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# Reasons For Ending Financial Support To The Dimmitt Independent School District Follow Through Project

B-164031(1)

Office of Education  
Department of Health, Education,  
and Welfare

BY THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL  
OF THE UNITED STATES

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NOV. 20, 1972



COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
WASHINGTON D C 20548

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Dear Mr Price

In accordance with your request of April 28, 1972, and later agreements reached with your office, we have evaluated (1) the reasons the Office of Education (OE), Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, gave for its decision that the Dimmitt Independent School District (Dimmitt) Follow Through project, Dimmitt, Texas, would not be funded for school year 1972-73 and (2) the impact on the community if the project had not been eventually funded. Also as agreed we did not evaluate the overall effectiveness of the project or the individual project components.

Follow Through is a program for children in kindergarten through the third grade who are from low-income families. It began in school year 1967-68 and was authorized under title II of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, as amended (42 U.S.C. 2809). Follow Through was created to sustain and expand the gains of Headstart graduates and children from similar pre-school programs, but its main emphasis today is to find teaching methods that work best for disadvantaged children.

With few exceptions the operators of Follow Through projects are required to select and implement one of 22 different model approaches designed especially for educating disadvantaged children. Educational institutions or private educational research organizations usually develop or sponsor these model approaches and provide the projects with technical assistance, training for teachers and parents, and overall guidance needed to implement a specific approach. In addition to providing educational activities, Follow Through projects provide eligible children and their families with ancillary services (such as health, nutrition, and social services) and parent participation activities.

Dimmitt started its Follow Through project in school year 1969-70 and selected an educational approach known as the Engelmann-Becker model, developed by Siegfried Engelmann and Wesley Becker of the Department of Special Education, University of Oregon (sponsor). The project, limited to Dimmitt's South Elementary School, began in the first grade in the first year and expanded to the next higher grade, through third grade, each subsequent year. In school year 1971-72 Dimmitt

received a Federal grant of \$207,600 to operate the project in the South Elementary School for all of its approximately 600 first-, second-, and third-grade children. About 350 of these children were from low-income families, according to Dimmitt's 1971-72 Follow Through application.

On March 22, 1972, OE informed Dimmitt and 25 other grantees that their Follow Through projects would not be funded for school year 1972-73. OE stated that this decision had been necessitated by a \$9 million reduction in the Follow Through national funding level. In late June 1972, however, OE received a supplemental appropriation of \$3 million for Follow Through and funded the Dimmitt project and 19 of the 25 others.

OE's decisions on which projects it would not fund were based on program reviews consisting of reviews of project files and, in cases where additional information was needed, onsite evaluations. According to program officials, OE reviewed the files of all 178 projects funded in the 1971-72 school year and made onsite evaluations at 80 of the projects. The officials said that the onsite visits had lasted from 1-1/2 days to 2 days and had been made by review teams usually consisting of three or four members. The teams used a standard review guideline designed to provide information on the implementation of a project's instructional component, the delivery of ancillary services, career development, dissemination of project information, parent involvement, and project organization.

On the basis of a review of Dimmitt which included an onsite visit made December 5 and 6, 1971, OE concluded that the project was not cost effective, meaningful parent involvement was lacking, questions existed concerning implementation of the instructional approach and the effectiveness of instruction, certain ancillary services were weak, and project information was not disseminated. OE reported this to Dimmitt in a letter dated April 7, 1972.

Our examination of the reasons for not funding the project is discussed in detail in appendix I. In general, some of OE's criticisms were valid, but others were not because they were not based on fact and some involved problems that OE considered insignificant. Of the reasons given, the most significant appeared to be the lack of adequate parent involvement. The potential impact on the community if the project had not been eventually funded is discussed in appendix II.

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As agreed with your office, we did not ask OE and Dimmitt officials to formally comment on the report, however, we discussed its contents with them during our review. We plan no further distribution of this report unless copies are specifically requested and then only if you agree or publicly announce the report's contents.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "James B. Axtell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" and last name "Axtell" being more prominent than the middle initial "B.".

Comptroller General  
of the United States

The Honorable Robert D. Price  
House of Representatives

EVALUATION OF REASONS FOR ENDING  
FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO DIMMITT

COST EFFECTIVENESS

OE, in its letter dated April 7, 1972, concerning the Dimmitt project review, stated that the project was not cost effective because teachers' salaries and part of the director of Federal programs' salary had been paid from Follow Through funds

Teachers' salaries

During school year 1971-72 Dimmitt, with OE's approval, paid approximately \$26,770 from Follow Through funds in salaries to three of its 22 Follow Through teachers. No teachers' salaries were paid from Follow Through funds during the first 2 years of the project (1969-70 and 1970-71), and no Follow Through funds for teachers' salaries were requested for school year 1972-73

Because OE approved the payments and because our reviews at other Follow Through projects funded for school year 1972-73 showed that some teachers had been paid from Follow Through funds during school year 1971-72, we asked OE program officials why Dimmitt had been criticized for this practice. The officials said that teachers should not be paid from Follow Through funds except, as in Dimmitt's case, when it was necessary to reduce the student-teacher ratio to a desired level. However, they said that, in the program review process, projects that paid teachers from Follow Through funds were judged to be less cost effective than projects that did not. These officials said also that extenuating circumstances had not been considered in the evaluation process. Thus project components that OE believed were weak were so rated regardless of such factors as OE's approval which seemed to condone the weaknesses

Director of Federal programs' salary

Approximately 16 percent, or \$2,336, of the director of Federal programs' salary for school year 1971-72 was paid from Follow Through funds. The director also was paid \$2,240 from Follow Through funds during school year 1970-71. Dimmitt's Follow Through budget applications for those years which OE had approved included this information. OE had approved the use of Follow Through funds for this purpose at other projects we reviewed that were funded for school year 1972-73

An OE contracts and grants official told us that OE does not have written criteria defining the conditions needed to justify such payments. OE program officials told us, however,

that part of the director's salary could be paid from Follow Through funds if the services provided were needed and commensurate with the amount paid and were not services that the director would have furnished to the first three grades of the Follow Through school irrespective of whether the school had a Follow Through program

OE criticized such payments at Dimmitt because the review team believed that the services the director of Federal programs provided to the Follow Through project were clerical rather than substantive. According to OE's review team leader, the team could not determine during its discussions with project personnel what the director did, other than recordkeeping, which the team believed did not warrant the use of Follow Through funds. The team leader said, however, that the team had not asked the director what Follow Through functions he had performed.

The director of Federal programs told us that his Follow Through duties included developing a consolidated budget for all Federal programs, organizing and supervising Dimmitt's inservice training program for Follow Through teachers and teacher-aides, preparing all Follow Through progress and evaluation reports, obtaining equipment and supplies for Follow Through, coordinating the sponsor's curriculum with that of the Texas Education Agency, and coordinating program activities among Follow Through school officials and district officials. He said that the portion of his salary paid from Follow Through funds had been based on an estimate of the amount of time he spent on these duties but that he had kept no records to support the estimate.

Because (1) records were not available locally, (2) the leader of OE's evaluation team told us that he had no documentation to support this or any item in the evaluation report, and (3) criteria had not been established, we could not substantiate the validity of OE's criticism.

#### PARENT INVOLVEMENT

OE stated that meaningful parent involvement was lacking in the Dimmitt Follow Through project. The review team reported that Dimmitt's superintendent had improperly appointed some members of the policy advisory committee, parents had not been given priority for filling project positions, and parents had not been involved in planning and managing the project, selecting the staff, or writing the school year 1971-72 application.

The policy advisory committee is a group of parents and other community members who represent the interests of the parents and the community in planning and managing a Follow Through project

#### Policy advisory committee appointments

OE's statement that the superintendent had appointed some members of the committee is true. According to the Follow Through guidelines, every project must have a policy advisory committee, of which at least 50 percent of the members must be elected from low-income parents of children in Follow Through classes. The guidelines state that the remaining members should be drawn from agencies, community groups, and individuals that have a concern for poor children but that the selection of these members should be discussed with the parent members prior to appointments.

According to the superintendent and the director of Federal programs, Dimmitt's policy advisory committee for school year 1971-72 consisted of 13 members, of which seven had been elected from low-income parents of Follow Through children and six had been appointed by the superintendent from non-low-income parents of Follow Through children. OE officials told us that the superintendent's appointments were improper because, according to OE's interpretation of the guidelines, parent members can serve on the committee only if they are elected.

The superintendent told us that OE officials had not informed him about their interpretation of the guidelines and that he was not aware his appointments were improper. He said that about 50 percent of the Follow Through children in Dimmitt were children of non-low-income parents and that he believed the parents of these children should be represented on the committee.

In our opinion, the guidelines do not clearly convey OE's interpretation that all parent members must be elected but suggest that the committee should consist of some members who are not parents of Follow Through children.

#### Employment of parents

Follow Through guidelines state that low-income persons, especially parents of Follow Through children, must be given preference in filling nonprofessional project positions and that the policy advisory committee should establish criteria for, and participate in, the selection of Follow Through staff. The guidelines, however, do not contain any standard against which a project's actions might be compared.

The superintendent told us that written criteria had not been established but that low-income parents who applied for positions had been given priority if they were qualified. He said that the most important employment consideration was the applicant's qualifications. We could not verify whether low-income parents had been given employment preference because the superintendent and OE did not have documentation to support their claims.

The superintendent told us that he did not allow the committee to have any overall responsibility for hiring and firing teachers and teacher-aides because he believed that this was his and the school board's responsibility. He said, however, that he had informed the committee members that he would consider any recommendations they wanted to make concerning teachers and teacher-aides. The current committee chairman said that the committee had been so informed and that a former committee member had been employed as a Follow Through parent worker on the committee's recommendation.

During school year 1971-72, 39 teacher-aides, two data collection personnel, three testers, and one parent worker were employed in the Follow Through project. Of these 45 employees, 13 were parents of Follow Through children and nine of the 13 were low-income parents. OE officials told us that most projects fill about two-thirds of the nonprofessional positions with low-income parents of children in the Follow Through classes.

#### Role of policy advisory committee

The Follow Through guidelines require the policy advisory committee to play a substantial role in planning and managing the project. According to the superintendent and the 1971-72 chairman of the policy advisory committee, the committee accomplished little during the first 2 years of the program (1969-70 and 1970-71). On the basis of committee minutes and other available records for this period, we believe the only substantive decision made by the committee was to spend \$800 for clothing for needy children from low-income families.

The superintendent believed that the 1971-72 committee was better organized because it had a more competent chairman. This committee's most significant accomplishment, in our opinion, was that it sponsored a well-attended first-grade parent visitation day. We arranged to meet with the committee to determine whether the members understood their duties and responsibilities, comments made to us by the six members who attended the meeting indicated that they did not.

Follow Through guidelines state that the committee is to actively participate in the development of, and give approval to, the Follow Through application before it submits the



application to OE. According to the current committee chairman, the committee did not participate in preparing the Follow Through application for school year 1971-72. The director of Federal programs prepared and presented it to the committee for its comments and suggested changes, and the committee approved the application as written.

The committee minutes indicate that the director gave the committee the opportunity to help prepare the 1972-73 application but that the committee requested the director to prepare and submit the application to it for approval. The committee chairman told us that most of the members have limited educations and, therefore, could not be of much help in preparing the project application and related budget.

OE officials told us that Dimmitt school administrators had a negative attitude toward parent involvement. They said that the policy advisory committee had not been successful because it had not received the necessary guidance and help from school administrators.

We sent questionnaires to the 13 committee members to obtain their opinions on certain aspects of the program. Six of the eight committee members who returned our questionnaires said that they did not feel that school administrators had reluctant or negative attitudes toward parent involvement. One member responded that he did not know, and another responded that school administrators had so many things to do that they may have neglected the committee at times. Four members also indicated that school administrators had done some things to help the committee.

#### IMPLEMENTATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACH

OE stated that part of the sponsor's instructional model apparently had not been implemented. Specifically OE stated that (1) there had been questions about teachers' refusing to implement level III--third program year--materials and (2) teachers at all levels believed the sponsor's instructional materials caused problems in the use of available class time because they also had to cover material prescribed by the State.

#### Implementation of level III materials

Level III materials, first used at the Dimmitt project in the fall of 1971, were implemented by third-grade teachers who had not taught in the Follow Through project and who were unfamiliar with the Follow Through instructional materials. Shortly after school started, some of these teachers became concerned because they believed that some of the children were weak in basic skills. As a result most of the teachers

supplemented the Follow Through instructional materials with other educational materials to improve these skills

The sponsor's representative to Dimmitt told us that she had learned in early November 1971 about the problem in implementing level III materials and that, after discussing the matter with sponsor officials, it was decided that she should speak with the teachers, hear their concerns, and learn to what extent they were using sponsor materials. According to the representative, all but one of the level III teachers had been using sponsor materials to some extent and had been trying to work out reasonable plans for teaching the students

In a statement to us, the representative concluded

"While the third grade instructional program in Dimmitt certainly was not totally implemented according to the Engelmann-Becker guidelines and requirements, I do feel that the situation there was not as serious a problem of implementation as some persons have understood it to be. On the other hand, it is a situation that must not be repeated in Dimmitt."

She also said that the superintendent of Dimmitt had assured her that no teacher would be hired to teach third-grade Follow Through for the 1972-73 school year unless the teacher agreed to strictly follow the sponsor's program requirements

#### Teacher concern about class time

The Dimmitt director of Federal programs, who is also director of curriculum, told us that Follow Through teachers are required to teach in accordance with the minimum curriculum standards established by the Texas Education Agency. These standards prescribe the general subjects that are to be taught and the amount of time to be spent on each. The director said that Follow Through materials for reading, language, and math had been used to satisfy these minimum standards, however, subjects not included in the Follow Through materials--such as science, social studies, and art--had been taught as required by the Texas Education Agency

We gave to the 22 Dimmitt Follow Through teachers questionnaires concerning various aspects of the Follow Through program. Of the 17 teachers who returned the questionnaires, 15 responded that the sponsor's program had been fully implemented in their classrooms. Only two teachers (both level III) responded that time had been a disadvantage of the sponsor's approach.

EFFECTIVENESS OF INSTRUCTION

OE indicated that teachers and teacher-aides were confused about whether or not Spanish could be used in the classroom and that this confusion had decreased the effectiveness of the instruction

Guidelines issued by the sponsor in the summer of 1971 for local Follow Through supervisors stated that (1) instructions and corrections should be made only in English in all school-related situations except for bilingual instruction, (2) instructors should not teach or explain in a foreign language, and (3) the children should be encouraged to speak only in English in all school-related activities

OE became concerned about this policy and requested that it be changed. In October 1971 the sponsor wrote a letter to project directors, stating that children should be taught English during the instructional part of the day and during any teacher-directed activity but that foreign languages could be used to make the meaning of an English word clearer or when a child new to the school situation required instruction in his home language to meet an immediate need. Program officials told us that the review team found during its visit in December 1971 that some teachers and teacher-aides were confused about the policy.

One of the questions on our questionnaires asked if the teachers had been told that they could not use Spanish in the classroom. This question was also on questionnaires that we delivered to eight of the 39 teacher-aides to obtain their views about various aspects of the program. The eight teacher-aides were selected because they were taking summer college courses at the school during the time of our fieldwork.

Of the six teacher-aides and 17 teachers who returned our questionnaires, each aide and 14 teachers responded that they had not been told not to use Spanish in the classroom. Two teachers answered that they had been told Spanish should not be used but stated that the policy was not enforced. One teacher replied that the policy had been enforced except in extreme cases.

OE program officials told us that this problem and those with implementation of the instructional approach were not as significant as the other weaknesses discussed in OE's letter of April 7, 1972, concerning the Dimmitt program review.

ANCILLARY SERVICES

OE stated that health, social, and psychological services were all weak. Specifically OE stated that

- Evidence of efforts to follow up on physical examinations was lacking
- Staff was inadequate to provide services to Follow Through families in need of help
- Dimmitt had no public agencies with which to work
- The negative attitude of school administrators toward such services was not conducive to the development of adequate ancillary services

Followup on health services

OE's statement that evidence of followup on physical examinations was lacking was not accurate. We randomly selected the names of 35 children from a list maintained by the school nurse that showed the names of the children from low-income families eligible to receive health services. Our examination of the medical records of the 35 children showed that 25 had medical and/or dental problems and that, for all 25, school officials had taken action to provide the needed treatments.

Adequacy of staff

Although program guidelines do not contain standards on staffing levels, Dimmitt apparently did not have adequate staff to administer the social services component. The purpose of this component, according to Follow Through guidelines, is to assist low-income families in solving those problems that limit their full potential. The guidelines emphasize the importance of reaching out to all needy families and suggest that the social services staff work with families to encourage and stimulate self-help. This requires home contact which is, to the extent desired by parents, a program requirement.

Dimmitt employed one parent worker to administer the social services component. Her responsibility included helping to fulfill the needs of the low-income families of about 350 children. According to a Dimmitt official, Dimmitt covered an area of 417 square miles and about 40 percent of the Follow Through school's enrollees lived outside the town limits of Dimmitt. He said that some children lived as far as 25 miles from the school.

The parent worker told us that about half of her time was spent on attendance matters and that the remaining half was equally divided between making home visits and helping the school nurse with health services. She said that she had little time to organize worthwhile parent activities and could visit some low-income families only once a year. Although Dimmitt budgeted for two parent workers for school year 1971-72, a Dimmitt official informed us that Dimmitt could not find a qualified applicant for the second position.

#### Availability of public agencies

Although OE's criticism that Dimmitt had no public agencies to help had some validity, the problem seems to be endemic to such localities as Dimmitt.

A school official told us that Dimmitt, being a small rural town of about 4,000 people, has only a few public agencies but that agencies in surrounding communities provide services to them. From a listing furnished by this official, we identified 16 agencies and civic organizations within a 74-mile radius of Dimmitt which could be, and in some cases had been, utilized to provide services to low-income families. For example, the Dimmitt Lions Club furnished five pairs of eye glasses to Follow Through children in school year 1971-72. In the same year, Dimmitt referred 16 children with limited mental or learning abilities to three testing centers in Plainview and Amarillo, Texas.

#### Attitude of school administrators

OE program officials told us that they wanted to change the term "negative attitude" referred to in the letter of April 7, 1972, concerning the Dimmitt program review to "reluctant attitude" of school administrators toward ancillary services. They referred only to Dimmitt's failure to implement a local free immunization program as a reason for this statement.

According to the school nurse, Dimmitt did not have an immunization program because immunizations had not been required for entry to school. However, a Texas State law requiring immunization was enacted in 1971, and Dimmitt notified the community in a circular-type letter dated August 16, 1971, of the new law. The school nurse said that the children could receive the required immunizations from their family physicians or free from public health clinics in communities outside Dimmitt. The notification to the community, however, did not state that free immunizations were available.

DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

OE stated that Dimmitt had not disseminated information on its Follow Through project to the community, although dissemination is required by the program guidelines

From an examination of project records and past publications of the local newspaper and through discussions with project officials, we identified the following means that had been used to disseminate information about the project

- Eight articles mentioning or describing the project appeared in the county newspaper between March 1969 and December 1971. Although most of the articles described only the instructional component, one article mentioned the other components
- The Hereford, Texas, Sunday newspaper of August 15, 1971, included an article of nearly two full columns describing the project's instructional component and the summer workshop for Follow Through teachers.
- Some announcements of Follow Through activities were printed in the county newspaper and were announced over the local radio station in Spanish as well as English
- An Amarillo television station filmed a Follow Through classroom during the 1970-71 school year and showed the film on a nightly news program.
- Two articles concerning the instructional component of the project appeared in publications of the Panhandle Education Services Organization, which are distributed to educators in the Texas Panhandle.
- Dimmitt Follow Through personnel gave several lectures and presented demonstrations of the Follow Through instructional approach to groups of educators and to local civic organizations
- Teachers and school officials from 13 other school districts visited the Dimmitt Follow Through project at various times. Two school districts sent their elementary school teachers to Dimmitt's summer Follow Through workshop.

## POTENTIAL IMPACT OF CLOSING THE PROJECT

Had OE not funded the Dimmitt Follow Through project for school year 1972-73, 30 staff members--24 teacher-aides, three testers, one parent worker, and two data collection personnel--employed at the time of our review would have been released. Their salaries totaled about \$94,500 in school year 1971-72. In addition, an annual preschool summer workshop would have been eliminated. Total salaries of \$3,855, in addition to the \$94,500 mentioned above, were paid to the teachers and teacher-aides to attend this workshop in school year 1971-72.

Certain of the services to eligible children and their families also would have been eliminated. The director of Federal programs told us that Dimmitt would still have provided vision, hearing, and tuberculosis tests to all children and that the Lions Club would have continued to furnish eye glasses to needy children. He said that physical and dental examinations, however, would have been limited to those available to needy migrant children under the title I migrant program of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Psychological services still could have been obtained from the testing centers in neighboring cities.

According to the director, snacks now provided to Follow Through children would have been eliminated, but children of low-income families still would have received free lunches under the National School Lunch Program administered by the Department of Agriculture. The social services component could not have been administered because the positions of parent worker would have been abolished.

The director also told us that the sponsor's approach would not have continued without Federal funding and that the abrupt change to a different method of instruction would have been a difficult adjustment for the children. We did not attempt to measure the impact the change would have had on the children. However, the classroom environment would have been altered significantly because 24 teacher-aide positions would have been eliminated which, on the basis of Dimmitt's 1971-72 budget, would have increased the ratio of students to each adult from 9 to 16.