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The evolution of Iowa's intermediate educational unit and its influence on the delivery of special education: A historical perspective

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THE EVOLUTION OF IOWA'S INTERMEDIATE EDUCATIONAL UNIT AND
ITS INFLUENCE ON THE DELIVERY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION:
A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Specialist in Education

Christopher Anthony Kleve
University of Northern Iowa

March 1988

ABSTRACT

Kleve, Christopher Anthony. Specialist in Education, University of Northern Iowa, 1988. THE EVOLUTION OF IOWA'S INTERMEDIATE EDUCATION UNIT AND ITS IMPACT ON THE DELIVERY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

Iowa has developed a unique regional intermediate education system known as Area Education Agencies (AEAs). The AEAs provide local school districts with special education programs and services, media services, and other education services. The AEAs have existed since July 1, 1975 after the passage of Senate File 1163 in 1974.

The AEAs were not the first intermediate educational units in Iowa. In 1858 the state legislature created the office of the county superintendent to serve as intermediate link between the local schools and the office of the state superintendent. From the first decade of the 20th century, the role of the county superintendent gradually evolved. Legislative enactments gradually changed the role of the county superintendent.

This thesis traces the historical developments of the intermediate educational unit in Iowa. It synthesizes pertinent historical events and legislative enactments which have had an impact on the intermediate unit. Iowa's intermediate unit has gradually evolved to a position of influence for education. At the present time, 15 Area Education Agencies provide many needed services to local schools and their students.

In 1986 and 1987 the Iowa General Assembly mandated that the State Board of Education develop plans for restructuring Iowa's educational system. This mandate may have major repercussions for the AEA system.

This thesis serves as a condensed review for those seeking general background for making changes in the present system. It identifies some controversial issues of the past to consider for making future changes.

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This Study by: Christopher Anthony Kleve

Entitled: THE EVOLUTION OF IOWA'S INTERMEDIATE EDUCATIONAL UNIT AND ITS
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

The Iowa intermediate administrative unit for education has had a long history. Beginning in 1858, the county superintendent was this intermediate link (Special education: The struggle for equal educational opportunity in Iowa, 1977 from here on cited as Special education). Although this link existed from 1858, the county superintendency was largely ineffective until the first part of the 20th century. The county superintendency evolved gradually, through legislative enactments, into an effective intermediate unit (Smith, 1969). Education for the state's handicapped children, however, remained outside the realm of the county superintendents until the middle of this century (Special education, 1977). In 1955, the county intermediate units were permitted to provide limited special education services.

The role of the county intermediate unit continued to change as the 20th century progressed. Technological innovations in transportation and communication contributed to these changes but school reorganization had the most profound impact on the county unit. Reorganization brought with it a decrease in the number of local school districts. For the county superintendents, this decrease reduced their traditional supervisory role over small elementary schools (Kruger, 1983). Two new options for intermediate unit organization--joint county agreements and joint county mergers--became available to the counties because of these changes (Special education, 1977).

With the supervisory role of the intermediate unit diminished, many counties began providing other services to the local districts such as special education. Special education services, however, were unequally distributed across the state. The concern by the state legislature about this inequality finally led to a dramatic change in the intermediate unit in 1974 (Special education, 1977).

A bill introduced and passed in 1974 known as Senate File 1163 (S. F. 1163) abolished the county as the intermediate unit for education and created a regional service delivery system known as the Area Education Agencies. The Area Education Agency (AEA) system was created because of the uneven ability of the county units to provide equivalent special education services for the state's handicapped children. Pressure for the provision of these services came from parental and charitable groups, county superintendents, and finally the State Department of Public Instruction (Special education, 1977). By the close of the 1974 session of the 65th General Assembly, 15 AEAs were created. Each AEA had three divisions: special education, media, and other educational services.

The AEA system has existed since 1974 and proven to be very effective in providing needed educational services to the local schools (State Board of Education, 1987). In 1986 and 1987, however, the Iowa General Assembly mandated that the State Board of Education develop plans for restructuring the intermediate units. The State Board of Education (1987) outlined nine plans in accordance with the legislature's request. The special education directors also voiced their concerns over restructuring (AEA Directors of Special Education, 1987).

Before future changes in the Iowa intermediate unit structure are implemented, some plan or set of criteria should be developed. Geographic area and population uniformity may be ways of ensuring equality. Whatever changes Iowa makes in the structure of the AEAs, it needs to focus on the results of those changes on the handicapped children.

Purpose of the Review

This thesis is a general review of the historical developments of the intermediate educational unit in Iowa. The purpose of reviewing this subject is to describe and synthesize the legislative responses to the educational demands leading to the development of Iowa's Area Education Agency system. A second purpose is to reveal the role special education played in the development of the present system. Finally, this thesis should be helpful as a condensed review for those seeking a general historic background of Iowa's intermediate educational unit. The purpose is to be a useful guide for those investigating possible changes in the present system for the future.

Importance of the Review

The present review is important to the literature as a synthesis of pertinent historical and contemporary issues concerning special education and the intermediate unit. A short, concise study of this topic is of value to those needing pertinent historical information on the intermediate unit. This review may also prove useful to those seeking possible alternatives to the present delivery system because it identifies some controversial issues in the past.

Limitations of the Review

The following limitations of this review are acknowledged. First, the review does not attempt to offer interpretations of historical events or their implications. Second, the thesis is a general review. It is not an exhaustive analysis of all original documents, but rather a general review of relevant facts concerning the intermediate unit. Since the Iowa legislature has begun to seek possible changes in the present intermediate unit, a third limitation has been the inability to determine the future of this unique system.

CHAPTER II

THE COUNTY INTERMEDIATE UNIT: A CENTURY IN THE MAKING 1858-1957

In 1858 the Iowa General Assembly enacted legislation which created the county superintendent's office as the first intermediate unit for education (Special education, 1977). The position of county superintendent served as a link between the local schools and the State Department of Public Instruction (State Board of Education, 1987). For over a century, the 99 county superintendents served as vital intermediate administrative links for education. Gradually, through legislative enactment, this county office evolved from a largely political and ineffective position to one of significance for education (Smith, 1969).

As an intermediate unit, the county superintendent helped to improve the quality of education throughout the state. By the middle of the 20th century, the need for special education programs for the state's handicapped students became apparent to the state legislature. The county superintendents, from their intermediate position, were enlisted to help with the implementation of special education services (Special education, 1977).

The Need for An Intermediate Link

Education: A Local Enterprise

In the 19th century, education in the United States was primarily the responsibility of the local community. The Federal Government did not assume this responsibility because it was believed that the Constitution did not empower it to do so. The Tenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, the final Amendment in the document

known as the Bill of Rights, states: "The powers not delegated the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people" (United States Constitution, Amendment X, 1787). When Iowa became a State in 1846, a strict interpretation of this amendment was maintained. Since the Constitution and its Amendments made no mention of education, it was a reserved function of the states or the people. The State, in turn, has traditionally given local communities the responsibility for education.

Free public education was a concern of the people who settled Iowa. When Iowa became a state, the Constitution of the state required the legislature to provide a system of free public instruction to the school aged population (State Board of Education, 1987). Individuals and groups at the local level, however, were the first to provide educational opportunities for their children. When these local communities perceived the need, schools began to operate. The state appears to have accepted this trend because it passed laws to allow communities to collect local taxes, usually on property, to pay for public instruction (Smith, 1969).

By allowing local control for education, the number of school districts increased rapidly. At the time of statehood in 1846, Iowa had 416 school districts. By 1900, the number had risen to 17,522 (State Board of Education, 1987).

A State Office For Education

The Iowa Constitution in 1846 established the office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. The two major duties of the

state supervisor were "administration of the permanent state fund and to provide general supervision of the schools" (Smith, 1969, p. 3).

Other important duties were to interpret the school law and to improve the teaching competencies of individual teachers (Smith, 1969).

The Superintendent of Public Instruction office was not sufficiently staffed to carry out these duties. As late as 1900, the office had only three staff members: the superintendent, a deputy, and a stenographer (Smith, 1969). Given the manpower restrictions placed on the department and the poor transportation system in Iowa during the 19th century, it was almost impossible for the State Superintendent to carry out the duties bestowed upon the office. A need for a more locally administered education system arose.

The County Superintendency--The Intermediate Link

In 1858, the state legislature passed a law creating the county offices of school superintendents (Smith, 1969). The state needed a unit that was familiar with the many local school units and part of the existing governing system in the state. A county-by-county organization was their choice. Governmental offices at the county level already existed such as the county recorder, the treasurer, and the office of sheriff.

The 1858 law provided a county level administrator--the county superintendent of education. By establishing a county superintendency, the state was concentrating its educational mandate in the hands of a relatively few individuals (Trost, 1972). Although the state superintendent still maintained authority over education, most of the authority rested with the county superintendent. The 1858 mandate

directed each of Iowa's 99 counties to elect a superintendent for a two year term. The county superintendent needed no specific educational qualifications, but "had considerable power in that he issued teacher certifications" (Smith, 1969, p. 104). Although a link between the state department and the counties existed, it was informal. In 1913 the intermediate link became formal (Smith, 1969).

Trost (1972) cites three early duties of the county superintendent: (a) supervision of all teachers in the county for the improvement of instruction; (b) examination of certification of teachers; and (c) conducting institutes for professional training of teachers.

Unfortunately, the position of county superintendent was largely political and ineffective in educational matters until well into the 20th century (Smith, 1969). The county superintendent position remained a popularly elected post, the person elected needing no educational qualifications. Because the county superintendent did not of necessity possess educational expertise the post was regarded as ineffective. Richard C. Barrett, the State Superintendent in 1900, "saw a need for a change which could strengthen the position and make it one of educational leadership" (Smith, 1969, p. 104).

Early 20th Century Changes in the Intermediate Unit

Changes in the intermediate unit began to take place slowly. In 1906 the 31st General Assembly enacted legislation which transferred the power to issue teacher certificates from the county superintendent to the State Board of Educational Examiners. It also required the county superintendent to have a first grade certificate or a life diploma

(Smith, 1969). This was the first step toward enhancing the efficacy of this office.

A Change in the Selection of the Intermediate Administrator

A 1913 legislative enactment produced further changes requiring the county superintendent to meet higher standards. The presidents of the local boards of education in each county were instructed to appoint the county superintendents for three year terms (Smith, 1969). Removing the office from a popularly elected post to an appointed one strengthened the office by taking it from the political arena. The 1913 law was also important because it legally established the county superintendent as an intermediary between the state and local districts (Smith, 1969; Trost, 1972).

The development of the county as a legal unit of the state educational system had two implications. First, it established a professional basis for educational delivery. Second, the counties were better able to provide information to the Department of Public Instruction concerning local districts needs (Smith, 1969).

By upgrading the qualifications of the county superintendent, those holding that position were more knowledgeable about educational issues and were better able to meet the needs of the schools. The county superintendent, as an educator, was in a key position to facilitate the programs and efforts of the State Department of Public Instruction (Smith, 1969). The large number of one-room schools, however, still limited the county superintendents' effectiveness. Despite the changes brought about by the 1913 law, the principal task

of the county superintendent remained to "supervise and help the teachers of the rural schools" (Smith, 1969, p. 105).

Further Changes

In 1947 the position of the intermediate unit again evolved. The General Assembly enacted legislation in that year which created county boards of education. One of the boards duties was to appoint a county superintendent. The county superintendent was required by this law to hold the same certification as the one required for a superintendent in the state's larger districts (Smith, 1969). The county boards were given the power "to levy a tax to support its operations independent of the county board of supervisors" (Smith, 1969, p. 111). This action underscored the authority of the county boards and their superintendent over education by establishing extensive powers designed to improve the quality of education in Iowa.

The county superintendency during the period of 1858 to 1947 evolved into a more effective educational unit in Iowa. The majority of Iowa's school age children had the opportunity to receive free public education. Students in need of special education services, however, were largely not provided with needed programs. Special interest groups, like the Association for Retarded Children and United Cerebral Palsy, formed in the late 1940's and early 1950's and began to bring pressure on state education officials concerning the plight of special needs children (Special education, 1977). Up until the middle of the 20th century, the intermediate unit had little or no influence concerning special education.

Special Education and the Intermediate Unit

Two laws passed a decade apart had major implications for the development of the intermediate unit as the primary agency to deliver special education services. The first law, passed in 1945, established a division within the Iowa Department of Public Instruction for the "promotion, direction, and supervision of special education" (Special education, 1977, p. 1305). The second law, passed in 1955, permitted the county superintendent to provide some special education services (Special education, 1977).

The 1945 Law: The Creation of a State Division of Special Education

In 1945 the General Assembly accepted the recommendations of a 1944 State School Code Commission and created a Division of Special Education within the Department of Public Instruction (Special education, 1977). The reason for this recommendation was the disproportionate development of special education programs within the state. Twenty-six cities provided some services to handicapped children but "nothing was being done in areas where populations were sparse and school facilities meager" (Special education, 1977, p. 1305). The Division of Special Education was to promote, direct, and supervise special education throughout the state. It was directed to help overcome this apparent geographical discrimination facing handicapped children. The 1945 law provided for the issuance of certificates for special education teachers and support personnel, assumed excess costs for educating handicapped individuals, provided planning, and purchased equipment for local use (Special education, 1977).

The 1945 Act stood as an expression of the state's interest in special education but it was permissive in nature. It did not require the local communities to provide special education; it only allowed such action. The Special education Division could encourage development of special education but it was up to local initiative to implement the necessary programs. Even though local districts were promised financial assistance and professional guidance under this law, the Special Education Division hampered by meager funds and sparse staff could not deliver effectively.

The 1955 Law: The Intermediate Unit Begins to Provide Special Education

By mid-century, the individual needs of handicapped children, particularly in the rural sparsely populated areas of the state, were not being met. Rural districts had neither the money nor the handicapped populations to feasibly implement special education programs. What was desired was a way for the rural school districts to pool their resources and provide needed services. The General Assembly passed legislation in 1955 that permitted the county boards of education to enter the field of special education in order to coordinate county-wide efforts (Special education, 1977). This was the first step the state took to shape the intermediate unit as a delivery system for special education.

This 1955 law, like its 1945 counterpart, was permissive. Provision of county-wide special education programs was optional, not required. Many counties still did not opt to enter the special education field. Even though many counties refrained from offering special education, by 1960 the county school systems had become the primary providers of

special education services (Special education, 1977). A study in 1960 noted that special education had evolved as the intermediate unit's major function (Iowa Research Committee On the Intermediate Administrative Unit, 1960).

Since the counties were geographically larger than local districts and had independent taxing authority, they were in a better position to provide funding and administrative leadership to direct special education. Yet some of the counties were still unable or unwilling to provide these needed services. There was widespread dissatisfaction with the county units (Special education, 1977; Iowa Research Committee On the Intermediate Administrative Unit, 1960).

CHAPTER III

THE COUNTY INTERMEDIATE UNIT--1957 TO 1974

Contributions For Change

The county intermediate unit had another period of change beginning in 1957 and continuing until 1974 with the passage of Senate File 1163. A number of contributions combined to bring these changes. Improvements in transportation and communication during the 20th century influenced the role of the county superintendent. Another determinant was the state's interest in school reorganization and the development of three state goals for education: equality, economy, and efficiency. This reorganization had a twofold impact on the intermediate unit. First, the county's school boards were charged with developing plans for reorganization. Second, reorganization reduced the number of schools served by each county.

Transportation and Communication

Advancements in transportation and communication technology had a positive effect on American education. Both were major obstacles for county superintendents in the early 20th century (May, 1956). By the middle of the century, greater mobility allowed the county superintendent to spend less time in traveling and more time in the schools (Smith 1969). Improvement in communication technology allowed greater facilitation of information for the county superintendents. Information in regard to the local districts, as well as information provided the schools was made more accessible through improvements in communication.

Reorganization and the Intermediate Unit

The basic objectives for education were first spelled out by the Iowa General Assembly in a 1945 statute. Education was to be economical, efficient, and equal (State Board of Education, 1987). These goals were reiterated in a 1953 statute that made it "the official policy to encourage school reorganization" (Kruger, 1983, p. 8). Some state legislators were unwilling to force school district reorganization. They preferred to let the local districts take the initiative. The legislature did, however, set some guidelines and requested that county school boards and superintendents conduct studies "for the purpose of promoting reorganization" (Kruger, 1983, p. 8).

School reorganization was imperative if the state was to meet its educational goals. A reduction in the number of local school districts was viewed as necessary if education was to become economically efficient. In the 1952-53 school year there were 4,142 school districts throughout the state (State Board of Education, 1987). Many of these local districts were thought to be too small to be efficient. During the late 1950's the state sought plans from the county superintendent for the elimination of only the smallest districts--the one-room school houses (Kruger, 1983). In 1957, the General Assembly enacted a formal legislative mandate for reorganization based on the county studies.

According to Kruger (1983), there was little mass resistance for this first reorganization mandate because it aimed only to eliminate the smallest, most inefficient local districts. Iowan's generally supported this movement believing it would create better educational programs (Smith, 1969). Iowa led the nation in reducing the number of

school districts from 1955 to 1959 (Smith, 1969). Between these years, the total number of Iowa school districts was reduced from 3,471 to 1,448 (Iowa Education Directory, 1954-55; Iowa Education Directory, 1959-60).

As noted above, the studies and surveys conducted by intermediate unit officials aided reorganization efforts and led to a decrease in school districts. This decrease in the number of schools caused by reorganization resulted in a major change in the county intermediate unit. Because the small rural schools offered only elementary education and did not employ superintendents of their own, the county superintendents maintained a supervisory responsibility over rural school programs and teachers. The elimination of a number of local schools decreased the responsibilities of the county superintendent while services like special education were still needed. In recognition of the changing role of the intermediate unit, the state offered counties a new option for organization--the Joint County Agreement.

Joint County Agreements:

A Second Option For Intermediate Organization

In 1957, the Iowa General Assembly enacted legislation that allowed counties to jointly employ superintendents. Two or more adjacent counties were allowed to enter into joint agreements for the employment of the county superintendent. This law did not create a new type of intermediate unit but made existing units larger. Each county continued to have its own school board. The educational policies of each county continued as before. The county superintendent in this joint county

unit continued to supervise the rural elementary schools, however, supervision was over a much larger geographical area.

The county boards had the authority to create joint agreements. The rationale for changing the intermediate unit was to reduce the number of intermediate administrators, thus decreasing the costs of education to the counties. The counties were not required to form joint agreements. Instead, each county was given the option according to the 1957 law. Once an agreement was established it could be changed. For example, two counties could jointly employ a superintendent one year and later they might decide to employ separate administrators.

Two adjacent counties with differing educational goals or policies were unlikely to form joint county agreements. A county acting as a service unit for the promotion of special education located near another county without these services was not likely to form a joint agreement. Thus, the goal of providing equal educational opportunities was not greatly enhanced by this intermediate option.

Special Education Under Joint County Agreements

There were few changes in the delivery of special education under the joint county agreements. Each county unit continued its activities for special education as before. The 1955 law had allowed the counties the option to enter the field of special education as a coordinating agency. In 1957 the counties organized in joint agreements also had this option. But still the delivery of special education fell short of the demand for these services (Special education, 1977).

In summary, the joint county agreements did little to promote special education in the counties that did not previously have

established programs. In effect, the main result of the joint county agreements was the reduction in the number of administrators at the intermediate level.

Joint County Mergers: A Third Option

In 1965, the counties were availed a third option for organization through legislative action (Special education, 1977). Counties were allowed to merge thus becoming regional agencies for education. Under the joint county agreement option, each county maintained its own board of education. Now two or more adjacent counties were allowed to merge their school boards, forming a multi-county board for education. Joint county mergers, like the agreements, employed a superintendent as the administrator over the multi-county unit. The main difference between county mergers and the agreements was the development of a regional option rather than counties remaining as separate entities.

The Impact of Further Reorganization on the Intermediate Unit

In 1965, the General Assembly also enacted legislation requiring all independent elementary school districts to attach themselves to a high school district (Smith, 1969). This forced reorganization of schools which were not supporting a high school met with much resistance. The General Assembly, unwilling to make the decision on how to organize the non-high school districts, gave the responsibility to the intermediate units. Some of the rural communities perceived the intermediate unit as the entity forcing them to reorganize. This resulted in a great deal of animosity (Kruger, 1983).

Without the rural elementary schools to supervise, the county superintendent's role was limited to record keeping and providing

educational services to schools (State Board of Education, 1987). The elimination of non-high school districts made regional organization of the intermediate units possible. By organizing as regional entities, the intermediate units could provide needed services to the local districts. Also joint county mergers had the tax base to support these special services.

Not all counties embraced this option, however. By 1975, there remained 22 single county intermediate units. Joint county agreements encompassed 46 other counties with 18 superintendents. The remaining 31 counties were organized in merged intermediate units with 10 superintendents (Iowa Educational Directory, 1974-75).

The Three Options and the Provision of Special Services

The option the county chose for organizing its intermediate unit did not correlate with how adequately the county provided special services to the local districts. Many of the single county units embraced the opportunity of extending the role of the county superintendent to include the provision of educational services. All ten merged joint counties offered the local districts some special services (Special education, 1977).

The real impetus for whether the intermediate unit would provide such services came in two areas. The first was the county superintendent. If the county superintendent was interested, knowledgeable, and concerned about special education services, they were more likely to be offered (Kruger, 1983). The second was the parent's and/or special service groups' demand for services (Special

education, 1977). The concentration of these groups was primarily in the urban areas, thus, the demand was greatest in cities.

The best indicator of whether special services were to be provided was the population of the locale (Special education, 1977). Sparsely populated areas were less likely to offer services even at the county level. This inequality of services was a concern of the state educational agency, but there was no state law mandating the provision of these needed services. The failure of both the county intermediate units and the local school districts to meet the needs of handicapped children demonstrated the need for a change in the delivery of these services (Special education, 1977).

CHAPTER IV

THE AREA EDUCATION AGENCY: 1974 TO THE PRESENT

The unequal delivery of special services and the realization that equal access was necessary, prompted the state to seek a change in the intermediate educational unit. The Iowa Department of Public Instruction formally recommended the formation of "regional administrative units to provide quality special education instruction and support services" (Special education, 1977, p. 1311). Pressure mounted for quality special education programming. The political climate in Iowa was ready for change.

The Impact of Special Education Issues On the Intermediate Unit

By the 1970's the county intermediate unit was the main education agent providing special education services to the state's handicapped children (Iowa Research Committee On the Intermediate Administrative Unit, 1960). The neglect of some school districts and county units to provide needed services accentuated the failure of the state's permissive stance.

Local initiative and politics hindered the development of an equal distribution of special education services. According to Kruger (1983), so did the state's school finance system. Limited state aid was available for only a fraction of the excess costs of special education. On the average, seventy to seventy-five percent of the funds expended by the county school systems were for special education (Special education, 1977). State school officials entertained little hope that local districts could provide the needed special services. Studies by various legislative committees concluded that "there was

little likelihood that local school districts in Iowa would ever be in a position to economically and effectively provide all needed services" (Special education, 1977, p. 1310). These studies demonstrated a need for a more effective organizational system for special education encompassing the local, intermediate, and state levels (Special education, 1977).

Ironically, the performance of the non-rural districts brought the issue to the attention of the legislature. Exemplary programs offered in larger cities emphasized the need for special education services in all districts. The legislature was "plagued with complaints about inequitable services" (Kruger, 1983, p. 17).

Pressure For Equality

Pressure was being applied at the state level to ensure equal educational opportunities for the state's handicapped children (Special education, 1977; Kruger, 1983). Parent and charitable groups kept the issue constantly before the legislature (Special education, 1977). Lobbying efforts of groups such as the Association of Retarded Children and United Cerebral Palsy of Iowa provided impetus for legislative studies. In some places, private interest groups, like Exceptional Persons Incorporated in Waterloo, operated their own educational programs for special populations (R. W. Mooers, personal communication, September 2, 1987). The success of such programs heightened the legislators' awareness of the need for comprehensive legislation.

The State Department of Public Instruction, "protective of its administrative interest in special education," (Special education, 1977) also began offering recommendations for reform. A report offering

recommendations was submitted in January of 1974 to the 65th General Assembly by the Iowa State Board of Public Instruction. Merging or consolidating the then present county boards of education into regional education agencies was one such recommendation (State Board of Public Instruction, 1974). A further recommendation was that these agencies should provide special education services to include: (a) special education instructional programs, (b) special education support personnel, and (c) special education directors (State Board of Public Instruction, 1974).

The Political Climate in 1974

With pressure mounting, the 65th General Assembly took their seats on January 16th of 1974. Both chambers of the Assembly held clear Republican majorities. The Governor, Robert Ray, was also a Republican. The State of Iowa had a budget surplus and 1974 was an election year. All these factors combined to make the political climate ripe to allow for change.

On the first day of the new session, Governor Ray gave his state of the State address to a joint session of the General Assembly (Full text of Governor Ray's state of the State message, 1974). In this speech Ray gave brief mention of the need to change the structure of special education in the state (Full text of Governor Ray's state of the State message, 1974). The same day, a leading Democrat complained that the Governor had avoided every issue for which the Democrats pushed (Flansburg, 1974). The pressures for change probably had been brought to bear and the Governor did not wish to make this an issue in the upcoming elections.

The fact that both houses of the legislature were controlled by Republicans and that the Republican Governor had called for a change, bears some notice. This control meant that if the legislature wanted to make changes in the delivery of special education, it would meet with little resistance from the minority party. Willard Hansen, the chairman of the Senate School Committee (where the bill was assigned), spoke out in favor of the bill (Study new handicapped school plan, 1974).

With a budget surplus, the state legislature could more readily support a change in the intermediate unit. At this time, the state could afford the higher costs of changing from a county based system to a regional system for education intermediate units. Even with this favorable political climate, the remaining issues confronting the legislature were enormous.

Assumptions About Creating Area Education Agencies

As noted earlier, the county intermediate units prior to 1974 failed to provide equal services to the state's handicapped students. A first assumption about creating regional service agencies, therefore, was that they would provide equalization of services to handicapped population across the state. A second assumption was that the financial burden for special education services would be equally distributed throughout the state. The wealth of the district would not be a consideration for the provision of needed services. A third assumption was that the AEAs would be in position to provide services to students with low incidence disabilities (for example blind and deaf students). In the past, only large districts offered services in low incidence

areas. Such students from rural schools usually did not receive needed services locally or were provided for in the state institutions (e.g. the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School). A fourth assumption was that the AEAs would allow the handicapped students to receive services in or near their home districts. These students would not have to travel great distances for services. A fifth assumption was that similar geographic sized areas and student populations would be chosen for the AEAs. With these similarities among the AEAs, it was assumed equal services would result (L. Courtnage, personal communications, December 15, 1987).

All these rationales for creating the Area Education Agencies were based on the needs of the handicapped population throughout the state. It was believed the AEAs would be in the best position to provide equal educational services to the state's handicapped students.

Issues Facing the Creation of a New Intermediate Unit

When the General Assembly met in 1974, there were a number of questions for the legislature to face regarding the possible change in the delivery system of special education. Change may have been a foregone conclusion, yet these questions required critical decisions:

(a) Could the proposed intermediate service agencies be combined with the existing Merged Area Schools system--Iowa's vocational and community college system? (b) What was to be the geographical boundaries and the administrative structure of these intermediate service agencies? (c) How were these agencies to be governed and financed? (d) What were to be the duties of these agencies?

Merged Area Schools and the Impact On the Intermediate Unit

The Merged Area Schools, Iowa's first regional educational units, were created in 1965. These units were designated as either community colleges or vocational technical schools (Area vocational schools and community colleges, 1987). Federal legislation--the 1963 Vocational Educational Act--made funds available for the creation of such units. Iowa had already begun to investigate the possibility of creating post secondary education units. Studies conducted by the Department of Public Instruction and reported to the General Assembly in 1962 called for a system that would include both regional services to local school districts (like special education and other educational services) and community colleges (State Board of Education, 1987). With passage of the Vocational Education Act, however, the feasibility of intermediate units for dual purpose roles were discarded in favor of 15 Merged Area Schools for the single purpose of post secondary education.

Aware of the 1962 proposal to create a regional education system which included both community colleges and regional services to the local schools, the General Assembly in 1974 began to investigate the possibility of such a system. Many issues were introduced such as the geographic configuration, duties, governing structure, and financial considerations of the regional units. Education officials across the state lined up on either side of this dual purpose system. Local school officials and county school officials, for the most part, took the oppositional position against such a system. The State Board of Public Instruction and Merged Area School officials were primarily proponents of the dual purpose system (State Board of Education, 1987). The

development of intermediate service agencies were bound to the following question: Should a dual purpose regional system be created or a regional service delivery system separate from the Merged Area Schools?

Geographical Configuration of the New Intermediate Units

Several options were available concerning geographical configuration of the new intermediate units. One option was for the legislature to appoint a commission to decide on possible alternatives. A commission plan required time for study, reporting, and implementation. A second option was to use recommendations presented by the Iowa Research Committee On the Intermediate Administrative Unit (1960). These proposals called for 26 to 36 individual units.

In January of 1974 the State Board of Public Instruction recommended a third option, the formation of 15 or 16 intermediate administrative units (State Board of Public Instruction, 1974). Because the State Board of Public Instruction favored the dual purpose regional system, this recommendation reflected its position. This third option was to use the boundaries already established by the Merged Area Schools. If this third geographic option was selected it would make it easier to create a system combining the Merged Area Schools with the proposed regional service delivery system.

Proponents of combining the proposed regional service delivery system with the Merged Area Schools pointed out the expediency of using the existing Merged Area Schools' boundaries. The configuration was already in place so the financial and time costs of study could be bypassed. In the end, the geographic configuration of the Merged Area Schools was selected (State Board of Education, 1987).

Duties, Governance, and Finance of the AEAs

The duties of the proposed intermediate educational agencies included special education, media, and other educational services. Those opposed to combining with the Merged Area Schools pointed out that these services primarily served the needs of elementary and secondary students, whereas the Merged Area Schools primarily served post secondary students (State Board of Education, 1987). They argued that the proposed intermediate educational agencies should be separate from the Merged Area Schools.

Governance of the proposed intermediate educational agencies was a definitive issue. The local school districts wanted the authority to appoint the board members of the proposed intermediate unit proportionate to the student population of the districts being served. The board members of the Merged Area Schools, however, were popularly elected (Area vocational schools and community colleges, 1987). A change in board membership selection would have to occur before the local school district officials would cede their support. Eventually the governance structure suggested by the local districts was accepted (Area education agency, 1987).

The debate concerning the creation of a dual purpose regional system or a separate regional service delivery system continued. An intermediate educational unit separate from the Merged Area Schools was finally adopted by the General Assembly (State Board of Education, 1987). Financing this regional service delivery system, however, still needed to be solved.

The question was whether the AEA should be given the independent taxing authority for its activities, like the Merged Area Schools, or whether the state should provide the funds (Kruger, 1983). The Merged Area Schools had been given considerable influence over their financing. The county school board also had considerable influence over finance through an ability to levy a local property tax (Smith, 1969). Even with this authority the counties had not provided adequate programs for special education.

The General Assembly was "hesitant to grant local property taxing authority to these agencies" (State Board of Education, 1987, p. 21). If the legislature granted independent taxing authority to the regional service agencies it was believed it would create an inequitable system and would become a fiscal anomaly for the state. A combination of local property taxes, local school budgets, and state aid was finally adopted. Special education support services were to be provided through the state's minimum foundation aid; instructional programs for special education would receive state funds through a weighted formula; media and other services were financed through local property taxes; and other funds were to come from the local school budgets (State Board of Education, 1987).

In May of 1974, the state legislature passed Senate File 1163. The 1974-75 school year was a period of transition between ending the activities of the counties and starting the operations of the newly created AEAs. On July 1, 1975 the 15 Area Educational Agencies commenced operations (Area education agency, 1987). The AEA system has existed since that time.

The Impact of S. F. 1163 on Special Education

Education for all Iowa's children from 0 to 21 years of age requiring special education was mandated by Senate File 1163. Part of this law amended chapter 281 of the Iowa Code. This chapter states that the policy of the state is to "require school districts and state operated educational programs to provide . . . for a free and appropriate public education sufficient to meet the needs of all children requiring special education" (Education of children requiring special education, 1987, p. 139). The primary responsibility to provide special education rests with each school district in which the child lives. S. F. 1163 specifically created a division of special education within each of the 15 Area Education Agencies (Area education agency, 1987). Even though the local district was charged with the responsibility for providing special education, the monitoring of special education programs and services was vested in the director of special education.

The AEA director of special education was charged with the responsibility "for implementation of state regulations and guidelines relating to special education programs and services" (Area education agency, 1987, p. 84). The director was given the following powers and duties:

1. Properly identify children requiring special education.
2. Insure that each child requiring special education in the area receives an appropriate special education program or service.
3. Assign appropriate weights for each child requiring special education programs or services . . .
4. Supervise special education support personnel.
5. Provide each school district within the area served and the department of education with a special education weighted enrollment count . . .
6. Submit to the department of education special education instructional and support program plans and applications . . .

7. Co-ordinate the special education program within the area served. (Area education agency, 1987, p. 84)

The AEA director of special education is delegated authority over the education of handicapped children based on these powers and duties provided by S. F. 1163. The director is charged with the duty to identify who is and is not handicapped, the responsibility to decide the appropriate placement for the identified child, and has the final authority on the level of service for each child financed through a weighted formula. This weighted formula determines the amount of money each local district will receive from the state.

The division of special education under the AEA system also employs support personnel which may include the following professionals: school psychologists, school social workers, audiologists, speech/language clinicians, vision specialists, pre-school handicapped specialists and home bound teachers, work experience coordinators, special education nurses and motor coordinators, occupational therapists, physical therapists, hearing impaired teachers, special education teachers, and consultants. The AEA's secure these support services through a system of pooling resources in proportion to the needs of each district.

The intermediate unit, under the AEA system, was established to provide equal and efficient special education programs to the state's handicapped children. The AEA's may vary in terms of area, student population, local school districts, and service personnel, but in terms of special education delivery, the 15 Area Education Agencies are fairly equal (State Board of Education, 1987).

CHAPTER V

THE FUTURE: PLANS FOR RESTRUCTURING THE INTERMEDIATE EDUCATIONAL UNIT

The 1986 Mandate

In 1986, the Iowa General Assembly issued a mandate to the Department of Education calling for it to develop plans for "the restructuring of school districts, area education agencies, and merged area schools with specific emphasis on combining the area education agencies with the merged area schools" (State Board of Education, 1987, p. i). In 1987 the legislature amended this mandate to include plans to redraw the boundary lines of the intermediate Area Education Agencies to include . . . "no fewer than four nor greater than twelve" . . . units (State Board of Education, 1987, p. i). It was mandated that all plans for reorganization must be submitted to the General Assembly by January 8, 1990. The intent for this mandate appeared to be motivated by Iowa's poor economy, and the need for equality and cost efficiency.

Rational for the Mandate

The motivation for the legislative mandate may stem from various events and perceptions about the condition of education in Iowa. The State has experienced economic hardships in the first part of this decade. An economic recession has enveloped the nation's farm sector. This has had a negative influence on Iowa's economy. The legislature's 1986 mandate for the State Board of Education has been one attempt to make education in Iowa more economically sound.

Population changes in the 1970's and 80's also seemed to influence the decision to issue the mandate. The baby boom of the post-war era had run its course by 1980. Iowa, like so much of the nation,

experienced a decrease in school-age population. Along with the decrease in school-age populations, Iowa experienced a population shift away from the rural communities. The legislature was concerned with the quality of education in the state particularly in the rural areas.

Inequalities in Iowa's educational system were noted by the state legislature. Rural school districts were unable to offer the course selection that large school districts offered. The "basics" were offered by the rural districts but the small populations and added costs inhibited advanced courses or the availability of special course offerings. This development concerned the legislature. By calling for plans for reorganization the legislature probably had these educational differences in mind.

Has Iowa education system fallen behind that of other states? College entrance scores were cited as the proof that this phenomenon may be happening. Iowa's position relative to these indicators steadily decreased as the decade continued. It is likely that the legislature reacted to this perceived decrease in the quality of education in Iowa and sought alternatives from the state agency.

State Board of Education Suggests Future Options

Reorganization of Local Districts

Restructuring of the regional agencies should not take place until a decision over local district reorganization are complete (State Board of Education, 1987). The reason for this recommendation from the State Board is obvious. If regional agencies are reorganized without first taking into account the reorganization of the local districts, then changes will inevitably reoccur when local districts merge.

Four plans for restructuring the local districts have been put forward:

1. A minimum enrollment plan (1,000 student minimum advocated).
2. A county-like school system plan.
3. A natural progression plan.
4. A restructuring commission plan. (State Board of Education, 1987, p. 24)

Each of these plans have been discussed in detail in the State Board report (see State Board of Education, 1987, pp. 24-28). The plans for reorganizing the local district are important to the discussion because the State Board of Education believes decisions concerning local reorganization have to come about before AEA reorganization can occur.

Merging the AEAs with the Merged Area Schools

The General Assembly in 1986 mandated that the State Board of Education investigate plans for merging the AEAs with the Merged Area Schools. The State Board deemed that this proposed merger did not seem feasible and recommended the abandonment of this plan (State Board of Education, 1987). Earlier legislatures concluded that the two regional educational agencies should remain separate. The State Board of Education report (1987) offered two possible explanations why the 1986 General Assembly made this proposal: either the members of the 71st General Assembly disagreed with the conclusions of the earlier legislatures, or they thought that combining the two regional agencies might lead to greater efficiencies (State Board of Education, 1987).

The State Board of Education report (1987) states that the merger between the AEAs and the Merged Area Schools was inappropriate for the following reasons: (a) the reasons considered in 1965 and 1974, for example, to facilitate organizing a regional delivery system, are no

longer valid; (b) combining these agencies would bring about complete disruption in current programs and services; (c) the two regional units serve two different constituencies; and (d) financial savings for merging these agencies may be questioned (State Board of Education, 1987).

The 12 year separation of the two educational units may also deter a merger at the present time. The AEAs and the Merged Area Schools serve two different populations, have separate funding systems, and their boards are selected differently. Even if it was possible to bring these two education systems together, very likely the disruption of services would be a heavy price to pay. As for the possibility of financial savings, the State Board of Education indicated that another layer of administration may be needed to coordinate the variety of services and programs of the merged system (State Board of Education, 1987). For the above reasons, combining the AEAs with the Merged Area Schools may not be a viable option to the State Board.

The Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) supported the State Board of Education's position against the merger proposal. The IASB newsletter of August 21, 1987 stated that such a merger would "undermine school stability" in the state (Iowa Association of School Boards, 1987, p. 2).

Alternative Plans For Merging the Area Education Agencies

Two assumptions were made by the State Board of Education (1987) concerning the proposed reorganization plans. First, a need remained for intermediate service agencies. Second, the three main service areas (special education, media, and educational services) should

continue under the AEAs. These assumptions are reflected in the plans submitted by the State Board of Education.

The AEA boundaries was a major issue for the State Board of Education. In 1974, the geographic configuration of the AEAs was accepted to expedite the development of a regional service delivery system. At that time, these boundaries already existed in the Merged Area Schools.

Nine merger plans were proposed in the State Board of Education report of 1987 (see Appendix A). These plans reduced the number of intermediate units from the current 15 to between 6 and 12 agencies. The recommendations by the State Board called for combining the AEAs along current boundaries (except for the plan for 6 agencies which divided the state into six sections). The boundaries in these plans reflected more equitably sized agencies with similar geographic areas. The criteria necessary for the formation of these new AEAs such as the minimum area an AEA should retain or the number of students necessary for each AEA, however, were not presented. Rather, the report stated that these criteria would be submitted along with the 1990 plans (State Board of Education, 1987).

The reduced number of AEAs using the existing agency boundaries probably would not achieve total equity among the regions. Since almost half of the population in Iowa is located in east and central section of the state (see Appendix B), a uniform geographic redistribution would mean a disproportionate population distribution. The Board's report offers some proposed alternatives for geographic redistribution,

but no criteria for making decisions concerning the implications and effect on services were offered.

The Special Education Directors' Recommendations

The AEA Directors of Special Education met in June of 1987 to respond to a request by Frank Vance, State Director of Special Education, concerning possible restructuring of Area Education Agencies. Their response was based on five assumptions concerning the AEA structure. First, the directors emphasized the efficiency of the present structure. Second, the directors stated they were in an advantageous position to recognize the prominent elements of a successful delivery system. Third, the goal of restructuring should be to design the most effective model to use for special education delivery. Fourth, since 75 percent of the AEA activities center on special education, any design should maximize the ability to deliver these services. Fifth, the present 15 AEAs have proven to be a very effective delivery system and their integrity should be maintained (AEA Directors of Special Education, 1987).

The most important consideration for any change of the AEAs, according to the directors, is that the special education division should remain capable of providing a free and appropriate education for the handicapped children in the least restrictive environment. Addressing only special education concerns, the directors identified five issues and developed recommendations for each one. The concerns were: (a) funding, (b) geographic and student enrollment considerations, (c) provision of services to children in low incidence categories,

(d) administration span of control, and (e) personnel (AEA Directors of Special Education, 1987).

The Directors recommended the current funding model be maintained. They feared discontinuation of this funding system would lead to uncertainty for the system.

The directors also recommended geographically square AEAs with centrally located administrative offices. The points of service delivery should not be more than 50 miles from the source. The travel distance under the directors' proposals in many instances would be considerably shorter for some AEA's than in the current AEA structure.

Student enrollment within the geographical area of an AEA should be at least 40,000 pupils from Kindergarten through 12th grade. Also, each AEA should include at least one metropolitan area or two to three school districts with a collective enrollment with a minimum of 10,000 pupils. At present, only four AEAs have enrollments over 40,000 students.

The AEAs should maintain the ability to modify traditional programs to meet the needs of handicapped children, particularly those in low incidence categories. Currently the AEAs have the flexibility to provide these needed services. The directors recommend this should continue within any plan for reorganization.

The directors believe that the administrative span of control under the current AEA division of special education is sound. Under the current system the directors of special education have the responsibility to: (a) identify the children in need of special education services, (b) ensure that each child requiring special

education receives the appropriate services, and (c) provide special education support personnel. No recommendations were offered by the directors of special education to change this system.

As for support personnel (those professionals employed to help provide special education services such as listed above on page 31), the directors recommended that the AEAs should continue current practices of providing well trained and highly qualified staff for special education support services.

In summary, the directors stated that the current structure has resulted in very effective and efficient delivery of special services. They maintain that the current structure should continue unless there is a clear indication that any proposed changes would result in a more effective programming for handicapped children (AEA Directors of Special Education, 1987). If changes are to occur, however, the recommendations put forward by this group concerning the geographic configuration and student populations of the new AEAs, would be a radical divergence from the present system. Combining present AEAs as the State Board of Education recommends would not achieve the square geographic configurations which the AEA Directors of Special Education recommend. If the enrollment criterion proposed by the AEA Directors of Special Education of 40,000 students (K-12) is accepted, then significant change in the present system would be necessary. Using 1985 student enrollment figures, 11 of the 15 AEAs fall short of this criterion. The recommendations of the AEA Directors of Special Education are significant: either leave the present system as it is or prepare for radical changes in the intermediate unit.

CHAPTER VI

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND THE INTERMEDIATE UNIT:

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRESENT PRACTICES AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES

The primary goal of Iowa's special education law has been to provide a free and appropriate education sufficient to meet the needs of all children requiring special education (Education of children requiring special education, 1987). Equality of educational opportunities for handicapped children commensurate with the level of opportunities for non-handicapped children appears to be the objective of this law. From the inception of S. F. 1163 in 1974, Iowa's 15 AEAs have been the primary delivery system for special education.

The Iowa 71st General Assembly, in its search for a more economically efficient education organization, has challenged the current structure of the intermediate unit. The legislature, cognizant of the differences between the AEAs both in geographic area and student population, mandated the State Board of Education submit plans for reducing the number of AEAs (State Board of Education, 1987). By issuing this mandate, the General Assembly sought a more equal distribution and cost efficient intermediate delivery system.

The AEA System: Reasons For Change

The 15 current AEAs are unequal in geographic area and student population. The state legislature concerned with this fact and the continued high costs of education (including the AEA system), sought alternatives from the State Board of Education for restructuring the system. Change in the current intermediate delivery system will become more probable when criteria for a more efficient system is identified.

Any change, however, should not compromise the equality of educational opportunities for the state's handicapped student populations.

AEA Disparities

Currently there is an unequal distribution between the AEAs in both geographic area and student populations. Table 1 shows these differences between the 15 Area Education Agencies in terms of students population and geographic area. Appendix C offers a visual display of the current AEAs and the geographic configurations.

The geographic areas of the AEA's vary from just over 1,600 square miles in AEA 16 to almost 6,600 square miles of AEA 11, with almost a 5,000 square mile area disparity between the largest and the smallest AEA. As noted previously, the boundaries of the AEAs were established in 1974 to be coterminous with the existing boundaries of the Merged Area Schools. If equal distribution in geographic area becomes a major consideration, these boundaries may need to be adjusted. If disparity in the geographic areas among AEAs adversely effects special education programs, some redistribution of area becomes a probability.

Student populations in the AEAs vary (see table 1). AEA 11 is the largest service agency with over 106,800 students; AEA 14 has the smallest student population with approximately 12,700. The total number of students may effect an agency's ability to efficiently provide some special programs. For example, an AEA with a low student population may have more difficulty providing programs to children with low incidence disabilities as effectively or effeciently as an AEA with a larger population.

Table 1

The Variability of the Current AEA System

AEA	Students (K-12)	Geographic Area (in square miles)
1	43,193	5,062
2	23,115	3,653
3	15,255	2,984
4	13,651	2,517
5	27,347	5,065
6	17,692	2,472
7	37,564	2,742
9	57,971	2,510
10	60,183	4,294
11	106,860	6,596
12	32,977	3,894
13	34,197	4,450
14	12,696	3,927
15	25,643	4,799
16	20,388	1,604

Note. Estimated student enrollment in Fall, 1985 (both public school districts and private schools) (Iowa Educational Directory, 1985).

The Disparity of the State Board's Proposals

The alternatives developed by the State Board of Education for consolidating the AEAs had some disparities when considering geographic area and student population. As noted in chapter V, 8 of the 9 proposed plans (see Appendix A) to reduce the number of AEAs utilize consolidation along current AEA boundaries (see Appendix C). Tables 2 through 9 display these 8 alternatives concerning student population and geographic area for the consolidated AEAs. The 9th proposal by the State Board of Education, the creation of 6 relatively equal geographic units, is represented by table 10. The examination of the 9 alternatives was necessary to understand the disparities which existed in the proposals by the State Board of Education. The 2 quantitative recommendations of the AEA directors of special education were utilized in this investigation. This group recommended that if a change in the AEA system was to occur, (a) relatively equal geographic square units should be created with (b) a minimum enrollment criterion of 40,000 students.

To complete this investigation, it was necessary to analyze the variability of each these plans and the current AEA structure. Table 11 displays the disparities within each of the proposed plans and the current AEA structure. For this investigation, a comparison between the largest and the smallest intermediate units (in terms of both geographic area and student population) was completed.

Table 2

State Board of Education's Proposed Plan For 12 AEAs: Map 1

AEA	Students (K-12)	Geographic Area (in square miles)
1	43,193	5,062
2	23,115	3,653
3 & 4	28,876	5,501
5	27,347	5,065
6 & 7	55,356	5,214
9	57,971	2,510
10	60,183	4,294
11	106,860	6,596
12	32,977	3,894
13	34,197	4,450
14 & 15	38,339	8,726
16	20,388	1,604

Note. Estimated student enrollment in Fall 1985 (both public school districts and private schools) (Iowa Educational Directory, 1985).

The first alternative presented by the State Board of Education, developed 12 intermediate units (see table 2). Under this alternative, 7 of the 12 units would have an enrollment under 40,000 students. This factor plus the difference in geographic area (from 1,604 to over 8,700) represented a larger disparity between the intermediate units than under the present system.

Table 3

State Board of Education's Proposed Plan For 11 AEAs: Map 2

AEA	Students (K-12)	Geographic Area (in square miles)
1	43,193	5,062
2	23,115	3,653
3 & 5	42,602	8,049
4 & 12	46,628	6,411
6 & 7	55,256	5,214
9	57,971	2,510
10	60,183	4,294
11	106,860	6,596
13 & 14	46,893	8,377
15	25,643	4,799
16	20,388	1,604

Note. Estimated Student enrollment in Fall, 1985 (both public school districts and private schools) (Iowa Educational Directory, 1985).

The second alternative presented by the State Board of Education has 11 AEAs. Under this plan, 3 of the intermediate units had enrollments under the 40,000 minimum (see table 3). The geographic configuration under this plan also varied significantly; AEA 16 still had only about 1,600 square miles and 2 AEAs had over 8,000 square miles. The disparity among the AEAs under this plan also were greater than under the present system.

Table 4

State Board of Education's Proposed Plan For 10 AEAs: Map 3

AEA	Students (K-12)	Geographic Area (in square miles)
1	43,193	5,062
2	23,115	3,653
3 & 5	42,602	8,049
4 & 12	46,628	6,411
6 & 7	55,256	5,214
9	57,971	2,510
10	60,183	4,294
11	106,860	6,596
13 & 14	46,893	8,377
15 & 16	46,031	6,403

Note. Estimated Student enrollment in Fall, 1985 (both public school districts and private schools) (Iowa Educational Directory, 1985).

The next two alternatives presented by the State Board of Education have 10 intermediate units. These two plans were similar but varied in how AEA 14 and AEA 15 were treated. In the first, AEA 14 was combined with AEA 13, and AEA 15 was combined with AEA 16 (see table 4). In the second, AEA 14 was divided between AEA 13 and AEA 11; AEA 15 was divided between AEA 11 and AEA 16 (see table 5). Both these options for 10 intermediate units had geographic and student population disparities. In both plans, AEA 2 remained isolated with an enrollment

Table 5

State Board of Education's Proposed Plan For 10 AEA's: Map 4

AEA	Students (K-12)	Geographic Area (in square miles)
1	43,193	5,062
2	23,115	3,653
3 & 5	42,602	8,049
4 & 12	46,628	6,411
6 & 7	55,256	5,214
9	57,971	2,510
10	60,183	4,294
11, 14* & 15*	126,327^	11,125^
13 & 14*	36,715^	5,432^
15* & 16	37,846^	4,819^

Note. Estimated Student enrollment in Fall, 1985 (both public school districts and private school) (Iowa Educational Directory, 1985).

* - indicates a portion of an AEA; ^ - indicates figures used by State Board of Education (1987).

of less than 25,000 students. AEA 9 also remained isolated with a geographic area just over 2,500 square miles. The disparities in student enrollment and geographic area under these two plans for 10 intermediate units were still large.

The State Board of Education presented 4 different plans for 9 intermediate units. The first two plans for 9 intermediate units were

Table 6

State Board of Education's Proposed Plan For 9 AEAs: Map 5

AEA	Students (K-12)	Geographic Area (in square miles)
1	43,193	5,062
2	23,115	3,653
3 & 5	42,602	8,049
4 & 12	46,628	6,411
6 & 7	55,256	5,214
9 & 10	118,154	6,804
11	106,860	6,596
13 & 14	46,893	8,377
15 & 16	46,031	6,403

Note. Estimated Student enrollment in Fall, 1985 (both public school districts and private schools) (Iowa Educational Directory, 1985).

similar to the plans for 10 AEAs except that AEA 9 and AEA 10 were combined. The geographic configurations of the AEAs under the first plan for 9 intermediate units portrayed the most equal distribution of any of the plans for consolidation by the State Board of Education (see table 6). The geographic configurations varied from just over 3,600 square miles to just over 8,300 miles. Under the second plan, one AEA was over 11,000 square miles (see table 7). A disparity in student populations still existed under both these proposals, however, because AEA 2 still encompassed less than 25,000 students.

Table 7

State Board of Education's Proposed Plan For 9 AEAs: Map 6

AEA	Students (K-12)	Geographic Area (in square miles)
1	43,193	5,062
2	23,115	3,653
3 & 5	42,602	8,049
4 & 12	46,628	6,411
6 & 7	55,256	5,214
9 & 10	118,154	6,804
11, 14* & 15*	126,327 [^]	11,125 [^]
13 & 14*	36,715 [^]	5,432 [^]
15* & 16	37,846 [^]	4,819 [^]

Note. Estimated Student enrollment in Fall, 1985 (both public school districts and private school) (Iowa Educational Directory, 1985).

* - indicates a portion of an AEA; ^ - indicates figures used by State Board of Education (1987).

The last two plans presented by the State Board of Education took into consideration the disparity with AEA 2. These last 2 plans for 9 intermediate units combined AEA 2 with the unit which encompassed AEAs 3 and 5. The first one, however, still had 2 intermediate units with enrollment less than 40,000 students and 2 AEAs with a geographic configuration of over 11,000 square miles (see table 8). The next one

Table 8

State Board of Education's Proposed Plan For 9 AEA's: Map 7

AEA	Students (K-12)	Geographic Area (in square miles)
1	43,193	5,062
2, 3 & 5	65,717	11,702
4 & 12	46,628	6,411
6 & 7	55,256	5,214
9	57,971	2,510
10	60,183	4,294
11, 14* & 15*	126,327 [^]	11,125 [^]
13 & 14*	36,715 [^]	5,432 [^]
15* & 16	37,846 [^]	4,819 [^]

Note. Estimated Student enrollment in Fall, 1985 (both public school districts and private school) (Iowa Educational Directory, 1985).

* - indicates a portion of an AEA; ^ - indicates figures used by State Board of Education (1987).

also had an AEA with a geographic configuration of over 11,000 square miles (see table 9).

The last plan proposed by the State Board of Education disregarded the current boundaries of the AEA's (see Appendix A). This 9th plan proposed the creation of 6 intermediate units roughly dividing Iowa in

Table 9

State Board of Education's Proposed Plan For 9 AEA's: Map 8

AEA	Students (K-12)	Geographic Area (in square miles)
1	43,193	5,062
2, 3 & 5	65,717	11,702
4 & 12	46,628	6,411
6 & 7	55,256	5,214
9	57,971	2,510
10	60,183	4,294
11	106,860	6,596
13 & 14	46,893	8,377
15 & 16	46,031	6,403

Note. Estimated Student enrollment in Fall, 1985 (both public school districts and private schools) (Iowa Educational Directory, 1985).

half from North to South and in thirds from East to West. Although this plan would create intermediate units proportionately equal in geographic area and would meet the AEA directors' enrollment criterion of 40,000 students, the geographic configurations of these units would be abnormally large (see table 10). Student populations within each of the units created by this plan would also vary abnormally.

None of the plans proposed by the State Board of Education utilizing consolidation of current AEA's would satisfy the criteria recommended by the AEA directors of special education. Because of the distribution

Table 10

State Board of Education's Proposed Plan For 6 AEAs: Map 9

AEA	Students (K-12)	Geographic Area (in square miles)
A	94,816	9,014
B	61,658	8,380
C	79,578	11,096
D	136,400	9,956
E	102,928	9,721
F	63,690	8,400

Note. Student enrollment and geographic figures presented by the State Board of Education report (State Board of Education, 1987).

disparity of Iowa's population, reducing the number of AEAs along current boundaries appears impossible. The last proposed plan, although it meets the criteria recommended by the AEA directors of special education, would create abnormally large intermediate units.

By reducing the number of intermediate units, it was thought that greater equality between the remaining units would result. The disparity of these resulting intermediate units, however, still is luminous. Table 11 compares each of the proposed plans of the State Board of Education in terms of both geographic area and student population. for this comparison, the largest and smallest intermediate units (in geographic area and student population) for each configuration were

Table 11

Ratio Comparisons of the Largest and the Smallest Units in Each of the Configurations Proposed

Largest Versus Smallest Unit Ratios		
Number of AEAs and Option	Student Population	Geographic Area
15	8.42	4.11
12	5.24	5.44
11	4.62	5.22
10, option 1	4.62	3.34
10, option 2	5.47	4.43
9, option 1	5.11	2.29
9, option 2	3.44	3.05
9, option 3	3.44	4.66
9, option 4	2.74	4.66
6	2.14	1.32

used. For example, in the current configuration of the AEAs, AEA 11 with 106,860 students and AEA 14 with 12,696 students was used. The number of students in the largest AEA was divided by the number of student in the smallest AEA. In the example, the largest AEA had 8.42 times as many students as the smallest AEA. This was done for each of

the proposed plans for both geographic area and student population. The same intermediate units were not necessarily used for both criteria.

The results of this analysis exhibited that, by using this criteria, each configuration of intermediate units was quite variable. The geographic configuration of the current AEAs has a distribution better than 5 of the 8 proposed plans for consolidating the AEAs by the State Board of Education. Each of the proposed plans for consolidating the AEAs exhibited better student population distribution than the current AEA structure. However, in 5 of the 8 plans the largest intermediate unit was over 4 and 1/2 times larger than the smallest unit. This disparity calls into question the viability of using any of these plans for restructuring the AEAs.

The proposed plan for 6 intermediate units disregarding the current AEA boundaries exhibited the best distribution in both student population and geographic area. As indicated, however, these 6 units would be abnormally large to be effectively used for intermediate units. The results of this analysis shows that a radical change in the AEA structure would be necessary if the number of AEAs was reduced. Consolidating the AEAs along current boundaries would only result in shifting the inequities of the current structure not eliminating them.

Cost Efficiency of the Intermediate Unit

Cost efficiency appeared to be a major impetus behind the General Assembly's directive to reduce the number of AEAs. Any plans such as those proposed by the State Board of Education (1987) may be more equitable in geographic area and student population but the cost efficiency may be questioned. It has not been proven that a reduction

in the number of intermediate units will create a more economically efficient system. As noted, the legislature assumed inefficiencies exist within the current AEA system. Inefficiencies such as the administrative costs for providing for special education services and the delivery of services to children with low incidence disabilities appear to be motive to change the AEA structure. The legislature assumed economical inefficiencies would be eliminated by reducing the number of regional service agencies. This assumption, however, may prove fallacious.

One result of reducing the number of AEAs would be a decrease in the number of top administrators and thus the total amount of top administrative salaries. Initially this appears to be a financial savings to the AEA system. Decreasing the number of top administrators, however, will increase the responsibility of the remaining administrators. Geographic area, student populations, school districts, and personnel will each increase in the remaining agencies if the AEAs are consolidated. Therefore, the responsibilities of the AEA administrators will increase as the number of AEAs decrease.

The AEA administrators duties include: (a) co-operating with local school districts to develop plans for improvement of educational programs and services in the AEA, (b) providing assistance to local districts for the general improvement of educational programs and operations, and (c) submitting program plans to the State Department of Education (Area education agency, 1987). If the number of AEAs are reduced and the number of local school districts are increased, it would be difficult for the remaining AEA directors to individually perform these same

duties without increasing administrative staff. For example, if AEA 6 (with 26 local school districts) and AEA 7 (with 21 local school districts) were consolidated the number of districts would be the total 47. Another level of administration or at least a number of assistants may be necessary to augment the increase in the administrators' responsibilities.

Geographic area is also a factor if the number of AEAs is decreased. Because geographic area will be larger, branch offices may be necessary. Branch offices may not decrease the financial costs for the AEA system but may actually increase it. First to consider is the cost of the actual structures that would house the branch offices. The cost of the building or even the leased cost would be significant. Second, the branch office would need supervision. True, some of the current administrative staff could perform these duties but is this enough? For example AEA 9, Mississippi Bend AEA, currently has in place the position of lead psychologist in each of its three branch offices; these individuals perform some supervisory duties for the agency. Because of these and other factors need to be considered, the cost efficiency of changing the present system may yet be unanswered.

Summary

The state needs to develop minimum criteria standards--such as effective geographic configurations and a minimum student enrollment--before restructuring the AEAs is to occur. The implications of restructuring the AEAs and the effects on special education also needs to be addressed. Reducing the number of AEAs may not automatically eliminate fiscal inefficiencies of the current system. Developing

only a more uniform geographic configuration may not solve the inefficiencies since population distribution is also tied to geographic considerations. The population distribution of Iowa presents a difficult situation. Whatever is done, those responsible must remain committed to the equal education opportunities of Iowa's handicapped children. This must be the first consideration of any change in the intermediate unit.

The purpose of this thesis has been to synthesize the various historical events leading to the development of Iowa's intermediate unit. With the mandates of the 71st General Assembly, a change in the current AEA system appears likely.

Iowa's commitment to special education remains strong. The Area Education Agencies have played a leading role in securing special services for handicapped children since 1975. Any changes may have a profound effect on the delivery of special education in Iowa. This synthesis of historical events leading to the current delivery system of special education should provide a useful backdrop for those considering a change in the present AEA system. Developing useful criteria is imperative, but the implications of these changes on the delivery of special education programs and services must be a major priority.

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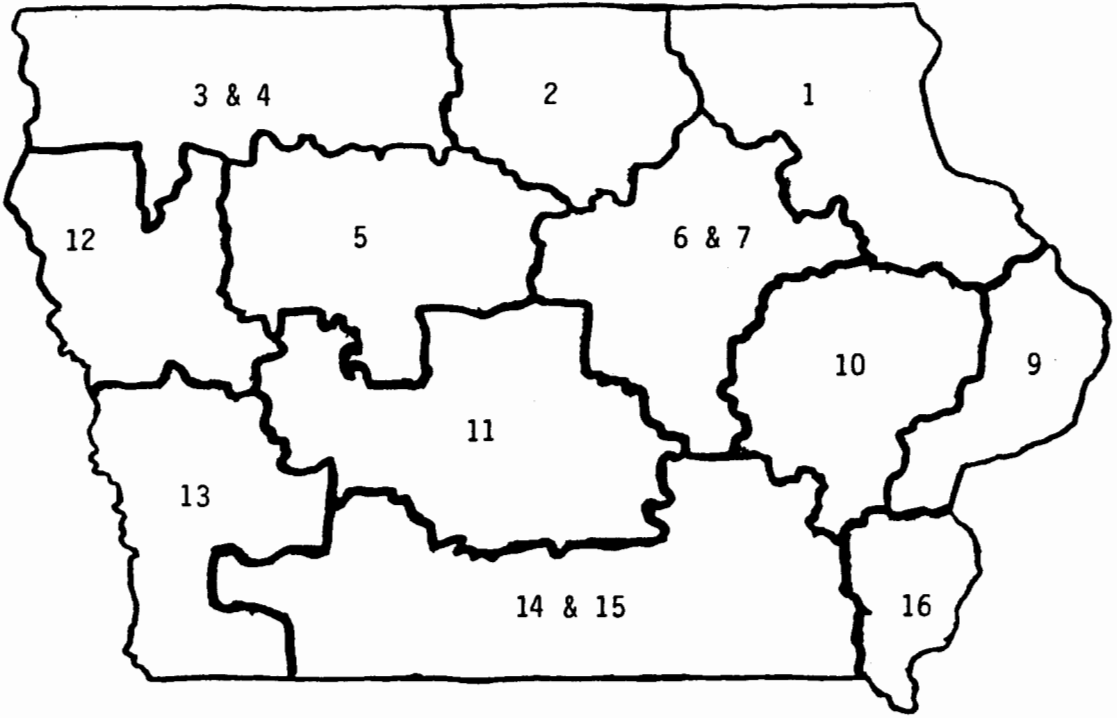
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APPENDIX A

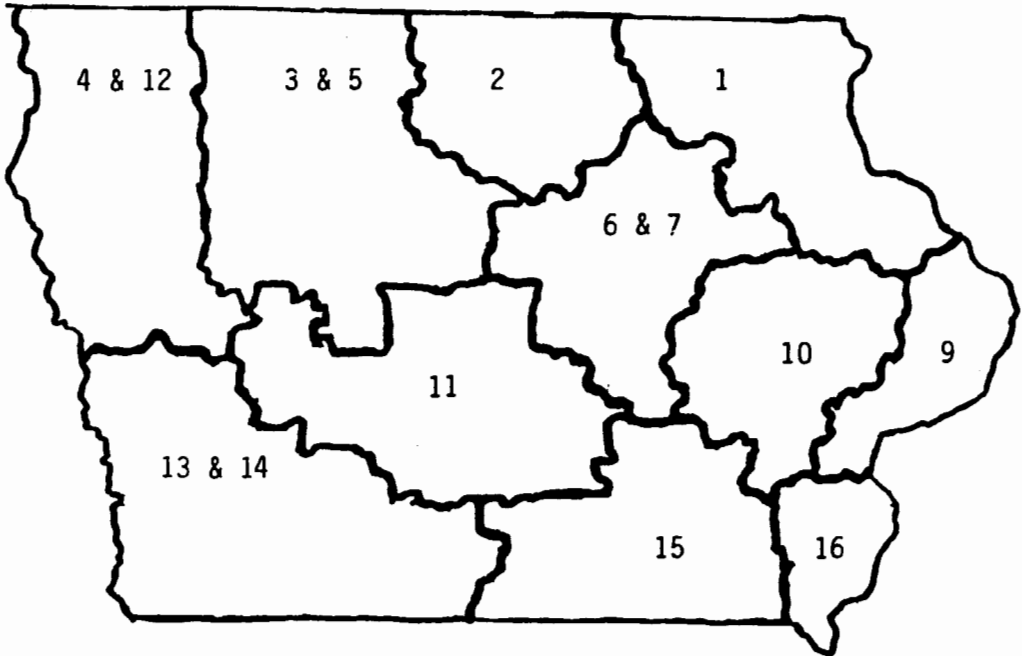
PLANS FOR RESTRUCTURING THE INTERMEDIATE EDUCATIONAL UNITS

PROPOSED BY THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

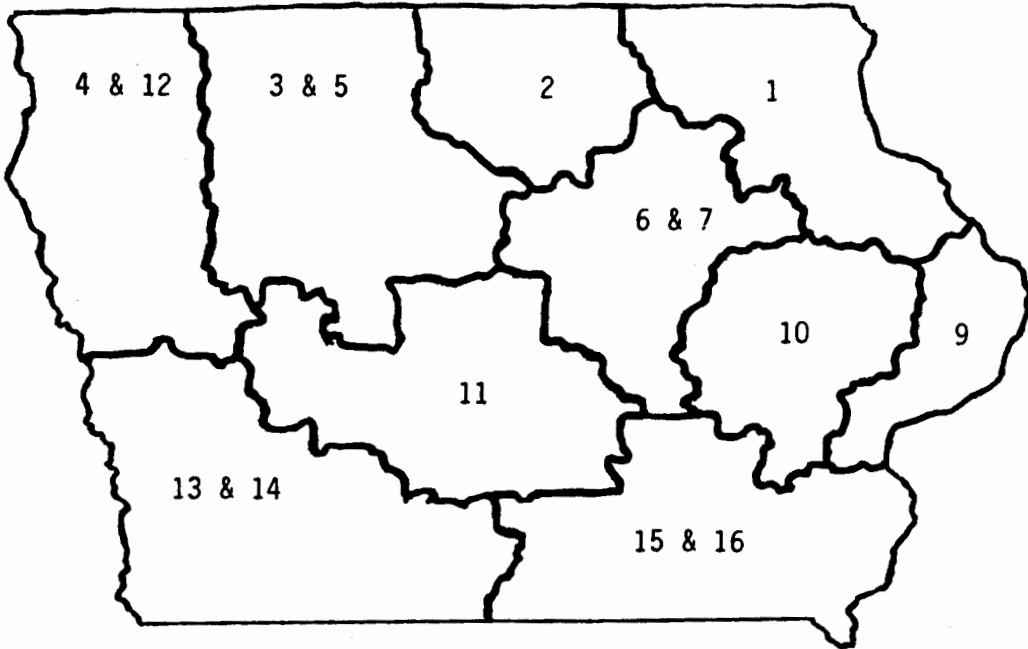
MAP 1: 12 Units



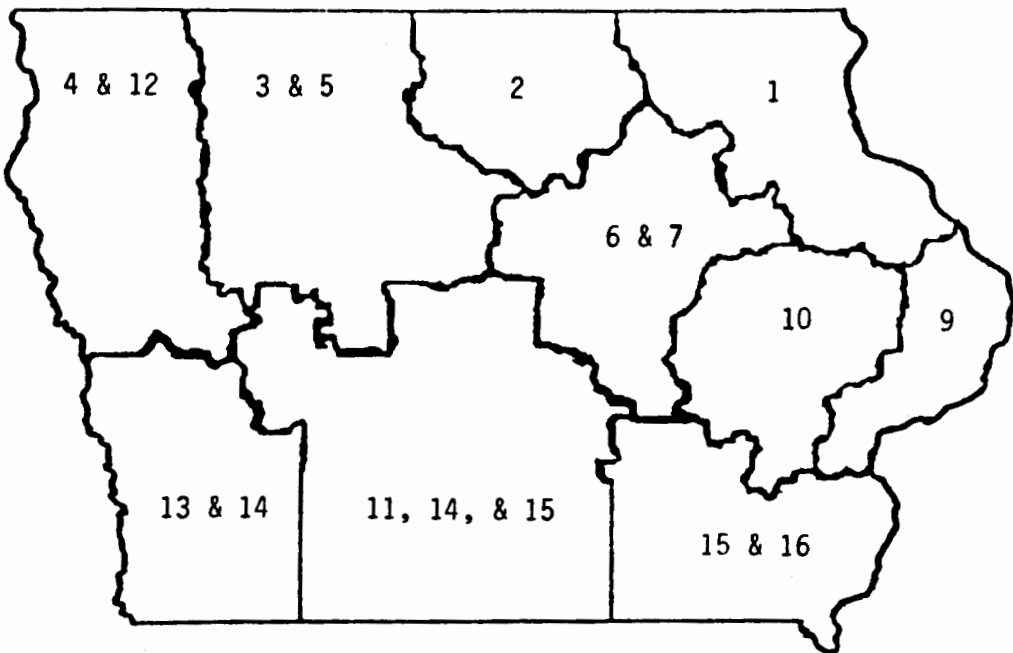
MAP 2: 11 Units



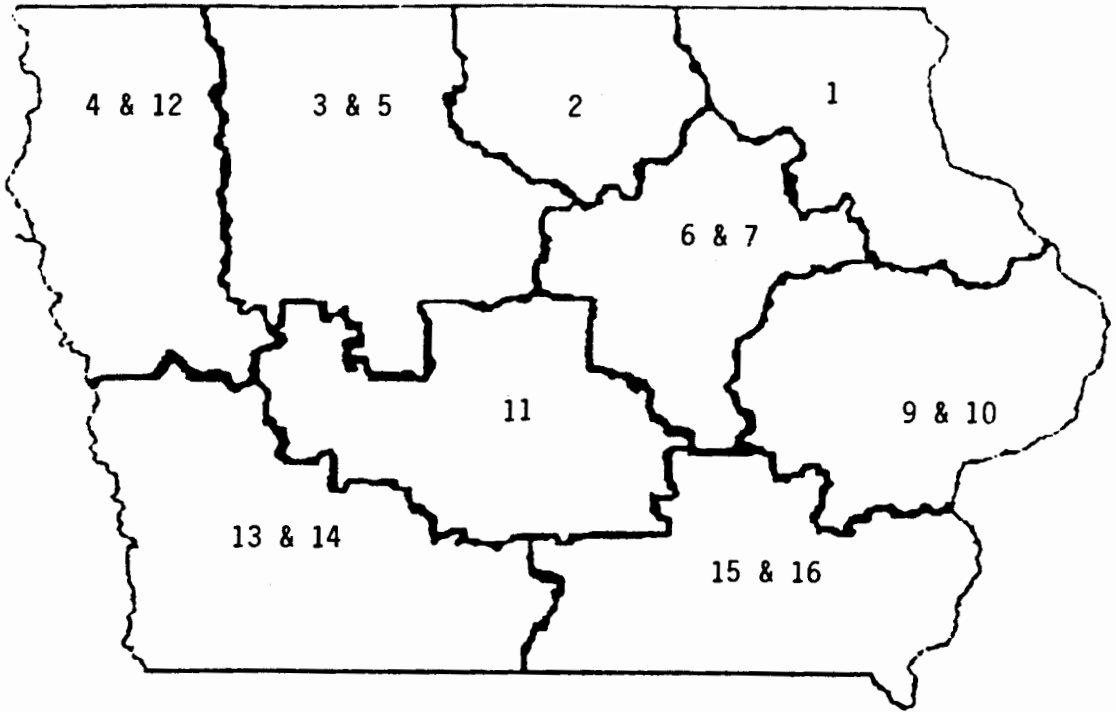
MAP 3: 10 Units, Option 1



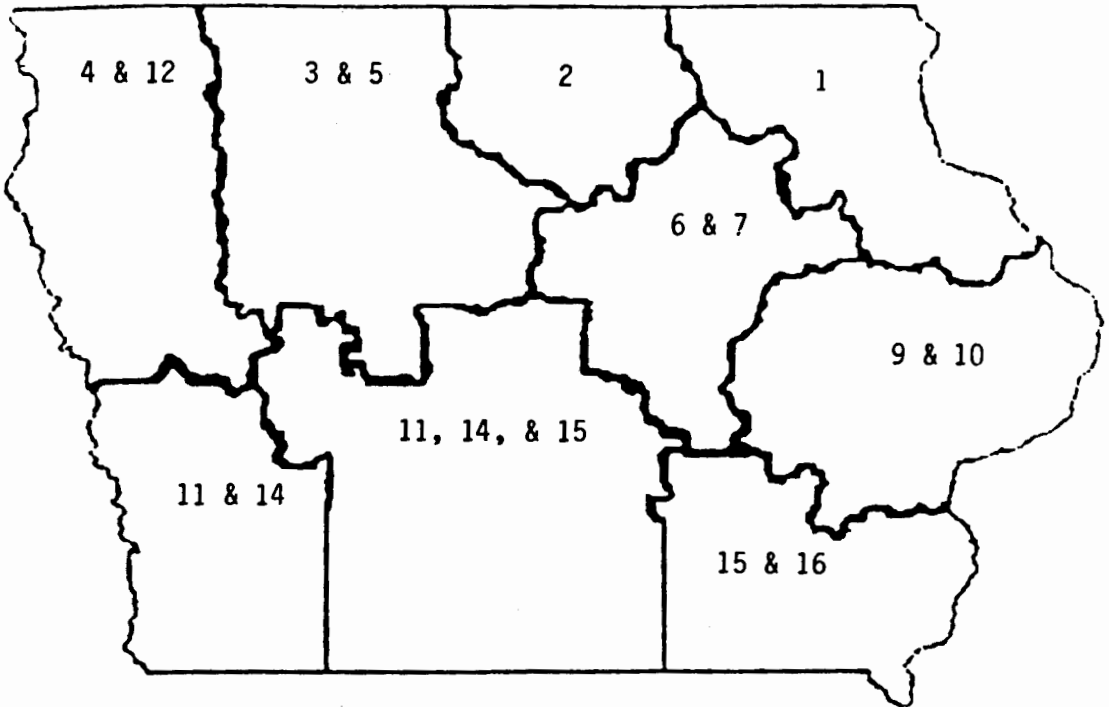
MAP 4: 10 Units, Option 2



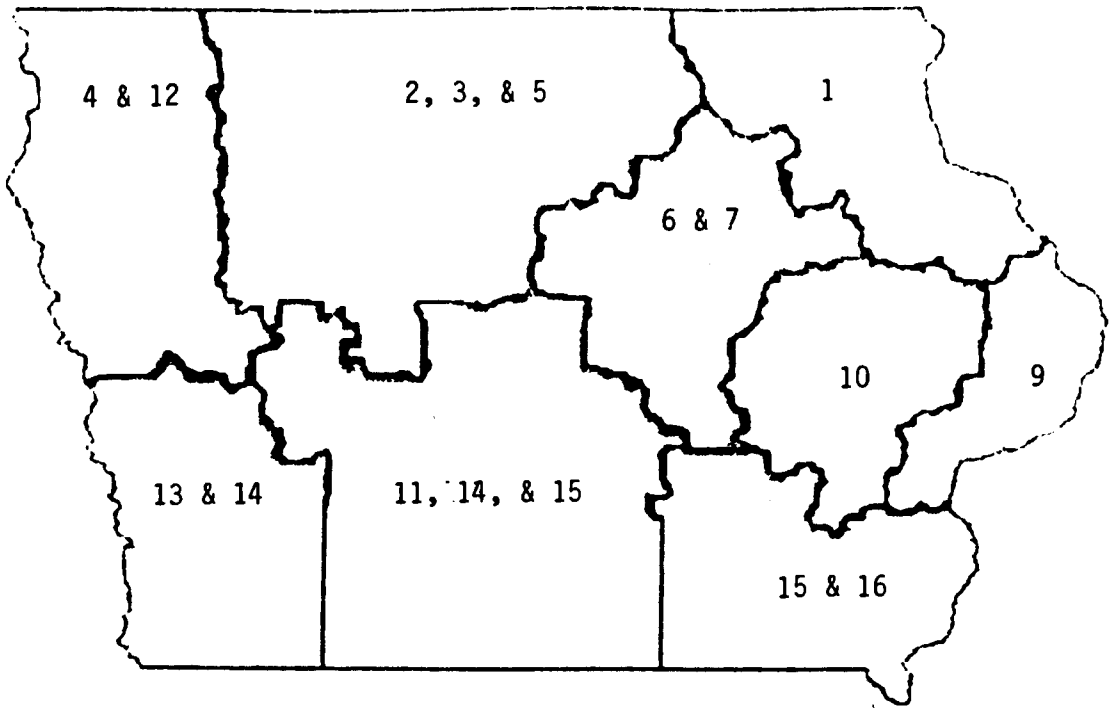
MAP 5: 9 Units, Option 1



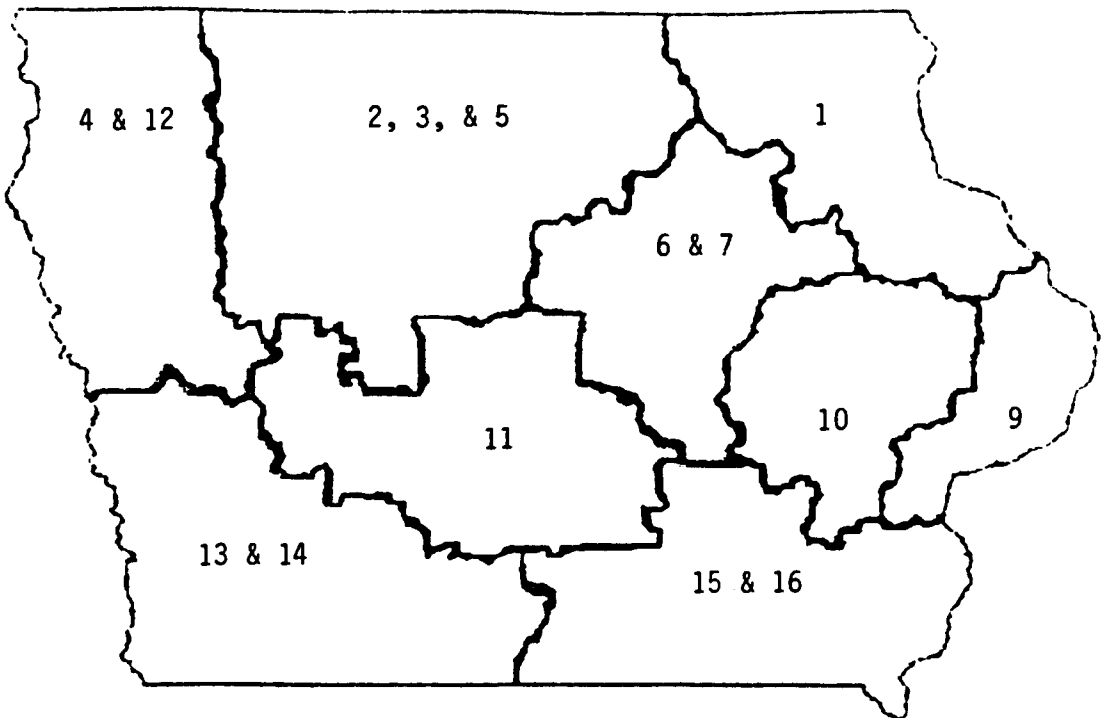
MAP 6: 9 Units, Option 2



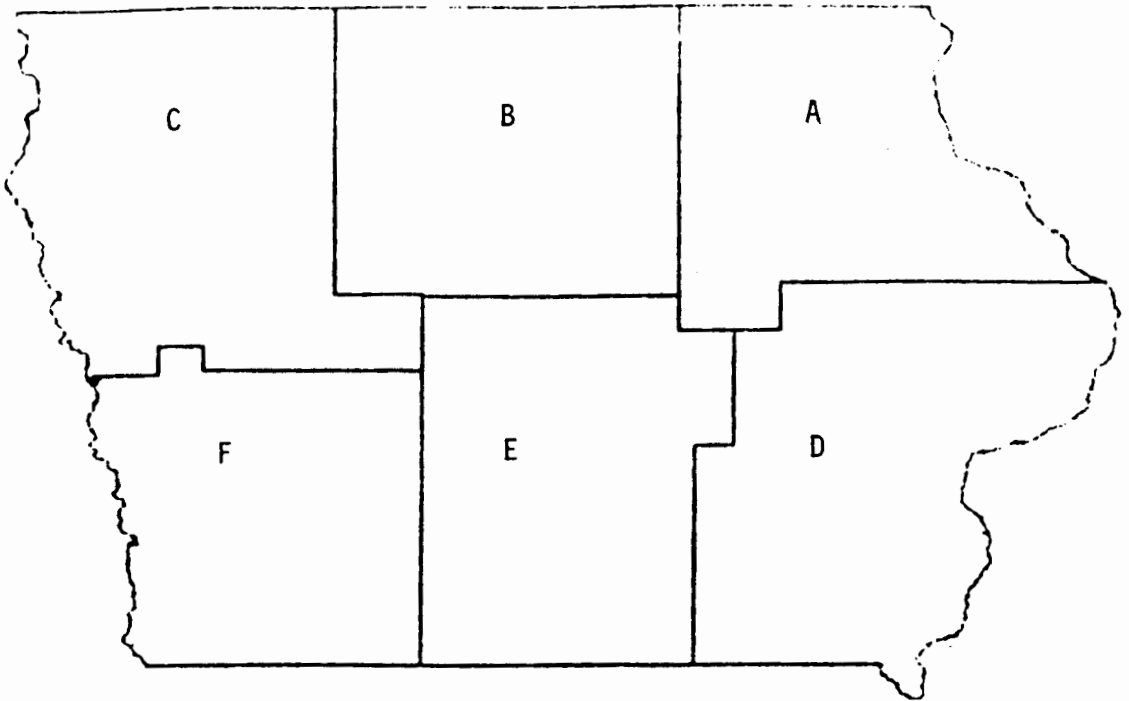
MAP 7: 9 Units, Option 3



MAP 8: 9 Units, Option 4



MAP 9: 6 Units

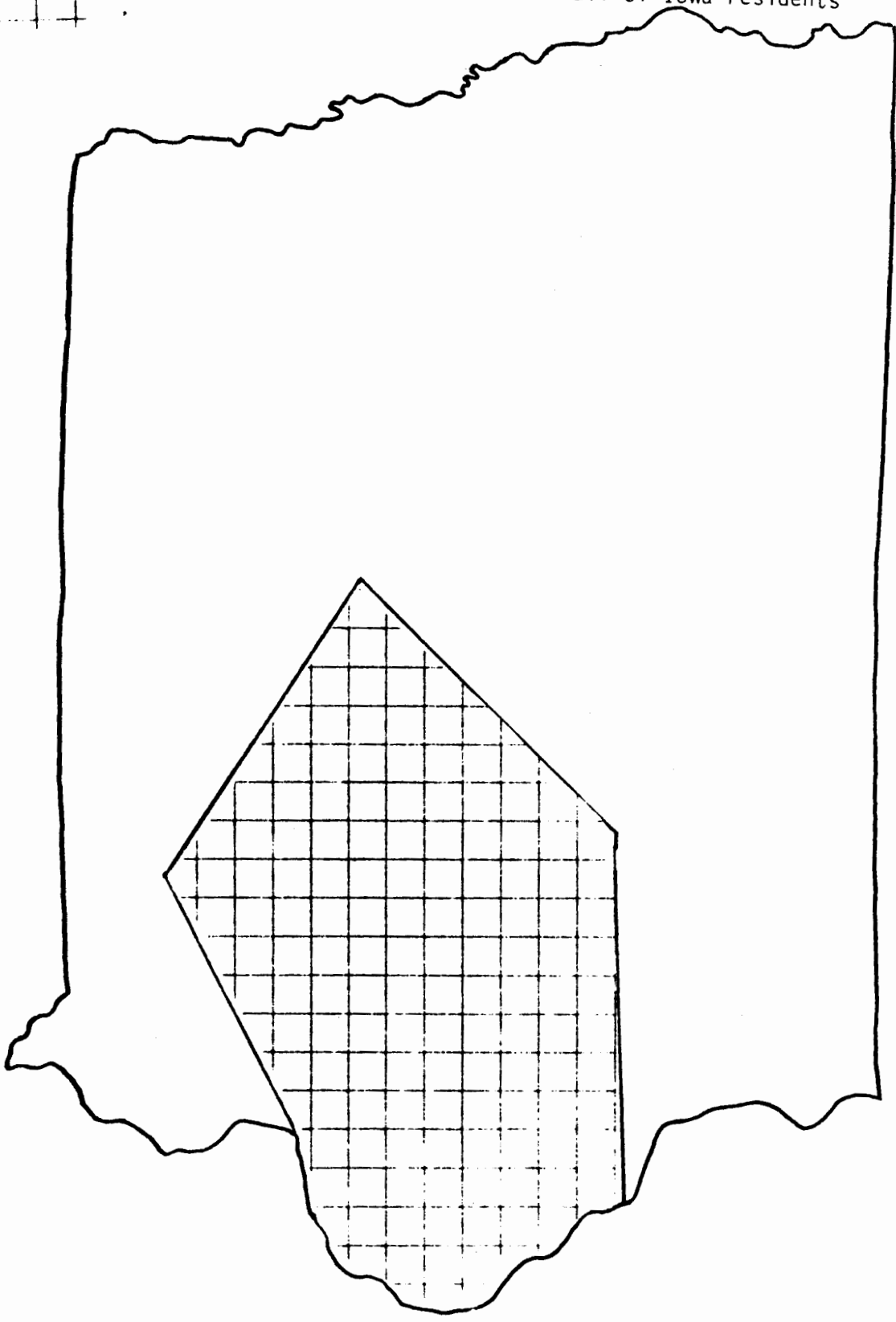


APPENDIX B

IOWA'S POPULATION CONCENTRATION



Denotes population concentration of half of Iowa residents



APPENDIX C
THE AREA EDUCATION AGENCIES

