



R.L. “Ozzie” Rose helped start the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators in 1974 and remained with the organization as the executive director until his retirement in 2003.

Before taking the COSA position, Rose worked at AASA and spent a year on staff for the National Academy of School Executives, then the association’s chief training arm. COSA, as the organization is known, was formed after the education community was divided into labor and management groups following the passage of the Public Employees Collective Bargaining Act. Now one of the three major organizations in Oregon, COSA serves principals, superintendents and central office administrators.

Rose spoke with freelance writer Glenn Cook as part of the AASA’s 150th anniversary coverage.

COSA is known as one of the strongest state associations in the U.S., in part because it serves all administrators in the state. Do you believe that is key for your state?

“There are a lot of positives in it. If you think about it, one third of our members can fire the other two thirds in their day to day jobs, but on the policy making side, the superintendents are typically more focused on money and the principals are more involved day-to-day in running their schools. Having those under one umbrella is a powerful thing, especially at the state level.

“In most of the smaller states, you see models that work like ours because they don’t have enough members and resources to support four separate organizations. Most of the bigger states, with the exception of California, do have that structure. We were the second largest state to have a consolidated organization when we formed.”

How does it work?

“We started out with everyone keeping their own legislative committee, but within five years we had a single legislative committee for the entire association. We also have departments for each group and they represent and advocate for their side as policy recommendations are being formed in the legislature, but the larger organization speaks for all the folks.”

Beside the fact that you have all the administrators, what is the single biggest factor behind COSA’s success?

“Training, training, training. That’s what’s driven the organization. When I first went to AASA, I saw what NASE was doing. It was the first venture focused on professional development for the working school administrator, the training of people who had gone through school and now had jobs.

“When the state association got started, I saw that we could do much of the stuff AASA had done in the way of professional training, the local and state issue type of government relations work. AASA became a trainer of those of us who were doing the work out there.

“The states used AASA as a reference to get good training, and then we could set it up and do it at less cost to members than they could do regional and national workshops. In 1969, I told (then AASA Senior Associate Executive Director) Jim Kirkpatrick that it was a good idea and we should be doing it, but as state associations become more and more independent it will be difficult for AASA to sustain. And that’s what eventually happened.”

Over time, as state associations grew, you started to see a decline in AASA’s membership and attendance at its national conferences. NASE eventually was shut down because, as you said, it became difficult for AASA to sustain. As AASA has dealt with these operational issues, do you think the organization lost its relevance to the working school administrator?

“No. Really it’s that the functions changed. The state associations provide the day-to-day, in the trenches training if you will. AASA worked hard at the national level and did the work we could not do at the national level. They take positions in Congress that reflect the membership, and they’ve worked really hard on maintaining the role of school districts as local units with local decision making authority. And as you know, particularly over the last 30 years, that has not been an easy road. There’s been a lot more federal intrusion.

“Federal relations is something AASA has continued to do well. They’ve had really good people working in federal relations over the years, and I think they were right on most of the things they pursued. They also have been really good at engaging the membership, and have worked really hard at educating us to help us influence our local members of Congress.”

As the work of various administrative groups becomes more and more specialized and job specific, do you think there is room for large associations at the national level?

“No question, things are changing. Look at the national conference, for example. When I started, it was held in February in Atlantic City. You were in run-down

hotels. It was colder than hell, and the town was shut down, but you would draw 20,000 to 25,000 people all connected with education. If you had anything to do with education administration, you had to be there.

“Because of technology and other tools, members don’t have as much need for that super meeting. They get information from so many different places now, and as a result, the need for face-to-face engagement has diminished over time. So I don’t think you’re going to see a return to those days. What AASA and the other groups have to do is find ways to meet the changing needs of their members in a much smaller landscape.”