### Instructional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Academic</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Non-Instructional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative Purchasing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Service</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Transp.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: What type of instructional services would best meet the needs of your district, were it added to the services currently offered by the collaborative? What type of non-instructional service?

To test the assumption that smaller school districts tend to have more need for collaboration than larger districts, the data were distributed across three categories of K-12 school district population. The relationship between perceived need for services and
school population proved significant, using the chi square test, at the .05 level for instructional services and at the .10 level for non-instructional services, with more superintendents from smaller districts than from large districts perceiving a need in both areas (Table 5).

Advantages and Disadvantages. Respondents reported their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of using collaborative services in a series of questions on the quality and cost of services, the indirect benefits of collaborative membership and the disadvantages of using collaborative services rather than another alternative. Quality and cost questions were confined to the area of special education instruction because this was the only service area in which almost all respondents reported using services.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size (K-12 Enrollment)</th>
<th>Need for Additional Services</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Non-Instructional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-1,999</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000-3,999</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4,000 and over</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: Is there a need in your district for collaborative services in the area of direct instruction to students, beyond the services currently offered by the collaborative? Is there a need for non-instructional services?

Instructional: Chi square = 4.49
significance = .10

Non-Instructional: Chi square = 6.65
significance = .04

The quality of special education services, in comparison to the quality expected at the most likely alternative placement, was perceived to be higher in the large majority of cases. Thirty superintendents reported that the collaborative provided the same or higher quality services. Only 3 reported lower quality services at the collaborative. The cost of special education services at the collaborative, in comparison to the most likely alternative, was perceived to be the same or lower by most superintendents (31). Only 4 reported collaborative services to be higher in cost (Table 6).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basis for Comparison</th>
<th>Higher</th>
<th>Same</th>
<th>Lower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: How does the cost of special education instruction at the collaborative compare with the cost of instruction you would expect to find for the same students in the most likely alternative placement?

Since cost effectiveness is widely assumed to be one of the major benefits of inter-district cooperation the question of cost savings was pursued an additional step in the interview. Respondents were asked whether they had, within the past year, used school district data to develop an estimate of the amount saved through the use of collaborative services in special education. Eleven superintendents gave affirmative responses while twenty-five responded negatively. Some among the second group, however, had been provided with an estimate compiled by the collaborative director for their district and felt confident in the information. In all seventeen superintendents were able to provide an approximate annual cost savings figure. One reported saving less than $5,000, one
between $5,000 and $20,000 and fifteen reported saving more than $20,000 each annually.

Superintendents were generally positive in discussing the indirect benefits of collaborative membership (see Table 7). More than half responded positively when asked whether the collaborative provided each or the following: a chance to share experiences with other superintendents across school district lines, a source of professional information not otherwise available, a source of state of federal funds which would not have been available to the school district on its own, and opportunity to experiment with new programs and develop model services for adoption by member districts.

Individual superintendents mentioned other benefits, including the leadership provided by the collaborative director, the availability of a system for sharing staff members with special skills or training, and the role of the collaborative as a fiscal conduit for trading staff salaries and tuitions across district lines. This last benefit was cited as a way to avoid the problem facing many school districts in Massachusetts, that of being unable to bill for services and receive funds, due to the fact that income received by any department in the town is deposited in a general account and not necessarily returned to the school account upon receipt.
### Table 7

**Indirect Benefits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A chance to share experiences with other superintendents</td>
<td>Yes: 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A source of professional information not otherwise available</td>
<td>Yes: 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A source of state and federal funds no otherwise available</td>
<td>Yes: 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A place to experiment and to develop new programs</td>
<td>Yes: 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other benefits</td>
<td>Yes: 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No: 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No: 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No: 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No: 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No: 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Question**: In which of the following ways did you and your district benefit from participation in the collaborative over the past year?

A number of respondents commented on the benefit of having an agency, as an appendage of the school department, in which the school committee had only indirect oversight of operations and in which decisions were therefore shielded from local school committee politics. The flexibility provided by this structure allowed superintendents on occasion to hire an extra staff member when the local district had declared a policy preventing any new hiring, or to try a new program which was controversial in the district. These were steps they may not have been willing or able to take in the
controlled and politicized climate in the local district. Others praised their collaboratives for providing a forum for long range planning and research. Still others had received more immediate benefits such as being relieved of responsibility for some extremely difficult students, or in another case difficult parents. On a more positive note, another respondent remarked that through the collaborative a group of parents of students with special needs had been able to unite in a support and advocacy organization.

Asked to identify the principal disadvantage resulting from collaboration, superintendents chose excessive cost of services (6), loss of local control (6) and duplication of administrative responsibility (5) most frequently. Smaller numbers of respondents chose excessive time demands on local staff members and scheduling and transportation problems. One superintendent cited the resistance on the part of several of his staff members who feared that the collaborative program and staff might grow at the expense of the local system, and that the jobs of local staff members were in jeopardy. Another found that geographical isolation and the cost of transportation were inhibiting factors, if not disadvantages. In several cases, poor management of the agency was mentioned as a problem, as was the relatively narrow range of services available in relation to the varied needs of the member districts. In one case, however, the opposite was reported. The collaborative's effectiveness in applying for and obtaining state and federal funds, under the leadership of an ambitious and competent director, had
resulted in excessive growth, unwanted expansion into new areas and a situation in which the outside funding sources rather than the collaborative member districts were establishing agency priorities.

Respondents often commented, in discussing disadvantages, that the benefits of collaboration far exceeded the problems. Eight respondents, more that 20% of the sample, went further by stating that in their experience there were no disadvantages at all.

Support. Respondents were asked to characterize their own attitude, the attitudes of their school committee and their director of special education and the attitude of the staff at the regional office of the State Department of Education in regard to collaboration as a strategy for meeting the needs of the district (Table 8, top). Responses were largely in the "very favorable" or "somewhat favorable" categories, with over 90% of the school committees and special education directors as well as the superintendents themselves characterized in this way. The only exception to the pattern was the perceived attitude of the state personnel, with the responses in the two "favorable" categories together at only 64%. A relatively large 34% of superintendents responded "do not know" in regard to the attitude of state regional center staff members, although responses to later questions indicated that the state had usually been represented at collaborative meetings and activities.

Among the four sets of generally favorable attitudes, superintendents perceived of themselves and their special education
directors most often as "very favorable" and less frequently as "somewhat favorable". Their perceptions of their school committees were more evenly divided. Their perceptions of the state staff members were divided equally between these two categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person or Group</th>
<th>Very Favorable</th>
<th>Somewhat Favorable</th>
<th>Unfavorable</th>
<th>Do Not Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Committee</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Director</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Department Staff</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: How would you characterize the attitude of each of the following in regard to collaboration as a strategy for meeting the needs of the district?

In reporting actions taken by each of the above mentioned groups and individuals, the respondents provided data on the ways in which attitudinal support for collaboration may be realized at the operational level (Table 9). The most common response to the question concerning the most effective action taken, across three of the groups, was attendance at meetings. Seventy-two per cent of
special education directors and 64% of superintendents were in this category, along with 43% of State Department of Education staff. Only 24% of school committees were reported to have meetings as their "most effective action". Another cluster of responses, for each of the four groups and individuals, was "no action". This response was the most frequently given for State Department staff, 49%, and for school committees, 30%, and in smaller proportions for directors of special education, 20%. Only one superintendent reported taking no action, explaining that in his relatively large district he had delegated responsibility for collaborative affairs to the director of special education.
Table 9
Actions Supporting Collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>School Committee</th>
<th>Special Education Director</th>
<th>Department of Education Staff</th>
<th>Superintendent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attend Meetings</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Resources and Information</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review Program</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate Services</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: In what way, if any, has each of the following most effectively demonstrated support of collaboration during the past year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superintendents' Actions</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attended Meetings</td>
<td>Yes 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraged Staff Participation</td>
<td>Yes 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended Program Approval</td>
<td>Yes 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred Federal Funds</td>
<td>Yes 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiated Requests for Services</td>
<td>Yes 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Yes 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: In which of the following ways, if any, have you taken action over the past year in support of collaboration?

Superintendents were asked in greater detail about the entire range of their own actions in support of collaboration, including the
"most effective" action. Responses indicated that most superintendents attend collaborative meetings and encourage other staff members to participate in collaborative activities, while smaller numbers recommend program approval by the school committee, transfer federal funds to the collaborative and initiate requests for services to be provided by the collaborative. Other actions reported include site visits to collaborative programs, offers of space for collaborative use in schools in which declining enrollment has left empty classrooms, and attempts to obtain favorable public relations for the collaborative. Several superintendents recalled that they had been among the initiators of the collaboratives to which their districts still belonged, but remarked that they had been less active in recent years than they had during the beginning phase of these agencies.

Discussion: Districts represented in this sample are all currently members of a collaborative and the great majority have maintained this membership over a period of six years or more. The data gathered here confirm the assumption that collaborative members tend to perceive a need for collaborative services and that, for these districts, the benefits of collaboration appear to outweigh the disadvantages. Nor is it any surprise that superintendents report a generally favorable attitude concerning inter-district cooperation among school committees and special education directors and that they are themselves favorable in attitude. These results are consistent with the model of the collaborative as a vendor of services for
districts which maintain membership and contract for those services only as long as the need, the benefits and the local support justify the continuing relationship.

Since collaborative services are so heavily concentrated in special education, both in instructional and non-instructional services, it was difficult to assess, for non-special education services, the relationship between each factor and the extent of use of services in each area. In "other instruction" for example there appeared to be no relationship between need and extent of use of these services. Districts which used "other instruction" did not appear to differ, in regard to need, from those which did not use this service. But with only five districts having "other instruction" as an available service at their collaboratives, no strong implication about the level of relationship is justified. The non-instructional areas of management and in-service present the same problem.

Some interesting comparisons are possible across areas, however. The response pattern for maintenance of services, the first indicator of need, reflects a strong perceived need for special education services. This need, of course, is primarily related to the state mandates of Chapter 766. These services must by law be maintained at the level at which they have been specified in each student's Individual Education Plan. Special education services are provided for member districts by collaboratives in large part in response to this state mandate. The need underlying the response to this
question is the need to conform to the law. Since there are no state mandates in the other areas, with the possible exception of state-required in-service training for teachers of special needs students, the level of maintenance is substantially lower in those areas.

In those non-special education areas a decrease in the level of services is projected by the majority of respondents, making it clear that the need is less pressing than the need in special education. Services in the non-special education areas are nevertheless needed at some level in most districts, or the superintendents would have projected elimination in the event of the demise of the collaborative.

The need for a broad range of services from the collaboratives is more clearly articulated in response to another set of questions, that regarding added services. A majority of respondents would like to add services, both instructional and non-instructional, and this need appears to be even more prevalent among the smaller districts. Yet regardless of indications of present or future needs, collaborative services are not available to any great extent in these areas, nor is there evidence that either school officials or the State Department of Education is taking steps to establish such services. The type of supportive actions which were perceived by respondents as effective, such as going to meetings and providing information, are unlikely to result in collaboratives expanding significantly beyond special education. In fact, there was
disagreement among superintendents on the most desirable direction for collaboratives with a sizeable minority expressing strong opinions in favor of maintaining a single, special education focus. While collaborative directors may wish to expand services, their support system of local constituents appears not quite ready to act at present. Nor is there any indication from the superintendents that the state has provided any leadership or motivation in this regard, in spite of numerous printed documents praising the strategy of collaboration over the years.

The framework for the rapid growth of and continued need for collaborative special education services is the state law, Chapter 766. There is no similar framework for collaborative services in non-special education areas. For this reason, growth of services in these areas will most likely be slow.

The level of collaboration in special education is not maintained by state law alone. The benefits of the collaborative alternative are closely related to this level of service use. Superintendents clearly view collaboratives as high quality, low cost operations although a large proportion admit that they have not, within their own district, calculated the cost savings of collaboration. They are confident in the services and in the management of the collaboratives. One sign of this confidence is that in considering the alternatives for placement for special education students, were collaborative services no longer available, a large number of superintendents chose "other cooperative
arrangements". Of all these benefits, it is cost which is the one most important. As long as the collaborative option is perceived as the least expensive, it will be the option chosen.

Of the indirect benefits listed above, several touched on a subtle but often mentioned characteristic of collaboratives, their organizational flexibility. Superintendents confirmed that collaboratives tend to serve as a source of information not otherwise available, that they have obtained state and federal funds beyond those which the districts on their own would have obtained, that they have been effective in starting and operating experimental programs. The reason is that, to a far greater extent than is true of a local district, collaboratives are able to send their administrators to state or federal offices where information and funding sources are located, to hire specially skilled staff to write newsletters or proposals or to develop new programs and services. By pooling their resources, districts have jointly been able, through the collaborative, to pay for a Wide Area Telephone line or send a representative to professional conferences or hire a program development consultant, according to the reports of superintendents. Several respondents explained, in addition, that they have been able to make use of the collaborative as a safe place to try out new ideas and new programs, far enough removed from the regular school staff and shielded from the view of the school committee. There was a chance for new ideas to be tested, in a safe setting, and to succeed or to fail as a model before being tried in full public view. This
opportunity was seen as particularly important for unpopular or risky ventures, such as an alternative high school class for emotionally disturbed students and an integrated regular education, special education pre-school. It is these intangible benefits, along with the cost advantages, which appear to motivate superintendents to support the collaborative concept.

There is a contrast between the reported strongly supportive attitudes of the superintendents, special education directors and school committees and the relatively low level of action reported. Meeting attendance appears to be the predominant means of action open to school administrators interested in supporting the collaboratives to which they belong. Since there are few cases of local officials or of the state office staff initiating requests for services, for example, one must assume that it is up to the collaboratives themselves to initiate new services. There was no indication that superintendents were dissatisfied with this situation, however, and a number of respondents went out of their way to praise the collaborative director and staff in providing leadership both for the agency and for member districts. Certainly the governance structure provided by the collaborative is open and supportive of participation, with a policy board and several advisory committees providing forums for review of operations and sharing of ideas. The reason for the reluctance of local officials to take a more active role is more likely found in their own situation. With little money in the budget to support any new projects, and with little time of
their own to devote to collaborative activities, attendance at meetings may be the appropriate level of support for collaboration at this time. While attitudes most likely reflect a knowledge of the long range need for collaborative services, actions reported here may tend to represent the short range reality of public education.

**Prospects for Collaboration**

Respondents were asked to characterize the expected trend over the next five years in the use of collaborative services by their districts and to give their perceptions of the probable impact of continued limited funding and continued declining enrollment in this regard. On the first question the response was favorable to prospects for increased collaboration, with 71% of superintendents expecting a moderate increase in the use of collaborative services. 29% of the respondents indicated either no change or a moderate decrease in the level of collaboration. No respondents chose either "substantial increase" or "substantial decrease", the other two possible choices.

Responses to the two subsequent questions, summarized in Table 12, indicate that the expected effect of continued financial constraints as well as the effect of decreasing enrollment is to encourage more collaboration in most districts. A moderate or
Table 10

Trend in Use of Collaborative Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Trend</th>
<th>Substantial Increase</th>
<th>Moderate Increase</th>
<th>No Change</th>
<th>Moderate Decrease</th>
<th>Substantial Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limited Finances</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declining Enrollment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Factors</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions: In what way, if any, do you expect limited funds for public education in the next five years to affect the level at which your district uses collaborative services? In what way do you expect declining enrollment to affect your use of collaborative services? What do you expect will be the effect of all factors on the level of use of collaborative services?

Substantial increase is indicated in more than 50% of the responses to each of these questions.

In addition, a number of other factors were identified as important in influencing the prospects for effective collaboration. Factors expected to contribute to collaboration were the demonstrated effectiveness of current collaborative management, cited by 6 respondents; the availability of a wider range of services, rather than just special education services, cited by 5 respondents; and the continuation of special education as a state mandated service, cited by 5 respondents. The primary factor expected to work against collaboration was the tradition of local autonomy in the district, cited by 6 respondents.
Discussion. Responses in this section of the interview were notably positive in regard to the trend toward increased collaboration by local districts, while recognizing some of the principal difficulties which collaboratives would face and some of the problems which might well result if collaboratives do survive and grow.

The complexity of the situation and the uncertainty which superintendents see in the future of their districts and of education in general appeared to be factors underlying the response pattern and the comments regarding long range prospects for collaboration. There were no responses at either extreme of the scale, substantial increase or substantial decrease in the use of collaborative services, all factors considered. The cluster of responses in the category "moderate increase" indicates an awareness of the contradictions involved in education at this time. Reduction of funds available increases the need for cost effective alternatives for providing services, while decreasing the ability of districts to pay for new service systems such as collaboratives which might provide such services. Declining enrollment makes it necessary to consider eliminating low incidence special services at the local level and search for other options, while making it politically difficult to justify supporting the expansion of services in cooperative agencies which might provide these services throughout the region. Finally, at a time when regional planning through inter-district cooperation makes most sense from the point of view of
rational management, school administrators and their local district constituents are feeling vulnerable and consequently guarding local autonomy more jealously than they might in an environment more supportive of education.

The response pattern shows also a small but not insignificant cluster of responses, representing 23% of the sample, in the category "moderate decrease" of use of collaborative services. This result is in clear contrast to an indication of the positive outlook expressed in a statewide study of collaborative directors conducted just one year prior to the current study (Demers, 1981). In that study, directors almost universally expressed optimism about the likelihood of growth of collaboratives. The difference may be one of perspective, with collaborative officials naturally having an interest in maintaining an optimistic outlook. It may be due, too, to the cumulative effects of one year's experience with reduced funding resulting from the tax limits imposed by Proposition 2 1/2. Certainly the comments of superintendents indicate an underlying pessimism related to the continuing impact of reduced funding for all educational services, collaboratives included.

It is interesting that in discussions of the trends for the next five years, finances are considered an important factor but the cost effectiveness of collaboratives is little mentioned as one of the clear advantages of pursuing the cooperative alternative. One explanation is that other factors, such as political pressure to spend funds on local staff salaries and locally operated programs,
are more important to superintendents concerned about the public image of the school district than are apparently rational decisions based on criteria of cost effectiveness in deciding whether to participate more extensively in collaboratives. Another possible explanation is that the cost effectiveness of collaboratives, although widely assumed and much referred to in the literature, has not been sufficiently demonstrated in fact.

The data on cost effectiveness in special education instruction uncovered in the course of this study was compiled primarily by collaboratives themselves and is open to question, since collaboratives are an interested party. Neither the state nor the majority of local districts has compiled data independently. Nor is this pattern exceptional, in view of the relatively few studies of cost effectiveness discovered in the review of literature. It is likely, consequently, that superintendents cannot make a firm commitment to collaboration on the ground of cost effectiveness except in the case of services to individual special education students for whom the district is required by state law to provide services, and for whom either local services or private school tuition services have already proved prohibitive in cost. The data may justify individual placements in collaborative programs, but they do not provide substantial justification for systematic inter-district cooperation at this time, in spite of the philosophical commitment of many superintendents to the cooperative alternative.
Other factors were mentioned as contributing to the trend to increased collaboration. There was an indication that increased responsibility for educational services, growing in large part out of new state and federal regulations, was being taken on by local districts and would in some cases be shifted to the collaboratives, providing that resources were made available. There is clear recognition that Chapter 766 mandated services are currently the mainstay of collaboratives, and that similar legislation in the future may well be met in part through inter-district cooperation. Another factor mentioned by several superintendents was the ability of collaboratives to expand their range of services while improving the efficiency of agency management. Several superintendents specifically mentioned the importance of collaboratives reducing administrative and operating budgets at roughly the levels of similar reductions in member districts, while maintaining of increasing services.

Finally, respondents indicated that actions by the state, the collaboratives and superintendents themselves could further the prospects for effective collaboration. The state actions included insuring clear definitions of collaborative roles and responsibilities and providing financial incentives to districts to work cooperatively. The collaborative actions included providing leadership in new service areas and continuing to maintain effective communications with member districts. And respondents indicated that superintendents could make collaboratives more effective by
continuing a high level of involvement in collaborative advisory and policy boards.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was a descriptive study undertaken to explore the perceptions of school district superintendents in regard to the voluntary educational collaboratives of which their districts are members. The study was designed to examine the availability and extent of use of services provided by collaboratives, the factors related to school district use of these services and the prospects for continued use of collaboratives as an alternative to the traditional, strictly local system of education. The data gathered here were used to complement previous studies by providing a new perspective, that of the school superintendent. The superintendent was identified as the primary decision maker in the local district, with responsibility for making choices between the use of collaborative services and services from other sources. The superintendent's perceptions were therefore considered significant in determining the factors relevant to collaborative effectiveness and the prospects for continued collaboration.

The study was conducted by means of a semi-structured interview using a 22 item questionnaire developed for this purpose. The interview took place by telephone with a random sample of 38 superintendents. Interview data were supplemented with demographic data, including school district size and wealth, and data descriptive
124 of the collaboratives of which the school districts are members. Results were analyzed for frequency and per cent distribution of responses.

Summary

The results regarding the availability of services and the extent of use of those services indicate services are available and used primarily in special education instruction, and to a far lesser degree in other instruction, in-service training for school staff and management support. A test for a relationship between the extent of service use and the K-12 enrollment of the school districts failed to find evidence of a statistically significant relationship.

The results regarding factors which characterize users of collaborative services indicate that among districts which are members of a collaborative there is a high perceived need for collaborative services. A test of the relationship between the perceived need for services and the K-12 enrollment of the school districts found the relationship to be significant, in regard to both instructional and non-instructional services. The data further demonstrated that superintendents in collaborative member districts perceive collaborative services to be of high quality and low cost, compared with the most likely alternatives, and that their districts realize significant indirect benefits as a result of collaboration. Finally the data indicate that these districts are characterized by
support for collaboratives among the superintendents, special education directors and school committees.

In regard to the prospects for collaboration, the interviews indicate cautious optimism on the part of superintendents. Respondents perceive a trend of moderately increasing use of collaborative services. They expect that the influence of continuing constraints on funding for public education, as well as continuing declining enrollments in public schools, will be to increase the extent of collaboration.

Conclusions

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the data reported in this study. First, that the services currently provided by collaboratives are confined primarily to the area of special education instruction. Second, that superintendents in collaborative member districts perceive the need to maintain collaboratives as an effective alternative system for providing services, including but not limited to special education instruction. Third, that the primary benefits of inter-district cooperation are cost effectiveness and increased organizational flexibility, and that these benefits outweigh in most cases the primary disadvantage, a loss of local control of services. Fourth, that the districts which are members of collaboratives tend to be characterized by a high degree of local support for collaboration. And fifth, that the prospects for
increased collaboration in the future are good, given the likelihood of a continued scarcity of financial resources for public education and a continuing decline in school enrollments. Each of these conclusions is discussed in detail below.

1. The services currently provided by collaboratives are confined primarily to the area of special education instruction. Collaborative services are currently used as they have been for a number of years (Demers, 1981) primarily or solely to provide substantially separate classrooms for students with special needs. Even within this group of special needs students, only a relatively small proportion of students are served through collaborative programs in the majority of districts. Some collaboratives have been operated as multi-purpose agencies and have been described in this way by the State Department of Education. However on close examination, even in the non-instructional areas of in-service training and management support, the services provided by most collaboratives are available primarily for use in support of the special education program in member districts. The collaborative system in Massachusetts operates at this time in effect as a special education service system.

2. The superintendents of collaborative member districts perceive a need to maintain the collaborative system as an effective alternative to entirely local programs and services, including but not limited to special education instruction. Most superintendents interviewed expressed strong satisfaction with the quality, cost and
accessibility of the special education services they use. Those in
the few collaboratives offering non-special education services were
equally satisfied. In all service areas, the majority of
superintendents indicated that services available from the
collaborative are being used by the district, a sign that the
services are effectively meeting the needs of the district. Many
superintendents speculated that if their collaborative were for some
reason unable to offer the currently available services, their most
likely response would be to find another collaborative. Three of the
superintendents interviewed reported that they were currently in just
that position, since the collaboratives to which they belong were
about to be terminated by the member towns. All three had already
made arrangements to join other already existing collaboratives.

The need to expand the range of services offered by
collaboratives was perceived by a majority of superintendents.
Analysis of the data indicated a significant relationship between the
perceived need for additional non-special education services and the
size of the local district, measured by enrollments grades K-12, with
the superintendents of smaller districts indicating a need more
frequently. Comments by individual superintendents on this issue
were predominantly in favor of the development of multi-purpose
collaboratives, although a small number of respondents clearly
indicated their preference for a small, efficient single purpose
special education collaborative.
3. The primary benefits of inter-district cooperation are perceived by superintendents to be the cost effectiveness of services and the increased organizational flexibility offered by the collaborative structure. Collaborative placements for special education students are seen as saving money for the district in most cases, both due to lower tuition costs and to shorter distances and therefore lower costs for transportation. It should be noted, however, that superintendents' perceptions are often based on data provided by the collaboratives themselves and not on local data, and that the cost basis for comparison is in many cases the costly private school option rather than the local or other public option for placement.

The organizational flexibility of collaboratives, as an indirect benefit, became apparent in the comments of superintendents about the ways in which collaboratives have been used by the districts. Collaboratives rent excess space from local districts, helping to pay the maintenance costs for under-used facilities; they serve as fiscal agents for receipt of tuition paid from one town to another to avoid the problems which arise when such payments are made directly to the town and deposited in the general fund; they hire temporary, non-tenured staff members to provide shared services among several districts.

These advantages appear to outweigh the primary disadvantage of collaboration, the loss of local control over certain services. While many superintendents recognized loss of autonomy as a potential
disadvantage, only a few perceived that lack of control or any other factor seriously impaired the effectiveness of their collaboratives. The issue of autonomy appears to have been dealt with effectively through the establishment in most collaboratives of a highly participatory governance structure. Superintendents reported that they and their special education directors, and in many cases representatives of their school committees, regularly attend collaborative governing and advisory board meetings. This pattern of involvement, along with the sense of ownership implied frequently during the interviews in references to "our" collaborative, is an indication that superintendents have a satisfactory degree of influence over collaborative operations.

4. Collaborative member districts are characterized by a high degree of local support for collaboration. In a large majority of cases the superintendent's own attitude toward collaboratives was positive, as were his or her perceptions of the attitudes of the special education director and the school committee. In spite of an awareness of the potential problems inherent in cooperative ventures and in spite of some actual problems reported by several respondents, superintendents generally expressed a belief in collaboration and cited examples of actions that had taken in keeping with that belief. Several superintendents described the strong role they had played in the early stages of collaborative development; others discussed their involvement in more recent attempts to support the collaborative administration or modify its services. Special education directors
were reportedly involved in similar roles, within their field. School committees, on the other hand, were reported as being more removed from the operation of the agency, many of them keeping involved only through a special meeting or an oral report once a year.

A notable departure from the general pattern of support is seen in perceptions of the attitude and actions of the staff of the State Department of Education Regional Centers. Superintendents seem to be less sure of the attitude of regional center staff and less aware of specific contributions the Department has made to collaboratives. This may be due, in part, to the lack of contact between the Department and the school districts. It is also attributable to the fact that the Department has taken few strong official actions to encourage collaboration and maintains the position that collaboratives are temporary agencies. Given this situation regional center staff have most likely not devoted significant energy to supporting collaboratives.

5. The prospects for increased collaboration in the future are good, given the likelihood of a continued scarcity of funds for public education and a continuing decline in school enrollments. Inter-district cooperation is a strategy which, according to educational policy analysts, is appropriate for providing specialized services to relatively small districts at a relatively low cost. Superintendents in this study have confirmed the assumption that, at least for certain special education services, collaboration is an
effective strategy. Their responses indicate a need for a broader range of services and a strong local base of support for using the collaborative strategy to provide services. The question remains whether funds will be found to pay for collaboratives and whether the need for services will continue to exist.

Collaboratives face two potential problems in regard to costs. First, although collaborative services are assumed to be cost effective, this assumption is not well documented. In projecting a moderate increase in the level of collaborative services superintendents have implied that cost effectiveness will tend to become a more important factor in the future in school district decision making. If collaboratives can demonstrate cost effectiveness more clearly, they will fare better in regard to the level of funding. If not, then local or other alternatives will be chosen as the best way to provide specialized services. Secondly, collaboratives cover their operating costs primarily out of local school district funds. Collaboratives must compete with teachers' associations, special subject interest groups, athletic teams and other advocates of specific local district services. Collaborative costs appear in most budgets as an identifiable line item and are therefore open to question every year at budget time. For this reason, although the services provided may save money the costs appear to be an increase when presented to school committees for approval. This presents a dilemma for superintendents who want to satisfy all parties, including collaboratives. Collaboratives must
find ways to portray their services as cost savings rather than additional costs.

The need for specialized services, given declining enrollments, is also open to question. Some superintendents believe that with fewer special needs students in future years they will more easily be able to provide services locally and may not need a collaborative. Most believe, however, that as their districts get smaller the need for "low incidence" services, whether in special education or in advanced academics, will become greater, and that the need for a cooperative arrangement for providing services will be greater than ever. In short, the prospects for collaboration are good, not in spite of a shortage of funds and a decline in enrollment, but because of these two long term trends.

Policy Recommendations

In Massachusetts and in other states, regional educational service agencies have demonstrated that a cooperative approach to providing specialized services can be both feasible and effective. In Massachusetts, where special education has been the primary focus of inter-district cooperation, collaboratives have provided services to member districts since the early 1970's and are now an accepted part of the educational system. Superintendents participating in the current study indicate that they and their districts are well satisfied with the services they receive. There are changes in
policy and procedures which would make the system even more effective within the area of special education and there are possibilities for using the collaborative system throughout the state to meet the need for other specialized services.

The recommendations made in this section are based on the findings of the study. Many of them emerged directly from the comments of superintendents whose wealth of both successful and at times frustrating experience with collaboratives is a rich source of knowledge about these relatively new agencies. While most superintendents commented on what the collaboratives should or should not do and tended to pass over the possibilities for action by school districts or by the state, the perspective taken here is broader. Since collaboratives are an integral part of a three tiered system of local, collaborative and state agencies, recommendations made here are addressed to three levels of operation in turn, on the assumption that it is a systematic rather than an isolated response which is required to bring about change.

Local Districts. The challenge for superintendents in regard to collaboratives is the same challenge that school administrators currently face in their daily work: how to continue to provide quality education for all students with reduced resources. To the extent that they see their collaboratives as limited purpose, highly specialized special education agencies, which has been an accurate portrayal of these agencies in the past, they will have failed to recognize the potential of regional educational services as an
alternative structure. To the extent that they re-think the purpose of collaboratives and take on the responsibility of re-shaping these agencies they will gain a powerful tool in carrying out the responsibility of the superintendency. As consumers of collaborative services superintendents must become active in determining the nature of those services as well as assuring that, within the district, the services are fully and effectively used. Specifically it is recommended that superintendents take the following actions.

1. Develop clear objectives for school district management and determine which objectives are appropriate areas for collaboration. This action will provide a shopping list for each superintendent as he or she approaches the collaborative board or director. Many superintendents are currently using the cooperative decision-making structure only passively, going to meetings to hear what is being done but not taking initiative in determining what should be done. Lacking management objectives for the district, they have no framework within which to conceive of possible alternative roles for the collaborative so they leave it to the collaborative director or the state to take the initiative. While superintendents frequently tell of their active involvement in establishing collaboratives the facts of history open this view to question. Collaboratives were almost all established in the two years immediately following the passage and implementation of Chapter 766, the special education law. While superintendents were doubtless present at initial meetings, it can be argued that the state, through regulations and legislation was
the party chiefly responsible for the development of collaboratives. Until superintendents take on that responsibility it is unlikely that collaboratives will develop further and consequently unlikely that they will reach their full potential.

2. Identify opportunities to use the collaborative for specific, non-special education services within the framework of management objectives. For example arrange for school district use of a collaborative proposal writer, curriculum developer, data processing specialist or program evaluator. Even without official board approval or formal recognition by the local school committee superintendents are in a position to increase the range of collaborative services incrementally. If successful, they have established a precedent and can provide new data demonstrating what new functions the collaborative might be able to perform for member districts. Demonstrated success will lead others to try similar services in nearby districts. If the attempt is not successful or if the service proves not to be satisfactory, little has been lost.

3. Arrange to pay for every collaborative service used. This action has several benefits. First the collaborative operates as a business and will be unable to provide more than limited services without additional revenues. Second the service provided will be more valued and most likely more effectively used if the users know that local funds are paying the bill. At the school committee level requesting funds for a service, even if the request is turned down,
can be an effective way of expanding the awareness of the committee members as to the potential for collaboration.

4. Report to the school committee on some aspect of the collaborative program regularly, not just at budget time when requesting funds. The committee must in the long run become a major source of support for inter-district cooperation. Regular exposure to the benefits of cooperative services, particularly in the non-special education areas, will tend to establish a basis for future support.

5. Take responsibility for overcoming the provincial attitudes of school district staff, school committee members and others, including professional associations or unions active in the district. Encourage direct contact between the school district staff and collaborative staff members at all levels. Plan joint in-service activities, include information about the collaborative at staff orientation meetings and administrative meetings, cover collaborative activities in the district newsletter or post collaborative news on bulletin boards. Mention the collaborative whenever possible in conversations. Encourage local staff to initiate requests for special services and to comment on requests developed at higher levels of administration. If collaboratives ever attempt to expand beyond special education services to any significant degree they will need the support of instructional, administrative and support staff. Building administrators will be particularly important, according to
superintendents of school districts whose collaboratives currently offer non-special education services.

6. Begin to explore with other collaborative member districts the possibility for coordinating school calendars and school day time schedules. Lack of coordination in these areas has proved an insurmountable problem in conducting joint in-service training and joint secondary level instructional programs in several collaboratives. To coordinate calendars and schedules may take several years, given the various levels at which approval must be obtained, so if there is to be a better chance for expanded cooperation in the future the planning should begin now.

7. Continue to maintain a high level involvement in collaborative governance. The contacts which are made at board meetings and the level of trust among administrators established there are benefits to the school district incidental to the main purpose of the collaborative but vital to the long run prospects for agency effectiveness.

Collaboratives. As cooperative agencies operating largely independently of yet controlled by member districts, collaboratives must constantly strive to balance two often contradictory functions: leadership and service. To lead effectively the collaboratives aggressively pursue opportunities for organizational growth, service diversification and expansion of existing programs; they employ highly qualified staff and set high educational standards; they collect and disseminate information, interpret state policy, initiate
contacts with a range of governmental, educational and human service organizations. They are the first in the region with a computerized student record keeping system, a full time vocational counsellor or an integrated pre-school. To serve effectively, on the other hand, collaboratives must be responsive to the needs of the districts, even in cases in which the districts have not identified their needs. They must provide low cost services and must not too far exceed the norms established in member districts for staff qualifications and salaries, program costs and service standards. They must follow the lead of member districts and wait, or appear to wait, for their members to initiate expansion. These leadership and service imperatives are further confounded by often conflicting demands of member districts. Some districts want a single purpose agency with a special education focus while others want a multi-purpose general education agency.

Given these constraints it is nevertheless possible for collaboratives, and in particular for collaborative directors, to take actions which will improve an already effective system and help prepare for fuller use of the potential of that system through some of the following actions.

1. Diversify offerings in instruction beyond special education and in non-instructional areas beyond special education support services. Outside Massachusetts regional service agencies are broader in scope and have demonstrated success in non-special education areas. Any program which demands specialized staff or
equipment, rapid start-up, large initial expenditures or an extensive research and development effort is a natural candidate for implementation by a collaborative. To remain primarily or solely in the secure area of special education is to lose opportunities to serve member districts. In pursuing the single purpose option collaboratives also risk eventually losing responsibility for special education. As funds are reduced and state guidelines modified to make it easier for local districts to provide services, the larger collaborative member towns will tend to withdraw students from collaborative placements and attempt to provide services within the district. Without other reasons to remain in the collaborative they may consider ending their membership. In either case the financial burden on the remaining, smaller districts will tend to increase as the number of students served decreases. Diversification will counteract this tendency by providing additional reasons for large districts to continue to collaborate, as well as by spreading operating and overhead costs across a larger range of services. Diversification will increase support for the agency in most if not all member districts as more staff and students realize the benefits of cooperation and become advocates of collaborative services rather than being potential opponents.

2. Take the initiative to identify those areas in which members are or will be in need of service, particularly areas in which declining enrollment or budget reductions are likely to bring reductions in services. Consider the possibility of altering service
models as well, possibly reducing direct instructional services and increasing indirect services. The size of the collaborative staff or budget should not be considered directly related to the well being of the agency. Rather collaboratives should attempt to achieve maximum utility from the point of view of member districts. By taking a leadership role in needs assessment the collaborative runs a slight risk of appearing to generate a demand for its own services. However the broader mandate for collaboratives in the state is to provide a range of cost effective services. The potential benefit for all parties - school district, collaborative and the state - is worth the risk. If collaborative directors and superintendents work cooperatively in such a needs assessment effort the results can be beneficial even if no new collaborative program emerges in that superintendents will become more familiar with their own needs in relation to those of other districts.

3. Work with school district staff, and in particular with school principals, to conduct these needs assessment activities and to undertake any long range planning. Secure the approval and assistance of the superintendent in this effort. Even when working primarily in special education, collaboratives can become more effective when they have strong local support from school administrators who have both access to resources and responsibility for logistics necessary to operate a successful program. They are, in addition, often the best communications links with instructional
staff and parents, both of whom should be given full information about the collaborative and should be encouraged to participate.

4. Find ways to encourage more active participation in the collaborative by superintendents, school committee members, special education directors and other representatives of member districts. These individuals have been and will continue to be the principal supporters of the agency and the collaborative concept. The more actively they are involved the more support they are likely to provide. Choose activities which are meaningful but involve minimum additional commitments of time. Several superintendents mentioned being involved in site visits, program evaluations and long range planning sessions. Such activities are mutually beneficial and serve to build a sense of ownership of the collaborative among school district managers.

5. Insure that the collaborative director remains easily accessible to member district school committees, visiting each committee regularly and inviting committee members to collaborative functions in addition to regular governing board meetings. Special efforts can be made to orient new committee members to collaborative services, to provide cost/benefit information at budget review meetings, to prepare special program reviews for presentation to committees at informational sessions. A collaborative, operating from an office located in one town, may be hidden from public and even school committee view, especially in geographically remote districts. The director, in traveling and making public appearances,
can overcome this problem. In those collaboratives having made or about to make the transition to multi-purpose agencies, what is most needed to guide these appearances is a strategy for marketing collaborative services. The timing, content and style of the director's presentations may determine the success of the collaborative's business as a service provider for the coming year.

6. Continue to use the participatory governance and advisory committee structures, even if they appear to be time consuming. They allow supporters to provide mutual reinforcement and offer them a chance to influence services and policies directly. They provide for the collaborative a regular, relatively accurate reading of the perceived needs of member districts as well as current information and a forum for the discussion of problems and possibilities. If practical superintendents, special education directors and school committee representatives should all be involved in governance, preferably in separate groups.

State Department of Education. It was through actions of the state legislature and the state Department of Education that the framework for collaboratives was established. The state, through the Department, has the responsibility to continue to support collaboratives actively. It is furthermore in the interest of the state to support a system which has demonstrated both its effectiveness in special education and its potential for providing non-special education services. Finally the state should act in support of collaboratives because member districts, on the whole,
have expressed their approval of the system by joining collaboratives and remaining members of these presumably temporary agencies for six years or more. Among the many state actions possible in this area the following can be included.

1. Clarify the legal rights and responsibilities of collaboratives as agencies and of collaborative staff members. Issues of tenure and unemployment compensation have remained too long undecided by state agencies. Eligibility of collaboratives for funds and responsibility for reports are but two of the administrative issues yet to be settled.

2. Provide financial incentives for districts to collaborate by reimbursing certain expenditures such as administrative costs. Including collaboratives in federal grant distribution formulas and exploring possibilities for more effective use of local district federal fund receipts through cooperative programming would both assist in the effort to encourage collaboration.

3. Gather, analyze and disseminate information on collaborative operations to help local districts determine which collaborative services are effective. The Department has made minor changes in the End of the Year Report to include data on collaboration. More effort in this area, in consultation with collaborative directors and superintendents could yield both statewide and local planning data more reliable than any currently available.

4. Review the goals and objectives for collaboratives as part of a three level educational system in the state, in light of
Proposition 2 1/2 and other budget reductions, and explore the possibilities for changing these agencies from single purpose, special education agencies to general service agencies.

**Implications for Further Research**

There are several ways in which the current study can be of assistance to future research efforts in this area. First, this study has identified several quantitative measures of factors possibly related to the extent of collaboration which should be considered in the design of future studies. These are the size of the districts which are collaborative members, the relative wealth of these districts, the expenditures for special education services in local, collaborative and other tuition placements, and the special education enrollments in these three placement categories. These data are available from the state Department of Education. Secondly, this study has identified a specific area of special education instruction, programming for students needing substantially separate classrooms (502.4 prototype students) as the primary focus of almost all the collaboratives in the state. It is this area to which future research should be addressed. One implication is that special education directors should be included as subjects or as sources of data in future studies. Third, this study suggests topics for future studies of inter-district cooperation. Several of these topics are discussed below.
1. A case study of a single collaborative and its member districts would be an excellent way to examine in detail some of the issues presented here in general terms. Such a study could examine differences in the extent to which member districts use collaborative services and the ways in which factors related to service use are weighed differently in each district. It might also include variables necessarily excluded from the current study such as the interaction among districts in a collaborative and the influence the decisions of one district have on the actions of the others. A case study of particular interest would be that of districts in a collaborative which was being discontinued. Three collaboratives to which districts in the current study belong were preparing for termination of the collaborative agreement and member towns had been compelled to plan for services from alternative sources. A closer examination of the process might provide insight into the advantages and disadvantages of these alternatives as well as the decision-making process. A case study conducted over time would provide data on the changes which take place in the extent of collaboration in response to environmental factors such as legislation, availability of funding and level of state support for collaboration.

2. A cost analysis of collaborative services, using a range of alternatives as a basis for comparison, would be extremely helpful in testing the assumption that collaboration is cost effective. Quantitative data in specific service areas within special education
instruction and management services might be collected over a reasonable time period, given sufficient preparation time, be collaborative and school district staff members at several sites. For example, special education services might be compared in cost with private, public or local alternatives. Cooperative purchasing could be compared with local purchasing, county or state cooperative bidding, or purchasing through informal cooperative arrangements or through statewide associations such as Massachusetts School Business Organization. The results might indicate the likelihood of cost savings in particular areas, or variations in the amount of cost savings depending on the size of the venture. It would be helpful, too, to determine whether the methods used by different collaboratives in administering services are similar, and, if not, which ones are most cost effective.

3. The current study suggests, too, that superintendents' perceptions of their collaboratives might be checked against the perceptions of other school officials, particularly directors of special education and school committee representatives to the collaborative, as well as those of collaborative directors. A narrow focus such as the need for additional services or the cost effectiveness of current services might be used in the design of a study of this type.

With the assistance of additional research of this type, the collaboratives of Massachusetts have the opportunity to improve their
effectiveness and serve their member districts in new ways in the years to come.


Squires, C. A Descriptive Study of Selected Features of Effective Special Education Cooperative Programs in the USA. Unpublished


Waller, J.D. An Assessment of the Appalachian Regional Commission's Regional Education Service Agencies Program. Washington, D.C.: The
Urban Institute, 1976. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 141 874)


Hello. My name is Walter Popper. I am calling from the University of Massachusetts. We are conducting a study of educational collaboratives. According to my records, your district is currently a member of the Collaborative. Is that correct?

(IF YES) Would you be willing to participate in the study by answering a few questions over the phone? (IF YES) Good. The purpose of the study is to try to develop a more accurate description of the process and the benefits of collaboration and to report on the prospects for continued collaboration in the future. I expect to make a summary of the study available to all superintendents I interview as well as to the state Department of Education, in hopes that the findings will be helpful in making collaboration more effective.

Your district was chosen as part of a random sample from around the state. I am interested in reporting statewide trends rather than specific responses from individual school districts, so I can assure you that your responses to these questions will be entirely confidential. Your name, and the name of your district, will not appear in any way in the study.

If possible, I would like to find a time when we can talk for about twenty minutes without interruption. Is this a convenient time for you, or would you rather schedule a time when I will call back?

PART ONE

I will begin with a group of questions about your collaborative. I will be asking you about four different kinds of services which collaboratives provide. The first two are instructional services. There is special education instruction, for students with special needs, and there is other instruction, for regular students in such areas as vocational training or advanced academics. The third and fourth areas are support services in in-service training for school staff members and in a variety of management areas such as cooperative purchasing of supplies, cooperative transportation and sharing of media resources.

In the questions in this section I will be referring to events and activities which have taken place during the current school year, September, 1981 through March, 1982.
1. In which of the following areas have collaborative services been available to your school district during the current school year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Service Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. (IF APPLICABLE) In Special Education Instruction, to what extent have you made use of the available services?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of Use</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantial</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some, constant level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some, decreasing level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. (IF APPLICABLE) In Other Instruction, to what extent have you made use of the available services?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of Use</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantial, for all students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantial, special needs only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some, all students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some, special needs only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. (IF APPLICABLE) In In-Service and Management services, to what extent have you made use of the available services?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Extent of Use</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-Service:</td>
<td>Substantial, general purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Substantial, special education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some, general purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some, special education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning stages, not current</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Used in past years only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management:</td>
<td>Substantial, general purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Substantial, special education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some, general purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some, special education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning stages, not current</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Used in past years only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. (IF APPLICABLE) In what specific areas of Other Instruction and Management does the collaborative provide services?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other Instruction:</th>
<th>Occupational Education</th>
<th>Advanced Academic</th>
<th>Computer</th>
<th>Gifted</th>
<th>Pre-School</th>
<th>Adult Education</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management:</th>
<th>Special Needs Transportation</th>
<th>Cooperative Purchasing</th>
<th>Data Processing</th>
<th>Food Service</th>
<th>Planning Assistance</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. If the collaborative were no longer able to provide any services, would you maintain, decrease or eliminate the services in each area?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Education</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>In-Service</th>
<th>Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Eliminate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7. Is there a need in your district for collaborative services in the area of direct instruction to students, beyond the services currently offered by the collaborative? Is there a need for non-instructional services?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional:</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Instructional:</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. (IF APPLICABLE) What type of instructional services would best meet the needs of your district, were it added to the services currently offered by the collaborative? What type of non-instructional services?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional:</th>
<th>Occupational</th>
<th>___</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gifted</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre-School</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>___</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Non-Instructional      | Special Needs Transportation | ___ |
|                       | Cooperative Purchasing        | ___ |
|                       | Data Processing               | ___ |
|                       | In-Service Training           | ___ |
|                       | Other                        | ___ |

PART TWO

I would like to ask you several questions about the effectiveness of collaborative special education instruction. I am interested in the quality, cost and accessibility of services to those of your students who need substantially separate programs, those with a 502.4 prototype Individualized Education Plan.

9. Approximately what proportion of your special needs students who are in substantially separate classrooms are placed at the collaborative?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 25%</td>
<td>___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 25% and 50%</td>
<td>___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 51% and 75%</td>
<td>___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 75%</td>
<td>___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. If the collaborative were no longer able to provide special education instructional services, what would be your most likely alternative source of services?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local</td>
<td>___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public or private tuition</td>
<td>___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another cooperative arrangement</td>
<td>___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. How does the quality of special education instruction at the collaborative compare with the quality of instruction you would expect for the same students in the most likely alternative placement? How does the cost of services compare?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantially Higher</td>
<td>____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Higher</td>
<td>____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Same</td>
<td>____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Lower</td>
<td>____</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantially Lower</td>
<td>____</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Over the past twelve months, have you or your staff had occasion to calculate the cost savings to your school district resulting from your use of collaborative special education services?

Yes ____
No  ____

13. Based on this calculation, or on any other information you may have from the collaborative or other sources, approximately how much savings do you believe results from collaboration by your school district in special education, if any?

$0 to $5,000  ____
$5,000 to $20,000  ____
Over $20,000  ____
Do Not Know  ____

PART THREE

I would like to ask you to comment on the indirect benefits of collaborative membership, as well as some of the disadvantages of membership.
14. In which of the following ways, if any, did you and your district benefit from participation in the collaborative over the past year?

As an opportunity to share experiences with other superintendents?  

As a source of professional information?  

As a source of state or federal funds not otherwise available to the district?  

As an opportunity for the development of new or experimental programs  

In other ways?  

15. In which of the following ways, if any, has collaborative membership proved to be a disadvantage to the district?

Excessive cost of services  

Loss of local control over services  

Excessive demands on staff time  

Duplication of administrative responsibility  

Logistical problems of scheduling, transportation  

Staff resistance to collaborative activities  

Other  

16. How would you characterize the attitude of each of the following in regard to collaboration as a strategy for meeting the needs of the district: the school committee? the special education director? and the staff of the regional center of the state department of education? What has been your own attitude in this regard?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude</th>
<th>School Committee</th>
<th>SPED Director</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Favorable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Favorable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Unfavorable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Unfavorable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17. In what way, if any, has each of the following most effectively demonstrated support of collaboration during the past year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>School Committee</th>
<th>Special Education Director</th>
<th>Department of Education</th>
<th>Superintendent Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attended Meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided Resources and Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewed Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiated Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

18. In which of the following ways, if any, have you taken action over the past year in support of collaboration?

- Attended meetings
- Encouraged staff participation
- Recommended Program Approval
- Transferred Federal Funds
- Initiated Requests for Service
- Other

PART FOUR

Now, in the final section, I have some questions about the trend you see in collaboration in the future.

19. Which of the following best characterizes the trend you see in the extent to which your district is likely to use collaborative services over the next five years?

- Substantial increase
- Moderate increase
- No change
- Moderate decrease
- Substantial decrease
20. In what way, if any, do you expect that declining enrollments in your district will affect the extent to which the district uses collaborative services during that same time period? How about the effect of continuing low levels of funding available for education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Declining Enrollement</th>
<th>Low Level Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantial Increase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Increase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Decrease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantial Decrease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. What other factor do you believe will be most closely related to the trend in collaboration over the next five years?

- Tradition of local control of services
- Resistance of school staff
- Continued state mandated services
- Range of services available from collaborative
- Access to services
- Management effectiveness
- Other

22. What actions, if any, would you recommend that each of the following might take to make inter-district cooperative service agencies more effective in the future?

**State Department of Education:**

**Local District Superintendents:**

**Collaboratives:**