

Interview with Bob Mueller

Bob Mueller, long time ESD board member from Grand Coulee Dam, has always been interested in education and its value in society. During the early 70's he was active during the consolidation of Grand Coulee and Coulee Dam into one school districts. This was approximately the same time that Intermediate School Districts were formed. In a conversation with Alice McGrath, who has been the Grant County Superintendent, he asked her about the effects of the formation of Intermediate School Districts. This led to more interest in the ISD's. That fall there was an opening on the board and he filed and was elected out of a group of five people. Since then he has attended all of the state conferences for ESD's, become an active member of the state ESD association, and held many committee appointments and served as president of the organization.

Mueller's lifelong interest in educational process was strengthened as he raised his family of six children. He has four boys and two girls. One daughter and husband are now teachers in the Grand Coulee Dam School District. Another daughter is a CDS at Liberty School District. One son is a psychologist counselor, and two of his daughters-in-law are also teachers. Mueller spent 37 years with the Bureau of Reclamation and retired as Chief of Construction on the third powerhouse at Grand Coulee

Dam. His lifelong involvement with engineering and construction on dams carries over into the educational field. During the building of the third powerhouse he indicated it was bigger and new, and processes and things were done that had never been done before. At the peak of their construction, they had approximately 2,000 employees, which was considerably less than the 6-7,000 employees who built the first powerhouse. In engineering, newer technology, bigger and more efficient equipment meant fewer men were needed for the construction. He indicated that he sees the same thing happening in education where more technology is influencing it, making fantastic changes and the role of education. "I see things that I never dreamed of when I was in engineering school now occurring in our schools," Mueller indicated. "Technology in business and industry is playing an important role in effecting what's taught in our schools."

"When you are raising children you have to be interested in education," stated Mueller. "However, more of my interest now is in the organizational side of education. I always was looking for better ways that education could be administered. The how-to-teach pedagogy leaves me in the dust, but I felt that I could apply business to education. I see the federal involvement in education as a positive thing because of the dollars involved. I didn't equate the dollars with control, just restrictions

and paperwork, and for the amount of money that's been made available to the districts, I don't think the paperwork is that bad."

Mueller has been involved with ESD's during virtually their total 20 years of existence. His term began on the board for ESD 104. He has seen the consolidation of 14 ESD's down to nine. "Probably a good thing to have nine," he indicated. "It has helped the structure of ESD's and I believe it has made them stronger." When it comes to North Central ESD, which has been developed out of three original ISD's, Mueller takes the greatest pride in the emphasis on cooperative programs. He sees the value of the cooperatives as giving local districts more influence on the development of the program and more influence in determining how the dollars are spent, which in turn makes the ESD more receptive to local district needs. The biggest challenge that he views for the future is to give service to all local districts in the most efficient manner possible. Another challenge he sees for the future is the importance of continued emphasis on curriculum services, especially to the smaller school districts in North Central ESD. He feels a strong commitment to emphasizing this area. Bob has always been interested in political processes and governments of schools, and for a number of years was the ESD legislative representative and went to Washington, D.C. every year.

Bob is enjoying his retirement from the Bureau of Reclamation, however, he is not ready to quit his involvement in education. "I want to remain active and continue to watch the new interests and help maintain what's good within our ESD," he stated. "I think the 20 Year celebration for ESD's tied in with the State Centennial Celebration will help emphasize the visibility of our agencies. I think this is one problem that we continually have to work at to make more name recognition, especially among legislators. I'm glad to see the ESD's involved in this 20 Year Celebration."