



When the Six District Educational Compact was first proposed in 1969, Ohio Department of Education officials in Columbus called it pure folly. They said it would never work. The whole idea that six superintendents and six Boards of Education could agree to pool their resources, yet maintain their individual identities, was absurd.

This Compact, comprised of Cuyahoga Falls, Hudson, Kent, Stow-Munroe Falls, Tallmadge City Schools and Woodridge Local Schools, has proven the state department of education wrong.

Looking back, things were vastly different in the world of education. The median starting pay for a teacher with a bachelor's degree was \$6,000. State support for schools was about 28 percent of the total budget. And the average cost per pupil was \$679.

An ad in *Ohio Schools* magazine invited teachers to spend the Christmas of 1969 in Hawaii. The complete cost, including round-trip airfare, 10 days in Honolulu, followed by three nights in Hollywood, a New Year's gala, the Rose Bowl Parade and a trip to Disneyland, was \$398!

Meanwhile, there was turmoil in the schools. This was the age of drugs, bomb scares, flag burnings, black arm bands, long hair and short skirts. Voters said "no" to 72 percent of the new school tax issues – the most disastrous defeat in history.

Some things have remained remarkably the same, however. In 1969, the new U.S. Commission of Education called for an end to the general education curriculum, and made vocational education one of the top priorities. In Ohio, school officials were scrambling to meet new state mandates requiring every school district to provide access to vocational training for its high school students.

Districts were given three options in meeting the state requirements: establish a joint vocational school, build vocational programs into a comprehensive high school, or contract with a larger district for vocational services. None of these options appealed to the superintendents of six small districts in Portage and Summit Counties. The state

law included a provision for "other arrangements that could be examples of innovative approaches." Superintendents from Cuyahoga Falls, Kent, Hudson, Stow-Munroe Falls, Tallmadge and Woodridge decided to follow that avenue. After months of planning, they asked the state department to approve the idea of a six-district consortium to provide vocational services. Everyone at the state level opposed it except one – the man at the top, Dr. Martin Essex, who served as state superintendent of schools from 1966 to 1977. He approved the plan, calling it an "exemplary program," which could serve as a model for similar efforts in Ohio. And he was right!

Dr. Franklin Walter followed as state superintendent and supported the growth of the Compact during his years of service from 1977 to 1991.

In 1970, when the six superintendents signed a contract to establish and jointly fund the Six District Educational Compact, Dr. Robert Stanton, then Superintendent of Kent City Schools, was chosen as the first chairman of the Compact. He was followed by Dr. Harold Wilson, who was Superintendent of the Cuyahoga Falls City Schools at the time.

Through the years, the Compact has expanded beyond its original purpose of providing career and technical education. Today, the list of programs and services offered by the Compact includes a wide range of college tech prep initiatives, shared business services including professional development for support staff, special education, summer school, the Summa Compact Partnership, Pathway Project; targeted programs such as COMPACT COMPASS: FOUR E's INITIATIVE, Saturday Family Workshop, the Compact Plan for the Future, C.A.R.E. (Chemical Abuse Reduced by Education) and Project SEARCH, and a whole host of special events such as Girls Geared for Engineering summer camp, the Reading and Writing Festival, A.C.E. (Aeronautics Careers Experience) summer camp and the Diane Burbick Conference on Math and Science for Middle School Girls.

Clearly, the regionalized approach taken by the Six District Educational Compact has defied the odds. Not only was this the first of its kind, but 50 years later, it remains the best!

