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ABSTRACT

The object of this study, conducted in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, School District, was to examine whether or not the urban elementary school administrator's assessment of the community's ability to reward or punish is a significant factor in his perception of his own role performance, his leadership style, and his work with the community and its organizations. Data were collected by the survey-statistical technique using (1) the Principals Profile and (2) the School Community Resources and Assessment Form. The data indicate that there are differences in leadership styles, community workmanship, and the role performance of principals in communities viewed as high power (able to punish) as opposed to those viewed as not. (Author)

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"Elementary School Administrators"  
Role Perceptions Related to Their  
Assessment of Community Power"

by

William H. Harris

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## Introduction

Historically Americans have had concern over the relationship of the school to its community. This concern manifests itself at the state level by citizen efforts to influence legislation, at the local board level by voting and lobbying and at the local school level by participation and confrontation. Often the ideological and sometimes practical position of the school differs from that of the community. Citizen concern at such times appears most acute, for a decision has to be made as to what position should prevail.<sup>1</sup>

It is where the school organization meets and services its clients, the neighborhood school, that community concern is more likely to be visible and vocal. Parents have an emotional and vested interest in their children and whatever influences them. The link between the neighborhood school and its surrounding community is dynamic, ongoing and often charged. The most representative of neighborhood schools is the elementary school. Its pupils are younger and more in need of parental direction it is more accessible to the community and its clientele more reflective of the neighborhood. Lutz and Iannaccone<sup>2</sup> lists ele-

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<sup>1</sup>Willard Waller, The Sociology of Teaching (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1967), P. 33.

<sup>2</sup>Lawrence Iannaccone and Frank W. Lutz, Understanding Educational Organization (Columbus, Ohio: Charles W. Merrill Co., 1963)

mentary school attendance areas as one of the three geographic distinctions which identify publics or groups likely to dispose of social power in the attempt to influence school matters. Here Home and School associations and assorted advisory groups flourish. Here individuals as well as groups are most active in the struggle for a voice in running the school. In some cities, notably Philadelphia,<sup>3</sup> advisory groups help select elementary school principals for their schools. They may also have inputs about goals and priorities.

The elementary school, then, is the likely recipient of early and concentrated community concern and its chief administrator, the principal, the most logical individual to deal with them. According to Hartley,<sup>4</sup> the public school has become the repository of many unresolved social problems. The end responsibility for the solution of such problems frequently rests with the administrator. If the school is in an urban locale, the deposited problems may be more complex, the demands for solution more shrill and the resources needed for remediation in shorter supply. Rogers<sup>5</sup> sees the

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<sup>3</sup>The Philadelphia Association of School Administrators Newsletter "Decentralization - Community Role in "Principal Selection" (Vol. VII, April 1972)

<sup>4</sup>Harry J. Hartley, Toward Improved Urban Education, Edited by Frank W. Lutz. (Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones Publishing Co., 1970), p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>David Rogers, 110 Livingston Street (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 283.

urban principal as the middleman being caught in a powerful vise. They, the principals, see themselves in a three way bind. Powerful unions, remote headquarters and protesting community provide the squeeze. The harassed principal still has the responsibility for running the school. His perceptions of and sensitivities to the desires and priorities of the school community and the power of that community to enforce those desires and priorities may heavily influence administrative style and performance.

#### Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to examine whether or not urban elementary school administrators assessment incumbent is a significant factor in:

1. His perception of his own role performance
2. His leadership style
3. His work with the community and its organizations

The study is intended to determine whether perceived role expectations, subsequent leadership style and community work of elementary school administrators who view their school community as high power (interested and effective in influencing school matters):

#### Hypothesis to be Tested:

1. Administrators in perceived high power communities will not differ significantly in their perception (have a higher score on the Principals Profile; working with the community) of their community

relations role from administrators in perceived low power communities.

2. Administrators in perceived high power communities will not differ significantly in the way they work with school personnel (have a higher score on the Principals Profile; working with school personnel) from administrators in perceived low power communities.
3. Administrators in perceived high power communities will not perceive their job role as more democratic (have a higher score on the Principal Profile; democratic leadership) than administrators in low power communities.

#### Location of the Study

The study was conducted in the School District of Philadelphia. This district is composed of eight semi-autonomous sub-districts each headed by a District Superintendent. Four of the sub-districts served as locales for the study. They were District Eight, District Six, District Four and District One.

#### Sample

Through the use of a community assessment index, 80 elementary attendance areas were selected from 129 attendance areas in which that instrument was used. The twenty principals of the elementary schools located in those areas comprised the sample. Forty of the attendance areas were

designated, through use of the community assessment form, as high power and 40 were designated as low. A brief description of the instruments follow.

### The Instruments

To conduct this study three instruments were used. Two were developed by the researcher. A third was the Principals Profile.

- I. The Principals Profile was designed by Lee Sprowles, Dayne M. Smith and James B. Kenny of the University of Georgia (1966). Its purpose is to determine job perceptions of school principals. It consists of three broad categories: (1) carrying out the role of democratic leadership, (2) working effectively with school personnel and (3) working effectively with the school and its community. It enables the principal to set forth his own perceptions of his job performance. The Principals Profile, according to those authors, has a high reliability due to the fact that only items leaving a factor loading of .70 or above were selected for inclusion in their questionnaire. The items are 97 in number: the first 23 relating to category 1, the next 45 to category 2, and the remaining 29 to category 3.

Individual item analyses were made by contrasting each single response with the results obtained from the total tally on the item by all of the principals who perceive

their communities as high power (will be called Hi. principals) and principals who perceive their communities as low power (will be called Lo. principals). Once it was determined that Hi. principals and Lo. principals were able to be identified by an instrument (The Community Resources Assessment Form), the scores on the Principals Profile were analyzed to see:

1. If the Hi. principals scores were consistent with one another
2. If the Lo. principals scores were consistent with one another
3. If the scores of the Hi. principals and Lo. principals were different from one another.

Item analyses were made of the responses of each of the Hi. principals and Lo. principals on the 97 items listed of the instrument. These were summed and for each a mean standard deviations prepared in the standardized process at the University of Georgia. Data produced by item analysis is contained in appendix B.

II. The Community Assessment Index: The Elementary School Community Assessment index was designed by the researcher to give an index of elementary school community power. It is a form consisting of six areas of assessment:

1. Home and School Association
2. School Advisory Group or organizations



3. Parent school volunteers
4. Identified community leaders
5. Organizations within the school boundary area
6. Community vote on the last two bond issues

The Elementary School Community Assessment index provided for the identification of resources, their summation and their assessment. (see appendix A)

Each category on the index form is assigned a range of zero to five power points. Five is the maximum of power points per category and thirty is the maximum of power points per elementary school community.

Communities are designed as follows:

1. Low power - 0 to 10
2. Middle power - 11 to 20
3. High power - 21 to 30

III. The Community Resources and Assessment Form: This form was developed by the researcher after extensive efforts to locate an instrument that would give a respondent's perception of community power failed. Items and questions were included in the form after considerable consultation with principals, district superintendents and community persons. (see appendix A)

The basic question asked each consultant was "what ten items would you include in an index of community power?". The five most frequently appearing items were included in an index and subsequently in the Community Resources and Assessment Form.

It is in three parts:

1. A resources check list
2. An assessment of those resources
3. Statements designed to give a philosophical direction to the respondents assessment of resources.

Each category consists of six questions, with a maximum of 24 points per category. A respondent may return a maximum of 72 points. Scoring is as follows.

1. Low power - 0 to 24
2. Middle power - 25 to 48
3. High power - 49 to 72

#### Data Collection

The Elementary School Community Assessment index was sent to School-Community Coordinators (para-professionals employed as liason persons between the elementary school and the community), Home and School Council presidents and to community persons in one hundred-fifty Philadelphia elementary attendance areas. One hundred-twenty were returned.

The Philadelphia School District placed a bond issue before its voting public in 1966, 1967 and 1968. Elementary school community voting patterns for these issues were researched in order to determine the per-centage of participation and for the direction of the vote. These areas were accorded an index of one to four. One represented an extremely low participation whereas four a relatively high. The voting

pattern indices were combined with the data received from the elementary school community index forms to devise a single index. Of the eighty elementary school attendance areas, forty with the highest index were selected as high power (interested and effective in influencing school matters) and forty with the lowest index were selected as low power (not interested and effective in influencing school matters).

Two instruments, the Principals Profile and the Elementary School Community Assessment Form were sent to the eighty principals in the selected high-low power areas. They were mailed first class with stamped self-addressed envelopes included. All respondents (100%) returned their completed instruments. It was necessary however, to contact fourteen of the respondents personally before the requested material was returned to the researcher.

The eighty selected schools were located in four of the eight sub-districts comprising the Philadelphia School District. The superintendent of each sub-district, the immediate superior of the principal, was asked to rate each elementary school area according to their perception of that areas' power (interested and effective in influencing matters). Each superintendent, as a role function, meets community concerns, investigates and assesses complaints, meets with area community groups, confers with leaders and selects community persons to sit on principal job interview panels. They are in position to make assessments of community power.

### Delimitations

In the collection of data the researcher made no effort to assess the age, sex, race or social class of the respondents. He was aware of these variables and their possible influence on the outcome of this study. They are not considered.

Philadelphia Principals are members of a union-professional type organization that offers assistance and suggestions to its members during confrontations with the community, faculty and the Board. These variables and their possible influence were not considered in this study.

The criteria for the selection of respondents was as follows:

1. be the principal of an elementary school located in an attendance area designated high power or low power by the Elementary School Community Index

### Data

Based on the data collected as described above three hypothesis were tested using a T test to determine significance at the (.05) level or less.

Tables I, II, III presents the data from that analysis:

TABLE I

		Democratic Leadership	Working With School Personnel	Working with Community
High	Mean	4.376	3.940	4.284
	SD	0.556	0.741	0.593
Low	Mean	4.151	3.699	3.370
	SD	4.406	0.372	0.462

TABLE II

T Test Values			
	Democratic Leadership	Working With School Personnel	Working With Community
T. Value	1.449	1,295	5.381
Significance	N.S.	N.S.	<.001

TABLE III  
INTERACTIONS

High Principals				
	MEAN	S.D.	D.F.	Sig. (.05)
Working with School Personnel	3.440	0.741	78	
Working with Community	4.284	0.593	78	
T VALUE -- 1.580				N.S.

TABLE IV

Low Principals				
	MEAN	S.D.	D.F.	Sig. (.05)
Working with School Personnel	3.749	0.399	78	
Working with Community	3.370	0.437	78	
T. VALUE -- 3.855				Sig.

TABLE V

Low Principals and High Principals					
	MEAN	S.D.	D.F.	T.	Signif- icance
High	4.179	0.660		} 3.872	< .05
Low	3.752	0.525			

Based on data in tables I and II:

Hypothesis I is rejected in its null form.

Administrators in perceived high power communities will not differ significantly in their perception (have a higher score on the Principals Profile; working with the community) of their community relations role from administrators in perceived low power communities.

Hypothesis II is not rejected in its null form.

Administrators in perceived high power communities

will not differ significantly in the way they work with personnel (have a higher score on the Principals Profile; working with school personnel) from administrators in perceived low power communities.

Hypothesis III is not rejected in its null form.

Administrators in perceived high power communities will not perceive their job role as more democratic (have a higher score on the Principal Profile; democratic leadership) than administrators in low power communities.

Other interactions may be noted on tables III, IV and V.

Elementary school administrators who perceive their school communities as high power differ significantly from those elementary school administrators who perceive their school communities as low power (table V). Specifically high administrators had a mean and standard deviation of 4.179 and 0.660 respectively as opposed to 3.752 and standard deviation of 0.525.

Regarding other interactions, it may be noted that high administrators perceive no significant difference in their role of working with their staff (school personnel) and with in working with the community. Low administrators, however, perceive their working relationship with school personnel significantly higher than working with the community.

Urban elementary school area communities may differ a great deal in the material and human resources found there in. There is also latitude in the perception that those who are responsible for the administration of the school have of those resources. Elementary school administrators who perceive that their communities are relatively high in power have an over-all role perception different from those who perceive their communities are low in power. School boards, superintendents and principals themselves would be well served to make accurate assessments of those resources in a community that local principals view as threatening.

Urban elementary school administrators who perceive that their communities have the power to reward or punish them, see their role of working with the community in a manner different from those in perceived low power communities. There is, however no significant difference in how the two perceive their roles in democratic leadership and in working with staff. Here too accurate perceptions and assessments should be made by school authorities since failure to do so may result in a school - community policy that is disastrous to both school and community. The local school in urban areas has moved ideologically away from its public. In trying to align the positions, school men may be overly influenced by demagogues and flamboyant style.

It is to be noted that High administrators perceive their roles in working with the community as significantly



higher than the perception of their roles in working with staff.

The low administrators, however, perceive their roles of working with the community and working with the staff as not significantly different. Perhaps in a heavily unionized school district, where community power is perceived as low, local school administrators see their interest best served by catering to staff rather than community.

Instructions:

The School Community Assessment Form is designed to sum and evaluate the school and community resources in an elementary school attendance area. It is simply a summation of those resources as you see them.

The form is in three parts:

- I Check-off
- II Description
- III Evaluation

PART I

Check the item that most closely describes the organization or activity:

A. Home and School Association

1.  very active
2.  active
3.  barely active
4.  not active group

B. School Advisory Board (or concerned parents group or Tax-payers for Education or a community based group concerned directly with education)

1.  very active
2.  active
3.  barely active
4.  no such group

C. Parent School Volunteers

1.  many
2.  few
3.  none
4.  no volunteer program

D. Organizations (block organizations, civic groups, etc.)

1.  many
2.  few
3.  one
4.  no organized groups

F. Identifiable Community Leaders

1.  many
2.  few
3.  one
4.  no identifiable leaders

F. Community Vote on Last School Bond Issue

1.  Large turn-out
2.  average turn-out
3.  small turn-out
4.  do not know

PART II

Check the item (only one) that closely describes your school community, its organizations, and its community.

A. How supportive is The Home and School Association of your school programs and policies?

1.  strongly supportive
2.  strongly opposed
3.  mildly supportive
4.  mildly opposed
5.  It is not concerned
6.  I do not know

B. How supportive is your advisory organization (or similar parent group) of your school program and policies?

1.  strongly supportive
2.  strongly opposed
3.  mildly supportive
4.  mildly opposed
5.  It is unconcerned
6.  I do not know

C. If your school has parent volunteers, please check the item that most closely describes their activities.

1.  strongly attempt to influence school policy and practices
2.  occasionally attempt to influence school policies and practices

3.  rarely attempt to influence school policy and practices

4.  always leave program and policy matters to the administration and faculty

D. If there are community organizations within your school boundary, are they:

1.  strongly concerned about school policy and practice?

2.  concerned about school policy and practice?

3.  seldom concerned about your school policy and practice?

4.  unconcerned about your school policy and practice?

E. If there are identifiable community leaders within your school boundary, they are:

1.  very active in school affairs.

2.  active in school affairs.

3.  mildly active in school affairs.

4.  not much interested in school affairs.

F. How did your school community vote in the last School Bond Issue?

1.  for the Bond Issue

2.  against the Bond Issue

3.  equally divided

4.  do not know

PART III

Please answer yes or no.

A. Were community residents and parents in any way responsible for your appointment?

1.  yes

2.  no

B. Would the parents and residents of your school community be expected to question your changes in curriculum?

1.  yes

2.  no

C. Parents come to school when children have problems. Are your parents likely to come when there are no problems?

1.  yes

2.  no

D. Do you attend school related evening affairs in your school community?

1.  yes

2.  no

E. Do you feel it necessary to consult with community parents and leaders before instituting a curriculum policy change?

1.  yes

2.  no

F. Do you feel it incumbent to discuss policy and curriculum with the community?

1.  yes

2.  no

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