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ABSTRACT

This paper, the third based on a 4-year sociological field study of school-community relations in a factional suburb, analyzes conflict generated by the discrepancy between the perceived and actual norms governing the school board-community relationship. A 3-year effort to develop board responsiveness followed a 7-year period of professional domination and suppression of dissent. Increased participation had the unanticipated consequence of raising expectations for citizen influence in decisionmaking and creating public visibility of the decline in school board authority. Findings have been related to previous research and theory on citizen participation and conflict resolution. (Author)

THE REVIVAL OF LOCAL CONTROL

in

SUBURBIA

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*This research was conducted prior to the author's affiliation with Community Service Society

Introduction

Advocates of urban school decentralization or community control maintain that a redistribution of power enabling urban school parents to participate in educational policy-making will upgrade educational achievement for minority students. The absence of data to support these beliefs has been discussed elsewhere (Cohen, 1972, La Noue 1972).

To a large extent the decentralization movement is based on stereotypes about "local control" and quality education in suburban school districts. According to this image, power is concentrated in elected school boards responsive to parents. This responsiveness is believed due to the high degree of parent participation in educational politics. It is assumed that middle class suburbs are dominated by parents with consensus on educational and fiscal policies.

Research to date does not confirm these stereotypes. On the contrary, the studies indicate a normal state of low parent participation in the decision-making process. When participation increases the outcome tends to be negative: budget defeats and opposition to professional decisions. (Carter, 1962, Coleman 1959, Martin 1962,). A recent review of research on curriculum policy-making has shown that "the role of the local lay community in curriculum change appears minimal" but "demands for community control are portents of an increasingly political approach to curriculum questions on the part of the general public (Kirst and Walker 1971)".

These findings may be a reflection of the research which has emphasized voting behavior, and trends in suburban school governance -- the insulation of decision-making following the school board reform movement and the growth of professionalism.

The purpose of this paper is to explore recent conflicts in a suburban school district which reflect the changing approach to curriculum noted by Kirst, challenge the notions about local control in suburbia and point out some neglected aspects of current school governance.

This is the third report on the "Eastport" school district, selected as a research site because of its social, religious and economic diversity. It is hoped that these papers will contribute to the development of the urban-suburban participatory models recommended by Gittell et al (1972).

The "Eastport" district has a history of episodic crises and strains in the school-community relationship related to social and economic differences within the parent community and between this group and the non-school community. A major source of economic conflict is the fact that only 52% of the residents are public school parents. In the earlier papers, budget opposition and resistance to innovations were attributed to inadequate mechanisms for mediating conflicting interests of community factions (Steinberg, 1971, 1972).

Analysis of recent conflicts in Eastport indicate the need to relate participation to: 1) the community context and the structure of political processes in school government, 2) the definition of "local control," 3) school board and community leadership, 4) the function(s) of participation, 5) school board responsiveness and 6) relationships between the local governing board, the teachers' association and the state. The focus of this paper will be on leadership change and its effects on participation. The discussion is limited to citizen participation in curriculum and budget issues.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this analysis of a three-year effort to create school board responsiveness and to increase citizen participation, illustrate an attempt to revive "local control" in Eastport following a seven-year reform period of "professional control."

Research methods included observation of school board meetings and private meetings between citizens and trustees, interviews with activists and trustees, content analysis of newspaper articles and letters to the editor, school documents and reports of citizen advisory committees.

Following Gittell et al (1972), the term "formal" will be used to refer to the mechanisms which provide channels for direct (citizens being elected) or indirect (voting for a representative) access to decision-making. "Secondary" mechanisms refers to "non-direct bodies which serve as pressure groups or are supportive of school policy" (Gittell et al, 1972,page 7).

Formal participatory roles include all the elected or appointed positions which are part of the school structure: school trustees, PTA officers, membership in citizen's advisory committees. Secondary participation refers to such activities as going to meetings (school board and local school), writing letters to the editor, joining ad hoc groups, signing petitions, etc. that reflect an attempt to influence decision-making.

Although voting statistics are included, the emphasis is on participation in secondary mechanisms. This has been measured by attendance at different types of meetings over a four year period. The author has observed all but two regular board meetings, all budget hearings and

numerous meetings at the local school level. Parent informants and trustees have provided data on attendance at meetings not attended by the author.

Participant perceptions of school board actions are based on interviews with approximately three hundred residents. Due to the Eastport school board's policy of deliberating controversial issues in closed "executive sessions," it is impossible to describe what actually went on within the school board. In some cases the rationale underlying a board decision has been explained publicly; in other instances this has remained private. (The position of individual board members on specific issues is rarely made public.)

Consequently this report is based on public events, the visible behavior of trustees and how these have been perceived by individuals and factions in the community. As a resident, the author's status represents an additional source of bias. Since perceptions vary with group identification, an attempt has been made to check conclusions with representative informants and school trustees involved in the events discussed herein. Citizen views have been incorporated in the body of the report. Trustees were asked to correct factual errors and some revisions were made on the basis of their suggestions.

The term "reform," as used here, refers to the period when educational decisions were controlled by professionals, and decision-making insulated from the public in order to suppress controversy. A "reformist" in Eastport is a person who believes that school affairs should be controlled by professionals. This point of view appears to have been

acceptable to citizens who became active in efforts to improve educational facilities and services in the early 1960's. It was reinforced by their perception that Eastport was dominated by "anti-budget" groups who would block educational improvements. A few activists socialized by the early group are still involved in school politics.

The revival movement represents the activation of citizens who perceive Eastport as dominated by a "majority" interested in a traditional skills oriented curriculum and moderate spending. They also perceive educational affairs in Eastport as dominated by a minority and tend to attribute increased school costs to this group.

* * * *

Findings suggest that participation is related to leadership style and control of the secondary mechanisms for participation which link the school board to its constituency (explained later). During the reform period, formal participatory roles were controlled by the school administration or representatives who perceived their functions as legitimating (Kerr 1964). Secondary participation was low and dissent was suppressed. When issues became visible, secondary participation was channeled into community-controlled mechanisms.

Leadership change in 1969-70 revived the board's representative function, formal roles occupied by representatives of various factions and both formal and secondary participation in school-controlled mechanisms increased. There was virtually no participation in community-controlled mechanisms over the next two years, but it increased in 1972 as formal roles became less representative and the school board was perceived as

having resumed its legitimating function.

A renewal of conflict in 1972, reflects two unanticipated consequences of increased participation: 1) increased expectations for citizen influence and 2) increased visibility of the decline of school board authority or "local control." There is emerging public awareness of the limited effectiveness of the existing mechanisms for participation in educational decisions.

Although the emphasis here is on local determinants of participation, increased expectations for parent influence in educational issues (or curriculum) in part represent the impact of the urban school decentralization movement. There is some evidence that this extra-community factor has legitimized the expectation that parents are entitled to participate in these areas.

School Community Relations: 1962-72

The Eastport school district, located near a major middle Atlantic urban center, includes four elementary schools, a middle school (7-8) and a high school (9-12) attended by about 6,000 children from 52% of the 12,000 households served by the district (based on a 1970 study). Between the mid-1950's and mid-1960's school enrollments and teaching staff both increased by approximately 25%. Since 1971-72 enrollments have leveled.

The district includes one pluralistic and two factional suburbs. The factional suburbs are Republican-dominated, have restricted country clubs, and friendship cliques that are frequently formed on a religious basis. School enrollments reflect a decline in Protestant residents and an increase in Jewsand Catholics. (The latter due largely to the

transfer from local parochial to public schools.) Politics in the pluralistic suburb are not controlled by one party and the population comprises several ethnic and social class groupings.

For seven years, between 1962 and 1968, educational controversy was suppressed and participation in school-controlled mechanisms was inhibited by insulating decision-making from the community through professional domination and a sanctioning board. Public apathy was fostered by the norm of non-intervention, creating a leadership and responsibility vacuum within the community at large.

This trend was reversed in 1968 by the appointment of a "community-minded" superintendent and a 1969 budget defeat which led to school board-initiated actions to increase participation in decision-making. After the 1969 budget defeat the school board president announced three goals for the school board: 1) to develop support for the school budget, 2) to make the schools responsive to the community and 3) to develop more efficient management systems, thereby keeping costs down.

Increased voter turnout (Tables I and II) in school elections prior to 1969 reflected opposition to bond issues and rapidly rising school costs. In 1969 opposition was associated with four additional factors: dissatisfaction with school board-community relations, the quality of educational services, property reassessments and redistricting. (The latter related to utilization, not integration.)

Between 1969 and 1970 the superintendent assumed the role of an "expert advisor," the school board emerged as a mediating agency, and the school budget was passed in both 1970 and 1971. The budget was defeated in 1972. Contrary to a long-held belief of administrators and

board members that budget opposition was related to non-use of the schools, the 1972 budget was defeated by school parents. (This was the first year that the school board analyzed voting on this criterion.)

Effects of leadership change on participation will be illustrated in the events related to two board innovations instituted in 1969-70: open budget hearings and an educational goals committee.

TABLE I

Turnout at school tax elections 1960-1972

	YEAR	VOTE		TOTAL VOTE	TOTAL BUDGET
		Yes	No		
	1960	92	5	97	$4,000,000
	1961	92	2	94	4,300,000
*	1962	1,471	428	1,899	4,700,000
	1963	300	28	328	5,300,000
	1964	102	6	108	6,000,000
*	1965	256	62	318	6,500,000
*	1966	428	440	922	7,300,000
	1967	1,437	1,257	2,694	8,300,000
	1968-May	2,225	2,786	5,011	9,900,000
	1968-June	2,509	2,125	4,634	9,600,000
*	1969-May	2,312	2,843	5,155	10,900,000
	1969-June	2,638	2,985	5,623	10,900,000
	1970	3,016	2,316	5,332	11,800,000
	1971	2,240	1,620	3,860	12,600,000
	1972-May	1,687	2,241	3,928	13,500,000
	1972-June	2,849	1,816	4,665	13,164,522

*Contested trustee elections

TABLE II

Turnout at bond elections

YEAR	VOTE		TOTAL VOTE
	Yes	No	
1963	1,880	415	2,295
1965	2,647	1,611	4,258
* 1969	2,403	2,659	5,062

*1969 bond issue and school tax presented on same ballot.
1963 and 1965 bond elections held one month after tax election.

LEADERSHIP CHANGE

One study of suburban school elections has identified the nonpartisan nominating caucus as a major conflict management device (Minar 1968). Another suggests that the system works best when organized on a group rather than a geographic basis (O'Shea 1972).

The Eastport nominating caucus, the Selection Committee, is organized on a geographic basis with 12 elected members who appoint 12 additional members. The criteria for electing and appointing members appear to vary with changes in participants. Procedures for electing the selectors were changed in 1969-70, when this election of Selection Committee candidates was opened to the entire community. Previously, this election was confined to residents who attended the Selection Committee's annual meeting.

Until 1969-70 selectors were nominated and elected at the same meeting. At this annual meeting, the Selection Committee announced its school board candidates for the coming school year. (Trustees serve three-year terms and each year two vacancies were filled by the Committee.) Only political sophisticates knew about the selection process in the mid-sixties, and meeting participants were representative of vocal factions rather than the community at large. Since the Committee is independent of the school board and the school administration, it is categorized as a community-controlled mechanism. Its activities are not promoted or publicized by either the school board or the administration, nor does it have funds to carry on independent promotions.

In 1969-70 the Selection Committee decided that the selection procedures would be more democratic if selectors were voted on at the same time as the budget in the general school election. This change was instituted in the spring of 1970.

The most visible change in the Eastport school board between 1967-68 and 1972-73 was a shift from a business to a professional majority. There appears to be a relationship between occupational status, constituency orientation and perceived role function. These need to be analyzed by comparing the norms governing the school board-superintendent relationship during the reform and revival periods.

Eastport felt the effects of the school board reform movement in 1962 with the appointment of the first "outside" superintendent. This change reflected the activation of reform-oriented parents, and led to the modernization of the school plant, rising costs and a redefinition of participatory norms. Only participation supportive of the school administration was considered legitimate. Critics of the current establishment were excluded from formal participatory roles (both elected and appointed).

In the early 60's the reformists dominated participatory roles. Voting statistics suggest that this group consisted of a small minority (Table I). Opposition did not appear until 1965, when a school board incumbent was defeated by an independent candidate who ran an "anti-budget" campaign.

Judging from the characteristics and behavior of a majority of board members and interviews with former members of the Selection Committee,

the criteria for selecting candidates in the reform period included: high business or professional status, specialized knowledge (usually limited to finance and law), participation in some civic activity, and a "pro-school" attitude. A "pro-school" attitude was defined as the desire to improve the school system, approve increased spending, support the existing system, and accept professional control of the school program. Former teachers, and educators were excluded on the superintendent's advice that these people tend to have "definite" opinions about education and a tendency to "interfere" in school administration. Vocal critics were excluded on the grounds that they had an "axe to grind" and would make it difficult for the board to cooperate with the administration. Residents active in partisan politics were also excluded in order to "keep politics out of education."

These criteria led to non-controversial, status-congruent boards dominated by acquiescent males with little knowledge of education other than that gained through their own experience, and little knowledge of the community beyond their own peer groups.

Evidence of a revival movement appeared in 1968 when two reportedly "anti-budget" businessmen were nominated by the Selection Committee, creating a "split" board. The superintendent had resigned prior to the 1968 election but this was not disclosed until after the election.

Selection Committee nominees for 1969-70 were again businessmen. They were reported to be "pro-school", but were said to believe that the schools could be run more efficiently. One opposition candidate,

an educational consultant, supported by a small faction of school critics, was rumored to be running to promote "special interests." He lost.

The change in procedures for electing selectors may reflect a change in participants. Domination of the school board by businessmen, the elimination or reduction of school services, rumors that the 1967-68 and 1968-69 selection meetings were "stacked" by "conservatives", combined with 1969-70 board-initiated innovations to increase participation of "anti-budget" groups -- these factors appear to have activated the "pro-school" group and a few residents associated with the early reform period. Selection Committee nominees since 1969-70, for the most part, are school and civic volunteers. (The "pro-school" group consists primarily of residents who favor upgrading services regardless of cost.)

There have been three results: 1) a shift from a business to a professional majority on the school board, 2) a change in perceived role function from legitimating the school system to representing the community and 3) a change in constituency orientation. This last change appears significant.

In 1972-73 the board, for the first time, includes a majority who perceive the community as pluralistic, rather than being controlled by a large dominant group. All three shifts are reflected in a new board policy to support the development of alternate learning programs. Previous boards were inclined to reject parent requests for change or alternatives on the ground that the community was dominated by educational "conservatives" who would vote down the budget if they didn't like the changes.

Leadership change in 1968 and 1969 reflected the revival of local control in fiscal policies. Subsequently, there has been a trend to revive local control in educational policy.

Board candidates for two seats that were to be filled in 1970-71 were a college administrator (female) and a minister-professional. Voters approved a proposal to add a seventh seat on the school board. The Selection Committee proposed a businessman as candidate. He was opposed by an incumbent, (a "professional housewife" *) whose term on the board had just expired. The "pro-school" faction, incensed at this attempt to unseat the only trustee perceived as representing the interests of school parents (at that time), ran a vigorous and successful campaign to re-elect the housewife.

The Selection Committee candidate in 1971-72 was the educational consultant who was defeated in the 1969-70 election. (One of the two incumbents chose to continue in office that year). In 1972-73 the selectors picked a "professional housewife" and a businessman who had been active in the "pro-school" group.

Thus there appears to have been a change in the type of candidates offered by the Selection Committee which may reflect the activation of education and community-minded parents. The ability of the most active residents to achieve a board majority represents a source of strain in the school board-community relationship and highlights the difficulties inherent in the selection process. No effort has been made to undertake a representative survey of educational values and philosophy. Therefore neither the board or the Selection Committee has accurate information on the distribution of attitudes within the community.

*A "professional housewife" is a woman who has acquired the training to perform voluntary roles with professional skills.

Although the election of selectors has been opened to the community, the procedures for nominating selectors has not been changed to ensure representation of community groups and factions. For example, of the 12 selectors elected in 1972 only one was not a public school parent. Whether or not the 12 appointed selectors is more representative of the community (than the elected group) depends on the criteria for appointment (which has never been made public).

A major difference between the professional and business orientation is the definition of the school board's function and the trustee's role. All of the businessmen interviewed to date (including both formal and secondary participants) believe that the board should formulate policy and leave program and curriculum decisions to the administration. The professionals tend to believe that the board should be responsible for policy and curriculum and that the two cannot be separated. They feel that the superintendent's function should be primarily to implement curriculum.

One reason why the businessman may adhere to the separation of functions is that he tends to perceive the existing curriculum as representing his (and the majority's) educational philosophy. By refusing requests for additional funds for new programs or reallocating existing resources to create new programs, the board, in effect, controls the school program. Board members who perceive the superintendent as sharing their philosophy are willing to give him complete responsibility for allocating resources. (The current superintendent has not discussed his educational philosophy publicly.)

Changes effected by the board between 1969 and 1972 indicate an effort to upgrade the existing program and make administration more efficient rather than to develop new programs (with the exception of a work-study program for secondary pupils). Two alternate high school programs, a program for students with learning disabilities and "open" elementary classrooms were initiated by teachers and parents. Following this initiative, programs were approved by the board.)

SCHOOL BOARD INNOVATIONS AND PARTICIPATION

The 1969-70 board's first goal, support for the budget, was achieved through the expansion of formal participatory roles and the appointment of both influential citizens and critics to some of these roles. In addition, the board made several efforts to communicate with various community groups not directly involved in school affairs.

These changes increased supportive participation in the school board controlled mechanisms and served to integrate the school system with the non-school community.

School board-controlled mechanisms include advisory committees, regular board meetings, budget hearings and local school meetings. Administration-controlled mechanisms include the PTA and school meetings run by the principal. The PTA is included in this category because its membership includes the school principal and a teacher representative. In addition, most local PTA's attempt to select PTA presidents who can "work with the principal and adhere to state PTA requirements, which until spring 1972 stipulated that the PTA should not "interfere with administrative policies."

Community-controlled mechanisms for participation include the Selection Committee, ad hoc groups, formal groups (i.e. local business groups, fraternal associations and service clubs, etc.) and the local newspaper.

Changes in secondary participation to be discussed here are based on the following: 1) the number of citizens attending various meetings, 2) observed behavior of citizens, 3) interviews with participants, 4) evidence of the activation of community groups and 5) content analysis of letters published in the local newspaper.

There appears to be a correlation between increased supportive participation in school board controlled-mechanisms and the representativeness of formal participatory roles appointed by the board. When these formal participatory roles include representatives of various community factions, there was an increase in supportive participation. As participation in these formal roles became dominated by the professional educators and "representatives of the "pro-school" faction in 1970-71 and 1971-72 secondary participation was channeled into the community-controlled mechanisms.

The primary device instituted by the school board in 1969-70 to increase participation in school-controlled mechanisms was an Educational Goals Committee. The manifest function of this Committee was to find out what residents thought about the educational program and services and to develop goals for the school system. It had the latent function of expanding representation of formal participatory roles, thus integrating the school board with parent factions. This was an important factor in 1969-70 because this function had not been maintained by the PTA during the "reform" period.

Until the Goals Committee was instituted, none of the school board or administration-controlled mechanisms provided an opportunity to discuss the school program or services. Although matters relating to these issues were raised at public meetings, they were not discussed. These topics were regarded by administrators as beyond the competence of parents, and they advised PTA leaders to avoid discussions of educational philosophy or curriculum because they would lead to controversy. If anyone did question the adequacy of educational services, the former superintendent would usually respond that "dissatisfied parents are ones whose children aren't doing well."

It has not been feasible to collect systematic data on the Eastport PTA, therefore we must rely on a qualitative assessment of secondary participation in this mechanism.

There appears to be a correlation between level of participation and local school PTA leadership. For example, in one school in 1970 the PTA presidents were regarded as "anti-budget" parents by the "pro-budget" group. Meeting attendance was high. It was also high the following year, when PTA roles at this same school were filled by fathers as well as mothers representing both factions. Evening meetings are usually better attended than daytime meetings and also draw more fathers and working mothers.

Participation in school meetings (those run by local school principals) seems to be related to the principal's leadership style. In schools where principals are regarded by parents as defensive or authoritarian (Steinberg, 1971) attendance at regular PTA and school meetings is low except for the first meeting of the year when parents feel they might obtain some

information about the coming year or a crisis. Meetings at these schools are typically highly structured with little opportunity for interaction between parents and between parents and administrators.

In Eastport, a parent turnout of 15-20% is regarded as "high." A 5% turnout is regarded as "low." There is considerable school by school variation.

In 1970-71 the school board began the practice of holding two meetings a year at each local school. The first meeting to listen to parent concerns, the second to hear parent reaction to the proposed budget. Patterns of participation discussed in the following section are based on the latter.

Budget Hearings and Conflict 1968-69

During the reform period the budget was prepared by the superintendent and his administrative staff. "In those days," according to one trustee, "no one dreamed of questioning an item in the budget. We thought the professionals knew best and it wasn't the board's function to question specific items. Now we scrutinize everything."

It was extremely difficult for anyone to scrutinize the budget prior to 1969. Even businessmen complained that it was confusing. Attendance at regular school board meetings that year was low, but about 400 residents showed up for the annual budget hearing. When the school board refused to cut the budget the debate was channeled into the local newspapers and taxpayer groups. The board's refusal to cut the budget was perceived by many residents as proof that the board did not "represent the community."

1969-70 Budget and Goals Meetings: In keeping with its goal to economize, the new board reduced an estimate 22% increase in the 1970-71 budget

to 12%. These cuts and refusal to support parent requests for additional services antagonized the PTA and the pro-school faction. They accused the board of listening to the "negative" groups and even tried to stop a board-sponsored survey on attitudes toward school spending. PTA leaders were angry at the board for activating the "anti-budget" people and permitting them to occupy formal participatory roles.

There were, however, some parents who placed themselves in the "pro-budget" group who supported the board's economies. These parents had become active in the community enabling them to see that it was not dominated by the affluent. While they preferred to increase school services they felt the board had to consider the entire community -- not just school parents. A 1970 board sponsored survey on attitudes toward school costs indicated an average income of $18,000 with 18% of the respondents reporting incomes under $10,000 per year.

The 1970-71 budget included an increase of $1,300,000 over the previous year, due to replacement of items left out of the earlier "austerity" budget, teacher's salary increases and a small amount for program improvement (an estimated 3%). Observers attributed the favorable outcome to the fact that the school board had listened to and involved the community. This was the first time that promotion of the budget was not confined to the PTA and the pro-school faction but shared throughout the community. (Some efforts were indirect. For example, the LWV sponsored a study of the school system which included information about school costs.) In addition, residents were finally aware that defeating the budget did not keep costs from rising. Several parents revealed that they were shocked to discover that extra-curricular sports, textbooks and other services

were eliminated, but teacher's salary increases were left in the budget. A few residents suggested action to change these state legislated procedures but nothing was done about it.

Approximately 500 residents were actively involved in education in 1969-70 primarily through the efforts of The Educational Goals Committee. The steering committee for this first year included 21 residents, 11 of whom were civic and social influentials or dissidents who had not previously been active in formal roles. They recruited 50 additional residents who held meetings in their homes to discuss the educational program.

When some of the "pro-school" people heard the results of these discussions they were convinced the groups were dominated by "conservatives." Concerns focused on the teaching of the basic skills, non-college-bound students and the "average" student. Interviews with meeting participants suggest that these concerns did not reflect a conservative bias but were shared by a wide range of participants.

Several residents were cynical about these meetings, claiming they were a "public relations gimmick" to get people to "vent steam" before the budget vote. Many reported that they attended the meetings out of a sense of obligation.

1970-71 Budget and Goals Meetings: Some of the board's advisory committees were still in operation in 1970-71 but most had completed their assignments. Thus board meetings and the Goals Committee were the major mechanisms for secondary participation.

In order to increase understanding of the budget the board held separate budget hearings at each of the six local schools in addition to the annual hearing required by law. Public announcement of program

cuts brought out hundreds of parents at schools most affected by the cuts. Opposition was diffused by modifying the program cuts in schools which exhibited the greatest opposition.

There was minimal public discussion of a major issue in the 71-72 budget: the fact that teacher contract negotiations had not been completed before the election. However, the board explained that the proposed budget included anticipated salary increases and would not go up regardless of the outcome of negotiations.

Negotiations were completed after the budget was passed, by 620 votes, despite a sizeable increase of $800,000. A Right to Read program was announced at a June board meeting, indicating the board's effort to increase productivity and accountability. (Teachers would work an additional 2 hours a week providing reading instruction to children reading below their potential, and the program would be evaluated.) Teacher and parent opposition did not emerge until school began in September, 1971 when the program became visible to both groups. (School board meetings and newspaper announcements appear to be ineffective communication channels in Eastport.)

Only PTA presidents (and two parents of their choice), and teachers appointed by principals knew about the reading program in June. Many parents and teachers were hostile to the program because it was imposed from above, without their involvement. Parents felt this was a violation of the board's traditional policy to involve the community in educational policies. Some teachers complained about hasty implementation of changes without sufficient teacher preparation and planning. Parents were inclined to sympathize with these teachers. (Particularly those parents who considered their children to be "bright.")

Also, announcement of the program reinforced the suspicion that reading instruction in the elementary schools was inadequate. This was acknowledged by the board and administration, although the presentation of achievement test results gave no indication of the extent of the problem.

Goals meetings 1971: There was a marked decrease in participation in the 1971 goals meetings which included a spring workshop and an all day community-school workshop. Whereas the 1970 meetings had included about 500 secondary participants, most of the 1971 participants were formal role occupants and members of the "pro-school" faction. Or, as one observer described them, "the same old group."

The steering committee for 1971 consisted of two administrators, six teachers, six students, the president of the teacher's association and no parents. A few parents participated as discussion leaders in the all-day workshop. Goals were formulated on the basis of the 1970 and 1971 meetings but were written up by the second group.

The school board questioned the representativeness of the conclusions and asked the committee to hold another series of house meetings in 1972 for more representative feed-back. (The four goals included: 1) emphasis on individual worth and responsibility to society, 2) a variety of teaching styles and content to meet student needs with emphasis on basic skills, 3) responsive internal and external communication and 4) effective planning, efficient management and evaluation of results.)

1971-72 Budget and Goals Meetings: Procedures for introducing and discussing the proposed 1972-73 budget were similar to those utilized the previous year. There was a marked decrease in attendance at local school meetings as well as the annual hearing (a total of 150 residents attended these 7 meetings). Again, the teacher contract negotiations had not been

completed and residents were promised that the final figure would not exceed the proposed amount.

The proposed budget came to $13,500,000. A $900,000 increase would raise property taxes $4.93 per thousand assessed valuation. Teachers' salaries and benefits represented the major increase. A reduction in school revenues required a much higher increase in homeowner's property taxes than would have been expected normally (primarily due to the reduction of assessed value of apartment houses). Each year since 1970 the board has reduced non-instructional expenses and eliminated some staff positions. Further reductions, announced the board, would require program cuts.

The absence of visible organized opposition led one former board president to remark that the budget would be passed. Unlike 1969, when opposition was evident throughout the year and months before the election, the opposition did not emerge in 1972 until three weeks before the election, when residents started writing anti-budget letters to the newspaper.

It is interesting to compare the 1972 anti-budget letters with those written in 1969. In the earlier period letters were based on emotional appeals, with little reference to substantive issues. In contrast, several of the 1972 letters indicated a growing sophistication in educational finance and administration.

This knowledge was the result of increased participation and access to information on the school system. In informal meetings some board members inferred the board's inability to control school costs because of

requirements imposed by the state legislature and the strength of the teachers' union. It was apparent to the community that the board's efforts to reduce expenditures in non-instructional costs could never balance teachers' salary and benefit increases. (Salaries and benefits make up 80% of the budget).

If residents complained about specific expenditures, however, the board would explain that the district spent less in that area than most other districts in the country. This explanation was not convincing to property owners who compared 1972 taxes with those in 1962. By 1972 even some who had always identified with the "pro-budget" group had begun to complain privately about teacher's benefits, incompetence and "waste."

As one businessman wrote to the local paper: "Apparently, we are approaching a fiscal crisis in regard to educational cost." It was felt that the schools should institute the same type of controls as industry to reduce costs and increase productivity.

An anti-budget ad by a "Concerned Taxpayer" group announced the reactivation of a group that had been instrumental in the 1969 budget defeat. Visible participants in this group are residents with no children in the schools. But there are indications that school parents who feel that their point of view is not represented on the school board or who feel they have been intimidated by the school staff channel their dissent to these older residents. This is perhaps the reason some board members and administrators perceived the community as dominated by "conservatives." (This is the most visible and vocal group.) In a community like Eastport, where the school system is dependent primarily on school parents for support, the board must ensure as it did in 1969-70 that all parent groups are represented in formal participatory roles.

This need is illustrated by the 1972-73 budget defeat in which a majority of votes were cast by school parents. In response, the board reduced the total budget by $340,000 and achieved a favorable outcome on a second ballot.

The steering committee for the 1972 goals effort included 24 administrators, teachers, parents and students. Of the eight parents, only three could be classified as community influentials, others had participated in earlier committees but were not active in either general school or civic affairs.

Following the board's mandate, this committee held a series of meetings in homes to discuss the four goals formulated by the previous group. Only 22 residents agreed to hold these home meetings. Goals committee members and residents attributed the decline in participation to: 1) lack of confidence in the committee -- it was perceived as a device to manipulate parents to vote "yes", 2) the steering committee did not represent the community, 3) alienation of the community and administration, and 4) boredom -- people said they were tired of talking about the same thing.

The low response to both the budget hearings and the goals effort in 1971-72 is an indication that the board had lost its credibility. When asked why they didn't go to meetings, former participants replied "Why bother?" The board has made up its mind and is going to go ahead no matter what we say. . . . The simplest thing is to vote no -- that's the only thing that influences the board."

Some parents were reluctant to speak out publicly against a budget increase based primarily on teacher's salary increases. There is wide-

spread parent feeling that this type of opposition will affect the way their children are treated by teachers.

The alienation between the administration and parents became visible with two issues: 1) opposition to budget cuts to reduce the 72-73 budget and 2) opposition to terms of the teacher contract.

Parents and teachers heard about the proposed cuts through the newspaper, PTA leaders and union representatives. About 500 residents and faculty packed the hearing on this issue. When they complained about not being involved in the decisions, the board president said it was their own fault since they had had ample opportunity to discuss the budget at the the pre-election hearings. Parents and teachers could not understand this attitude since they perceived the purpose of those hearings to explain the proposed budget -- not for parents and teachers to make recommendations for budget cuts. These conflicting expectations reflects the inability of the community to perceive the change in the board's attitude towards participation and point out the need for the board to clarify its expectations for various types of participation.

Parents and some board members were antagonized by the terms of the 1972 contract which included a proposal to dismiss elementary pupils at 2:30 instead of 3:00. Informed parents were mainly those included in the PTA communication "network" who had heard about the issues only a few hours before the discussion.

Most Eastport citizens assumed that the entire board was aware of the proposed time change, but vocal dissent of a board majority indicated that this was not the case. This public disclosure of controversy within the board, a departure from the policy of unanimity, created public

visibility of administrative and professional domination of the negotiating process, as well as the constituency orientation of the board minority (all businessmen). (The educational consultant expressed support for the proposal, on the basis that radical changes were necessary to solve the system's problems, but felt the change could not be instituted on such short notice.)

One of the most revealing aspects of this controversy was the support for the proposed time change by the two board members who had initiated increased participation in decision-making in 1969-70. The board president, one of these two change agents, countered community objections to the proposal with the insistence that the school system had to change and it was up to the community to adjust to school initiated changes.

"Don't you realize how contradictory this is ?" one mother asked the board president, "You've been telling us for three years that the board would be responsive to the community -- then you turn around and support a policy that would have a major effect on our lives without one word of consultation with us." Other parents wanted to know why the teacher negotiating terms were not made public before ratification.

"We can't discuss these things in public," the trustee explained. The law won't permit it."

Several letters to the editor debated these issues suggesting that instead of representing the community and fostering changes reflecting the community, the board was in fact attempting to change the community to suit the interests of teachers and administrators.

These events illustrate two of the major factors responsible for the declining power of the local school board: state mandated economic and educational requirements and the ascendance of the teacher's association.

Under present circumstances, the original meaning of "local control", or local determination of educational expenditures, no longer applies.

The board's efforts to create an open participatory system are limited by the restraints imposed by these external authorities. Eastport citizens again felt insulated from the decision-making process and inclined to perceive the board as a legimating agency.

This results from the perception that the board's function in the economic sphere is limited to ratification or rejection of privately negotiated teacher contracts. Its function in the educational sphere appears limited to policy-making with citizen in-put confined to the formulation of amorphous goals.

Interviews with board members and some facts suggest that these citizen perceptions are simplistic. Board members report that there is considerable exchange with the teacher's union prior to ratification. However, since these behaviors cannot be made public, the process is a mystery to most citizens and creates the basis for misunderstanding. While it may be necessary for economic matters to be negotiated privately, some citizens question the appropriateness of these procedures for issues that affect the school program and the community.

Despite its declining authority, the Eastport school board was able to achieve a gain (additional teaching hours) in the 1971-72 contract and has responded to parent concerns related to educational services. These achievements, however, benefited a small number of students (only 10% of the elementary and junior high school students were recruited for the Right to Read program and revised vocational programs in the high school).

For a majority of voters the salient issue was the continued increase in school taxes which are an obvious burden to the less affluent. Although the budget was defeated in all four voting districts, the highest "no" vote was cast in the area with the largest number of working class families.

SUMMARY

Changes in school board leadership between 1969 and 1972 suggest that the revival movement can be divided into two phases. The early period reflects an attempt to revive local control of school finances, the present period to revive local control in educational policy.

Increased secondary participation in 1969-70, integrating the school system with the community created a strong "pro-budget" sentiment in 1970. A decline in supportive participation in 1972 was attributed to increased school taxes and the domination of formal participatory roles by members of the "pro-school" faction which renewed the communication gap between the board and the school parents. It became evident that the board could not fulfil its 1969 promise to keep costs down due to two factors beyond the board's control: state mandated requirements and the ascendance of the teacher's union.

While maintenance of the strategies utilized to integrate the school and the community might not have changed the budget outcome, it might have provided the school board and administration with more adequate information on parent sentiment and possibly effected budget modification before the election.

Findings suggest that when increased participation is related to an increase in secondary participation in school-controlled mechanisms, election outcomes will be favorable. If participation is channeled into community-controlled mechanisms the outcome will be negative.

In Eastport increased use of school-controlled mechanisms was fostered by expanding formal participatory roles which were filled by parents representing various community factions. Participation in school-controlled channels decreased as formal roles became dominated by representatives of one faction and dissent was directed into the community-controlled channels.

Failure to institutionalize procedures that will ensure broad-based parent representation in formal participatory roles appears to be a major conflict inducing factor in Eastport. Since school-controlled formal roles in Eastport tend to be dominated by the "pro-school" faction, the school board must assume the responsibility for broadening participation.

Two additional sources of strain in Eastport school-community relations were identified in the preceding analysis:

1) Traditional school board procedures for deliberating controversial issues in closed "executive sessions" which prevent the community from obtaining accurate information on education matters. Community perceptions of the school board are limited to visible issues and behavior.

2) Institutionalized procedures for selecting school trustees which enable the most active factions to dominate decision-making roles.

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