DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 094 028 UD 014 342

AUTHOR O'Shea, David
TITLE Theoretical Perspectives on School District Decentralization.
PUB DATE Apr 74
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (59th, Chicago, Illinois, April 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.85 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Community Control; Community Involvement; *Decentralization; Educational Administration; Educational Policy; Educational Problems; Educational Resources; Governance; Policy Formation; Politics; Public Policy; *School Districts; *Systems Approach; *Urban Education
IDENTIFIERS California

ABSTRACT

Drawing largely on data from Los Angeles, but with reference to other cities where appropriate, this paper attempts to clarify the distinctive positions taken by advocates of community control as opposed to proponents of administrative decentralization. While community control is essentially a political demand, oriented toward citizens influencing actual policy making, most decentralization plans, though responding to demands in the political arena, are primarily organizational, facilitating local participation in the implementation of policies already decided. Though different, both approaches represent attempts to deal with the relatively low levels of achievement and high dropout rates characterizing schools in minority areas. Whereas proposals for community control regard the poor outcomes of schooling as centering on the question of staff accountability, an organizational system perspective suggests that school ineffectiveness results from local administrators lacking both adequate resources and sufficient discretion in the use of such resources as are available. It is argued here that at issue are alternative definitions of the situation, one based on the theoretical perspectives of a political system model, the other on those of an organization as an open system, responsive to environmental constraints and contingencies. (Author/JM)

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOL DISTRICT DECENTRALIZATION

David O'Shea
Department of Education
University of California
Los Angeles

Paper for Symposium on School District Decentralization: Annual Meeting, AERA, Chicago, Illinois, April 15-19, 1974.

Decentralization has been one of the major developments in urban education in the past decade.[1] Appearance of this type of structural change is associated with the emergence, since 1966, of demands from minority sectors of the population for community control of the public schools. While community control is an essentially political demand, oriented toward citizens influencing actual policy-making, most decentralization plans, though responding to demands in the political arena, are primarily organizational, facilitating local participation in the implementation of policies already decided. Changing the organizational structure serves to preserve the existing political structure. Though different, the political and organizational approaches to school district reform both represent attempts to deal with the same problem; the relatively low levels of achievement and high dropout rates characterizing schools in minority areas. Proposals for community control, for example, derive logically from a political definition of the achievement problem which views the poor outcomes of schooling as centering the the question of staff accountability. However, an organizational system perspective leads to an alternative, and somewhat incompatible, conclusion. This is that the ineffectiveness of many schools in low income minority communities results from local administrators

lacking both adequate resources, and sufficient discretion in the use of such resources as are available. Consequently, administrative decentralization is seen as the solution; i.e., the passing out of increased authority to local principals, rather than to parents, for decisions concerning school program, personnel, and budget.

Drawing largely upon data from Los Angeles, but with reference to other cities where appropriate, this paper attempts to clarify the distinctive positions taken by advocates of community control as opposed to proponents of administrative decentralization. It is argued here that at issue are alternative definitions of the situation, one based upon the theoretical perspectives of a political systems model, the other upon those of an organization as an open system, responsive to environmental constraints and contingencies.

To date, of course, the organizational perspective remains dominant, with school systems decentralizing administration rather than policy-making. Whether or not policy-making becomes decentralized, as advocates of a political analysis of the educational problem suggest, depends largely on the ability of educational organizations to meet those academic needs which have generated community control demands in minority communities.

THE POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE AND COMMUNITY CONTROL

Analysis of events leading up to decentralization from a political system perspective, based upon Easton's (1965a, 1965b) work, focuses attention upon the political demands addressed to school district authorities and attempts made to mobilize support behind these demands. Such an analysis, for New York, Detroit, and Los Angeles, reveals a sequential model, common to all three cities, of key events leading up to the actual decision. These events were:

1. Rapid expansion in the proportion of minority group residents in urban populations.
2. Parallel increases in the proportion of schools with relatively low average levels of achievement.
3. Demands for desegregation as an approach to improving student achievement.
4. Relatively little response to desegregation demands.
5. Change from call for desegregation to demand for community control and direct accountability of schools to their clients.
6. Involvement of partisan political leaders in the educational problem.
7. Informal alliances between minority leaders on the one hand and influential white liberals and/or conservatives on the other.
8. Adoption of decentralization plan.

Of course, not all cities experiencing the first four of the above steps have also faced the subsequent ones. In Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago, for example, the push for community control has been relatively weak, though sufficient to put decentralization on the agenda of School District politics. Variations in the model between cities provide a potentially fruitful topic for research. It is anticipated that such research would reinforce the important role of the community control demand in precipitating moves toward decentralization.

The community control demand was first articulated in East Harlem in the Fall of 1966.[2] Despite a policy adopted in 1965 to cease constructing schools in locations that would generate an all-minority enrollment, the School District authorities decided to build Intermediate School 201 in an all Black neighborhood. The Board justified this action on the grounds that the site was purchased prior to adoption of the site selection policy.

Parents were outraged by the Board decision and, unhappily for the authorities, this community upset occurred in the Summer of 1966, the period Stokely Carmichael issued the call for Black Power. In East Harlem, Black Power was interpreted to mean community control of the schools, community leaders argued that if the authorities would not integrate schooling to help minority children achieve at a higher level, then segregated schools must be made accountable for student performance to the parental population. Essentially, therefore, the call for community control be-

came a substitute for the earlier demand for desegregation.

Once articulated in New York, the concept of community control spread to Detroit and Los Angeles. In all three cities the demand was taken up by partisan political leaders, resulting in legislative proposals for decentralizing school districts. These legislative proposals were supported by a coalition of leaders from both the majority and minority sectors of the population. While the minorities wanted achievement gains, the Anglo majority sought either reinforcement of segregating boundaries, or local control to implement enrichment programs and other qualitative improvements in their schools. By 1971, all three cities initiated decentralization programs. In New York and Detroit, where this resulted from legislative action, decentralization came closest to following a political system logic. In both New York and Detroit the school district was divided into regions, each to be governed by an elected board with power to appoint its own Superintendent. Eight such regions exist in Detroit; thirty-one in New York. In both cities, however, a central board has continued to function, coordinating overall activities, and retaining responsibility for budget and personnel. In Los Angeles, by contrast, where decentralization was introduced by the District itself, the school system has not divided into locally governed regions, but into twelve administrative areas, each responsible for a full K through twelve program. In addition,

and again distinct from Detroit and New York, Los Angeles has mandated elected school-community advisory councils, though emphasizing the advisory rather than decision-making role of these bodies.

AN ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS OF DECENTRALIZATION

Developments in Los Angeles, though initiated by action in the political arena, have developed largely in accord with the logic of an organizational system rather than that of a political system. Control has not changed, only structure. Interpretation of the structural changes is facilitated, therefore, by viewing these in the persepctive of Thompson's (1967) approach to organizations as open systems, "hence indeterminate and faced with uncertainty, but at the same time as subject to criteria of rationality and hence needing determinateness and certainty" (p. 10).

Thompson's approach synthesizes two earlier traditions which, as Gouldner points out, have focused upon either formal or informal, open or closed, characteristics of organizations. Thompson incorporates both, viewing organizations as natural, or informal, systems, shaped in many ways by environmental constraints, and the nature of their technology, but always striving toward formalized control over internal operations and external pressures in order to achieve predictability, and reduce uncertainty. Of particular relevance to the question of school district decentra-

lization is Thompson's proposal "that organizations cope with uncertainty by creating certain parts specifically to deal with it, specializing other parts in operating under conditions of certainty, or near certainty" (p. 13). Historically, as challenges have emerged in the social environment, the Los Angeles District has initiated structures specialized to deal with that sector of the environment which generated the challenge, thereby creating uncertainty for the District's operations.

By way of example, in Los Angeles in 1963, following a visit by Martin Luther King, demands for desegregation escalated in the form of protest marches on the Board. One consequence of this was establishment at the end of 1963 of the Office of Urban Affairs, the purposes of which included:

- Fostering research into the basic causes of current problems in achieving equal educational opportunity for all.
- Recommending ways for the District to work more effectively in and with the community in relieving these problems.
- Expanding and developing programs in the field of human relations as well as strengthening of personnel procedures in this area. (Los Angeles Unified School District, 1970:2)

Clearly this office was a new unit the functions of which were oriented toward reduction of uncertainty in the District's relationships with the Black, and also the Mexican-American sectors of the population, an increasingly important part of the social environment. In Thompson's model, uncertainty

in behavior of key sectors of the social environment of an organization indicates a breakdown in boundary-spanning processes and associated structures. Boundary-spanning is the process by which an organization receives inputs of information and resources from environmental elements and, conversely, exerts some measure of control to achieve predictability. To the degree required in order to stabilize environmental inputs organizations will create specialized units, as well as adapt their structure.

School systems, for example, are typically structured into separate elementary, junior high and high school divisions. Such structural arrangements help communication with the student population, one of the most important inputs into the organization; facilitate student control, a central problem for schools; and allow for the rationalization of instructional services. All three factors help the schools to reduce uncertainty in their social environment, maximizing predictability, a condition necessary for organizations to attain their goals efficiently.

Apart from structural adaptation to environmental exigencies, organizations develop specialized boundary-spanning units when it becomes necessary to reduce, or control, dependency upon elements in the social environment. School districts are notoriously dependent upon the electorate for economic support. Operating under norms of rationality, the logical procedure is for districts to develop structures

which will help the system respond to its dependency by securing some measure of control. In fact, school boards and parent-teacher associations constitute such structures, though having other functions as well. As Kerr (1964) discovered in studying school boards, one of their chief functions is to legitimate claims of the educational system upon community resources. For this reason, consensus among board members in regard to a tax referendum or a bond issue is extremely important for the mobilization of public support. In the same context, the role of PTA members in mobilizing electoral support for referenda is well known (O'Shea, 1973).

Boards and PTAs help, therefore, to counteract system dependence upon the electorate. In Los Angeles, however, by 1963, both the Board and the PTA were proving inadequate to the task of mobilizing community support behind the schools, at least in the rapidly expanding minority areas.[3] As in New York and other cities, leaders of the Black community in Los Angeles initially sought integrated schooling as a solution to the achievement problem, the extent of which Board members themselves appeared to be unaware until State mandated testing programs forced public disclosure of the situation in the Fall of 1967. Then, as Mazzoni (1971) observes:

> Board members were stunned to discover that the Los Angeles first graders ranked in the seventh percentile on national norms, second graders ranked in the eleventh percentile, and third graders ranked in the twenty-first percentile--all on the Stanford Reading Test (p. 212).

These figures are District averages, brought low by the minimal achievement levels of inner-city, predominantly minority, schools. By 1970 one-half of all children in the Los Angeles schools were from Black or Mexican-American families. Despite the achievement problem, as the District made no more than token efforts to desegregate, not surprisingly leaders in the minority communities began asking for community control This demand, unlike integration, was congenial to leaders in the Mexican-American as well as the Black population.

Within the context of a diffuse appeal for community control, at the end of 1967 activists in the Black community began making demands for specific changes in local schools, focusing initially upon the replacement of White principals by Blacks. Refusals by the authorities provoked student strikes, parent picket-lines, and even demonstrations at Board meetings, all of which finally secured the requested action in most cases. These eruptions, which spread to the Mexican-American community early in 1968, convinced Board members that, at the least, the school system had lost touch with large segments of the minority communities.

Responsiveness by the authorities to minority demands for changes in the personnel and programs of the schools contrasted markedly with the intransigence of the same authorities in the face of demands for desegregation. Acquiescence to demands for improved school operations in minority areas was, in fact, a way of cooling out the desegregation demand, which

no Board member desiring re-election could support. Also constraining Board members to respond to demands for changes in local schools was the end, conceptually, of the notion that centralized control is the only legitimate arrangement for the provision of publicly funded educational services. By redefining the community's political relationship with the school system, minority leaders substantially reduced the former dependent relationship of their communities in relation to the schools. Conversely, from then on the Board and central administration were made to feel conscious of the dependence of the educational system upon minority group support. This reversal of the way power relations were defined eventually received substantial support from the State Legislature, as evidenced by the passage of the vetoed Harmer-Greene Act in 1970 to initiate division of the Los Angeles District.

While the changed definition of power relationships justified community leaders in taking aggressive action on behalf of their demands, and correspondingly weakened the authorities ability to reject such demands, Board acquiescence was also facilitated by the fact that as of May, 1967, the Board had a liberal majority, which included the president, Mrs. Georgiana Hardy. Liberal dominance was the outcome of more than a decade of work by a loose coalation of organizations which came together for biannual board elections under the label of Citizens for Better Schools. Representatives

of the Jewish Federation took a leading role in the CBS group, being joined by labor leaders, civil rights groups, and other liberal civic organizations. Board members who achieved election with CBS support were: Mrs. Hardy, Julian Nava, of Mexican-American background, the Reverend James E. Jones, Jr., a Black minister, and Ralph Richardson, a UCLA professor.

As the authorities became increasingly aware of District dependency upon newly awakened minority populations they reacted by initiating steps directed toward more effective "boundary-spanning" between the educational system and the Black and Mexican-American communities. The objective of this activity, of course, was to restore lost public support, thus counteracting dependency. As Thompson (1967) points out:

> Since the dependence of an organization on its task environment introduces not only constraints but also contingencies, both of which interfere with the attainment of rationality, we would expect organizations subject to norms of rationality to manage dependency (p. 30).

BOUNDARY-SPANNING STRUCTURES

Recognizing that student, and parental, dissatisfaction was rapidly eroding support for the school system, from 1967 the Board and top administrators initiated efforts to establish boundary-spanning linkages with minority communities in Los Angeles. Sequentially, these activities included:

1. Expansion of the school-community relations program of the District's Urban Affairs Office.
2. Creation in 1968 of an Urban Affairs Committee of the Board, to which the Urban Affairs Office made direct reports.
3. Appointment of a Citizens' Advisory group to the Board's Urban Affairs Committee. Among the eight members were leaders in the Black and Mexican-American communities.[4]
4. Initiation in 1968 of two experimental education "complexes," each comprising one high school, a junior high, and four or five elementary schools. Federally funded, these complexes were an attempt to develop programs tailored to meet community needs. Parents, students, and community leaders were involved in program planning. One complex was in the Black community, the other in the Mexican-American.
5. The "Eighteen School Project," a pilot program initiated in 1968 to explore ways of implementing the greater flexibility allowed school programs under the State's Miller Education Act.
6. Formation of permanent commissions for the development of educational programs in each of the minority communities. The first of these, with twenty-four members, was the Mexican-American Education Commission, created in 1969.

7. Decentralization into eight elementary and four high school administrative "zones" in 1970.
8. Decentralization into twelve K-12 administrative areas in 1971.
9. Mandatory creation of elected school-community advisory councils, also in 1971.

That these developments were a response to the District leaderships' awareness of the increasingly problematic degree of support it enjoyed from the public is evidenced by statements of Superintendent Crowther. In his January, 1968, State of the School System Report to the Board, Crowther identified factors responsible for this changing role of the schools in the community as being:

1. A demand by citizens for a greater voice in the planning and implementation of school programs.
2. A need to involve all citizens in meaningful dialogue, to the end that greater understanding and support of the schools be created.

The new programs, units, and changes in organizational structure identified in the above list are concerned either with improving the quality of educational services, or what Thompson (1967:67) calls "buffering" environmental influences, or both. The buffering function is central to the boundary-spanning process. Essentially, the objective is to protect the day by day operation of the system from external upsets. One way to do this is to create units which work with community leaders to identify their concerns before these es-

calate into issues.

An example of the serious difficulties created for the Board by inadequate "boundary-spanning" is provided by events associated with the decision made by administrators in June, 1968, to transfer a teacher, Sal Castro, from Lincoln High School. Castro was then under indictment by a Grand Jury investigating responsibility for student strikes, and associated community upheavals, in East Los Angeles. When community leaders protested to the Board against the administrative action regarding Castro, Board members endorsed the staff decision. As a consequence, demonstrations escalated, culminating with a six-day sit-in at the Board in October, 1968. Faced with visibly strong opposition, Board members reversed their earlier position, allowing Castro to return to Lincoln.

Board members felt their predicament could have been avoided if the administration had provided better information. As Mazzoni (1971) recalls:

> The Board originally was told that the overwhelming majority of teachers at Lincoln High and all of its administrators opposed Castro's return ... and finally that sentiment against Castro among Mexican-American parents was equally vehement (pp. 189-90).

However, as the debate progressed "at one stormy Board meeting after another ... a different set of facts began to emerge" (Mazzoni, 1971:190). Not all teachers opposed Castro; only fifty of the 170 at Lincoln High School. The Teacher Negotiations Council for the District wanted Castro restored to his classroom, as did the politically

active elements in the Mexican-American community, and the parent advisory committee at the school.

Clearly, therefore, "boundary-spanning" between the District and the Mexican-American community was very inadequate, and similarly with the Black community. Extension of the school-community relations program, and close links between its parent office and the Board, was one attempted solution. Another, which grew directly out of the Lincoln High School upset, was the Mexican-American Commission, later followed by Black and Oriental Commissions.

Related to the origin of the Mexican-American Commission was the fact that when a Grand Jury began looking into the disturbances at Lincoln High School, Mexican-American leaders formed an Educational Issues Coordinating Committee to protect the interests of their community. This committee achieved prominence when it successfully pressured the Board to reinstate Sal Castro at Lincoln High School. Later, when the Board realized that it needed structured relationships with the Mexican-American population, and authorized creation of a Mexican-American Education Commission, the Educational Issues group disbanded and became, in effect, the Commission, even retaining its same chairman, the Reverend Vahac Mardorosian.

While from 1968 through 1970 the Board was moving to adapt the District's organizational structure in ways designed to manage its new-found dependency upon minority pop-

ulations, militant leaders in the Black and Mexican-American communities were sufficiently successful in mobilizing public support to attract State Legislators to their cause. While organizational initiatives sought to re-establish District leadership over its client population, political initiatives sought to break up the District into units of a size that could be held accountable to their clients.

LEGIALATIVE ACTION AND DISTRICT RESPONSE

Initially, in 1968, two separate plans to restructure the Los Angeles District into smaller units were introduced into legislative committees in Sacramento, but neither was voted out. One bill, an early effort by Senator John Harmer of Glendale, was rejected by the Finance Committee. Another, sponsored by Democrat James Wedworth whose constituency included part of the District, was lost in the Senate Rules Committee.

However, in 1969 Assemblymen Bill Greene and Leon Ralph, both representing sections of the Black community of Watts, proposed separate bills. Greene's called for experimental school districts patterned after the three then being tried in New York. Community boards were to run each district, and be empowered to contract out educational services, such as reading programs, not available in adequate form within the curriculum of existing schools. By contrast, Ralph's bill did not propose restructuring district organization, but

called for alternative facilities in those communities where average student achievement was below normal. Both bills focused upon the problem of low achievement, and both stressed staff accountability for student performance.

While these bills failed, from the debates there emerged a coalition of conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats which created a Joint Committee on the Reorganization of Large Urban Unified School Districts, defined to mean Los Angeles. Early in 1970 this committee produced a bill sponsored jointly by Greene and Harmer which called for the abolition of the Los Angeles School Board, the institution of twelve local districts, largely self-governing, and a central board with representatives of each of the new local districts. This was the bill which actually passed both houses of the Legislature in August, 1970, but was vetoed by Governor Reagan. Justifying his action, the Governor pointed to the fact that the Los Angeles District, responding to mounting pressure, had divided into four administrative areas as of July 1, 1970, in an effort to make some move toward bringing decision-making closer to its clients. In the Governor's view, the district's initiative deserved testing before the State intruded directly. In fact, the district went even further toward administrative decentralization the following year, dividing up into twelve administrative areas and mandating school-community advisory councils.

As noted by La Noue and Smith (1973), the decision to decentralize the administrative structure of the Los Angeles District had multiple origins. While public pressure was among the most important factors, finding expression in legislative action, a favorable opinion regarding decentralization had been developing among District administrators since 1960. In fact, prior to the question emerging as a public issue, the District had commissioned several studies by management consultants, all of which recommended separating aspects of administration into decentralized units. Given the success of the Harmer-Greene bill in the State Legislature in 1970, the District authorities finally acted, creating a Decentralization Task Force. Presiding over the Task Force was the administrator who has since been appointed District Superintendent, William Johnston. Proposals generated by the Task Force focused upon administrative rather than policy-making decentralization. Associated with its administrative emphasis is the clear distinction which the report drew between political and organizational definitions of the educational problem. Reporting in 1971, the Task Force stated:

> The debate over decentralization seems inevitably to devolve upon two basic points of view: that advocated by those who favor local control--basically political in orientation--and that advocated by those who favor administrative decentralization--oriented more to function and professionalism (Los Angeles Unified School District, 1971:26-27).

Three years earlier the conflict between this administrative interpretation of decentralization and the position of community control advocates had been identified, rather prophetically, by State Senator John Harmer, co-author of the vetoed 1970 bill to dismember the District. Addressing hearings of the State Senate Committee on Education in 1968, Harmer said:

> The word "decentralize" has many meanings. To the school administrator it means decentralizing administrative authority, to the parent it means "community control." Decentralization without community control is meaningless (California State Legislature, 1969:37).

The rationale for the administrative view on decentralization is again well stated in the Task Force report:

> We believe it is always a good idea, when reforming an institution or a program, to take guidance, not only from general principles or preconceived opinions, but from comparable insitutions that do seem to work. Looking at public education broadly, it can be observed that not all of education is out of popular favor. The affluent private schools in the eastern United States, for example, on the whole, are well regarded by parents, students and teachers. So are many of the public schools in smaller affluent suburban school districts in Southern California and elsewhere. What is it that makes these schools acceptable at the least, desirable at the best?
>
> We submit that the answer probably has little to do with these schools being run on principles of local democracy--which they are not. It has everything to do with these schools being run on principles of delegated authority. Specifically, an important reason these schools appear to "work" better is that they are governed by local school administrators who have considerable managerial power, managerial discretion, and managerial immunity to outside pressures (including parental pressures). Public school principals in the Los Angeles District compare favorably enough to these school principals. What they have too frequently lacked in the past is any kind of real power to do a good job. Decentralization is one thing, democracy is another.... (Los Angeles Unified School District, 1971:28-30).

In adopting a decentralized administrative structure, and creating channels for local residents to relate more directly to school principals, the District went a long way in the direction of specializing its operational units to deal differentially with environment pressures. Given an increasingly heterogeneous environment, Thompson proposes that organizations divide into functional units, each dealing with a relatively homogeneous section of the environment. Further, if the social environment is not only heterogeneous, but also unstable, an organization will decentralize decision-making in order to provide local administrators the authority to use their own discretion when determining what actions to take.

Interestingly, District officials have justified decentralization in terms which echo Thompson's concepts rather accurately. For example, in March, 1972, that year's director of the District's Decentralization Task Force, Dr. Wilson Jordan stated that the importance of decentralization "is in encouraging local schools to become more individual, just as communities now are becoming different." Pointing to the rationale for decentralization, Dr. Jordan stated:

> For some years the school system operated on a centralized basis with a great deal of the decision-making taking place at a central location. For a long time this worked quite well--a single policy usually could prove effective throughout the different areas of the city. This, however, did not last for long. Communities become much more diverse than ever before. We became aware that our school children had widely varying educational needs, more people needed to become involved discussing basic issues. Change, indeed, became the byword, and we needed to find ways of accommodating this change" (Los Angeles Unified School District, 1972:Chapter VII, p and q).

By establishing twelve administrative areas, each containing an articulated K through twelve educational program, and mandatory advisory councils for each school, the district made a substantial adaptation to heterogeneity and change in the task environment. The decentralized area structure moves decision-making on policy-implementation closer to the local school level. Advisory councils at the school level facilitate "boundary-spanning" between the school district and its client population.

CONCLUSION

The Governor's action in vetoing the Harmer-Greene legislation aborted, at least temporarily, the movement toward local accountability of schools initiated by the call for community control. Rather than restructuring control, the District has been given time to develop an organizational response to the problems which sparked militant action in the political arena. Organizational developments have taken three main forms: compensatory education, heavily funded from federal sources; administrative decentralization, to increase flexibility of system response to local preferences; and new units both at the central and local school levels, to span the boundary with client groups. As the achievement problem persists, despite relatively massive infusion of additional funds, a question-mark remains regarding the future stability

of the Los Angeles District as a single entity. Problematic also is the long term effectiveness of the elected school advisory councils, one of the more important boundary-spanning elements. The major difficulty with these was pointed out in a report by a Joint Senate-House Committee of the California State Legislature which studied possible ways of reorganizing the Los Angeles school system (California State Legislature, 1971). In their report, the committee points out that advisory councils, even though elected, remain advisory. "Rarely are any administrators accountable to them and the sanctions they are able to apply have little force. Thus it is often possible for them to have little influence on what goes on in a school if the principal does not care to listen" (p. 59).

A third potential source of instability for the District's present decentralization plan is in the nature of the twelve administrative areas. While Thompson's rationale argues for these to be relatively homoegenous, in practice they are not at all. In fact, on sixth grade reading scores, and socio-economic indicators such as median family income of the population, four areas have greater internal variability than the District as a whole. A condition of this nature may precipitate moves either to decentralize further, perhaps to high school attendance areas, or to re-centralize, if services at the area level are found to be no more compatible with

differential needs of individual schools then they were prior to 1970.

Overall, future developments are tied most importantly to evidence of school performance. Some ways to reduce political demands for accountability and local control are to improve academic performance in low income communities, and also to respond to parental and student preferences for program content and instructional methods in higher status areas. Persistence of an unsatisfied clientele means continued tension between advocates of political and organizational restructuring of urban school districts. Further insight into conditions under which one or other approach gains precedence in the decision-making arena may be derived from comparative study of school systems in the major cities.

FOOTNOTES

[1]For an extensive discussion of the decentralization issue, see Jay D. Scribner and David O'Shea, "Political Developments in Urban School Districts," National Society for the Study of Education Yearbook, 1974 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). [Forthcoming, March, 1974]

[2]For a detailed account of events in East Harlem in 1966, see Scribner and O'Shea, Ibid.

[3]Minority population in Los Angeles approximately doubled each decade from 1940 through 1970.

[4]Los Angeles City Schools, Public Information Office, News Release, "Board of Education President Names Committee, Citizens' Resource Group on Urban Affairs," (December 24, 1967) mimeo. Quoted in Mazzoni (1971), p. 168.

REFERENCES

1969 California State Legislature. Senate Committee on Education. Proceedings of Hearing, Reorganization of Large School Districts, January 22.

1965a Easton, David. A Framework for Political Analysis. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

1965b _____. A Systems Analysis of Political Life. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

1971 Final Report to the Legislature by the Joint Committee on Reorganization of Large Urban Unified School Districts. Sacramento, California: Secretary, California State Senate.

1964 Kerr, Norman D. "The School Board as an Agency of Legitimation," Sociology of Education, 38 (Fall):34-59.

1973 La Noue, George R. and Bruce L. R. Smith. The Politics of School Decentralization. Lexington, Massachusetts: D. C. Heath & Company.

1970 Levin, Henry (ed.). Community Control of Schools. Washington, D. C.: The Brookings Institution.

1970 Los Angeles Unified School District. District's Integration Report to the Board, May.

1971 Los Angeles Unified School District. Educational Renewal: A Decentralization Proposal for the Los Angeles Unified School District. Decentralization Task Force, February 22, Vol. I, Summary.

1972 Los Angeles Unified School District. Decentralization: One Year Later. Presented by the Decentralization Task Force to the Los Angeles City Board of Education.

1971 Mazzoni, Tim L. "Political Capability for Urban School Governance: An Analysis of the Los Angeles City School Board (1967-69)." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California.

1973 O'Shea, David. "Suburban School District Government: A Comparative Perspective," Education and Urban Society, V (Aug): 405-437.

1974 Scribner, Jay D. and David O'Shea. "Political Developments in Urban School Districts," chapter in 1974 NSSE Yearbook, University of Chicago Press (forthcoming, March).

1967 Thompson, James D. Organizations in Action. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.