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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the desirability of professionalizing North Carolina school boards and presents a proposed program for moving from the present system of lay school boards to a Team Management System that involves students, citizens, and educators, in addition to the school board, in school district decision-making. The paper consists of three main sections that discuss some of the needs of North Carolina school boards, examine some of the problems of North Carolina school boards, and present a five-phase program for developing and implementing a Team Management System for school district governance. (JG)

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PROFESSIONALIZING THE SCHOOL BOARD:

NEEDS, PROBLEMS, AND A PROGRAM

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PROFESSIONALIZING THE SCHOOL BOARD:
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INTRODUCTION

In this term paper, the discussion is limited to professionalizing the local school boards of North Carolina. We will focus on three dimensions: Part I. Some of The Needs of North Carolina School Boards; Part II. Some of The Problems of North Carolina School Boards; Part III. A School Board Program.

To begin with, it is important to define our concept of a professionalized school board of which we will have reference to through out this paper. A professionalized school board in this context has four measurable criteria:

- (1) A four-year degree in the field of education.
- (2) Three years of public education experience.
- (3) Possess good communication and public relations skills.
- (4) Have a record of political involvement for education.

Likewise, it is equally as important to clarify what we mean by local administrative units and local school boards.

According to the Handbook for North Carolina School Board Members, 1974, North Carolina has one hundred county units and fifty separate city units. The county units range in size from about 1,200 students to over 80,000, and the city units range from less than 900 students to more than 30,000. Each of the above local administrative units has a local board of education responsible for the direction and planning of programs of public education. The unit superintendent is the chief executive officer in each local administrative unit. The administrative units work directly with the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina State Board of Education.

Part I. Some of The Needs of North Carolina School Boards

"Can the traditional division of educational responsibility between layman and educator survive, or have we reached the point where our schools must be run by professionals alone?"¹

This was one of the key questions asked of a group of school administrators by U. S. Comr. of Education, Harold Howe II at the Cubberly Conference. Howe remarked that law, custom, and reason dictate that control of the schools remain with lay boards of education. He continued in a contradictory way by pointing out that present trends, specifically the age of the specialist, has taken over, thereby making the control of education by lay boards very difficult.

A century ago our schools had teachers who were not specialists. Today we have specialists in the teaching of English, and beyond that the teaching of English as a foreign language; we have specialists in counseling and guidance, physical training, driver training, the education of the gifted as well as of the retarded. This specialization has brought unqualified gains - e. g. compensatory education, individualized instruction, curriculum reform, evaluation, and research - but Howe also noted that it has widened the gap between the educator and the layman who have traditionally shaped educational policy. A century ago, educator and layman spoke the same language; in general they agreed on the purposes and methods of education.²

According to an article in the American School Board Journal, "The school faces the same kind of a problem in operation that every factory manager faces. The difference is that the factory manager applies sound sense and up-to-date methods, while the school district too often thinks that the method of our great-grandfathers is good enough. This is a different world in respect to the demand for education. Modern life sets a fast pace, and those that fall behind are out of luck. The standards of previous generations are obsolete. Whether a boy is to be a merchant, a farmer, a dentist, or an engineer, he needs a much better education than he would have needed fifty years ago. Nobody can win nowadays against a handicap, in life's swift race; he does well to win at all."³

¹
USA Special Report, 1966, School Boards in An Era of Conflict, p. 20

²
Ibid

³
American School Board Journal, July - Dec., 1920, Vol. 61, p. 57

Therefore, it is imperative that we delegate professional decision making for the education of our children to professional school boards with the expertise and open-mindedness to do the job well.

The public interests is almost invariably better served by leaving professional questions to the professionals.⁴

Open-mindedness is a necessary characteristic for every board member.

Open-mindedness is very different from empty-mindedness. While it is hospitality to new themes, facts, ideas and questions, it is not the kind of hospitality that would be indicated by hanging out a sign: "Come right in, there is nobody at home." It includes an active desire to listen to more sides than one; to give heed to facts from whatever source they come; to give full attention to alternative possibilities; to recognize the possibility of error in the beliefs that are dearest to use.⁵

Actually, there is no need to use hypothetical examples to illustrate the folly of according non-professional boards of education the power to set the curriculum.⁶

It also does not make sense to expect school boards, which are non-professional bodies, to keep up with all the research in all subjects.⁷

The gap between the educator and the layman has widened and now, unlike a century ago as U. S. Comr. Harold Howe II stated earlier, they do not speak the same language. This can be attributed at least in part to the article quoted from The American School Board Journal earlier that the method of our great-grandfather is not good enough. We must keep up-to-date.

⁴
Lieberman, Myron, The Future of Public Education, The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960, p. 60.

⁵
Dewey, John, Dictionary of Education, New York, Philosophical Library, 1959, p. 94.

⁶
Lieberman, Myron, The Future of Public Education, The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960, p. 58.

⁷
Ibid, p. 58.

Let's focus on some of the specific needs of North Carolina School Boards:

1. First of all, the General Statutes need to be amended. It presently reads that school board members shall be composed of "Persons of intelligence, good moral character, good business qualifications and known to be in favor of public education."⁸ Beyond this statement, there are no specific requirements for board membership. North Carolina has had some form of local school board since the beginning this state's public school system in the 1840's.

It is apparent that almost any wualified voter is eligible for board membership regardless of his educational training. Consequently, the education of our children is left to chance.

According to John Dewey's definition of chance, man finds himself living in an aleatoty world; his existence involves, to put it badly, a gamble. The world is a scene of risks; it is uncertain, unstable. Its dangers are irregular, inconsistent, not to be counted upon as to their times and seasons. Our magical safe guard against the uncertain character of the world is to deny the existence of chance.⁹

One sure way in which the state of North Carolina can deny the existonce of chance in educating its children is to amend the General Statutes to include a specific educational requirement, e. g. General Statutes stipulate that school boards shall be composed of "persons holding a minimum of a four-year degree in the field of education, a minimum of three years of Public education experience, in favor of giving public education top priority, known to be politically alert and politically active for the cause of public education, good moral character, possess good communication and public relations skills, and know to get the job done effectively.

8

A Handbook for North Carolina School Board Members, The North Carolina School Boards Association, Inc., Raleigh, 1974, p. 13.

9

Dewey, John, Dictionary of Education, New York, Philosophical Library, 1959, p. 10.

This way, professionalized school boards would be in existence⁹ throughout the state of North Carolina. Additionally, the remaining needs would be met:

2. We need Open-minded, formally trained board members with the qualifications to listen and consider possibilities from citizens, students, administrators, and other fellow educators.
3. We need fellow educators whose college training, educational experiences, and commitment enable them to recognize as well as meet the needs of students and educators in the local school system.
4. We need professional board members who believe in utilizing the democratic process by establishing a team approach to quality education. This approach includes students, educators, and citizens. We need to be reminded of the saying that "No one is as smart as all of us."
5. We need professional board members who are active members in the North Carolina School Board Association in order to be abreast of ways to seek educational improvement locally.
6. Finally, we need professional board members who will avail themselves of the opportunity to attend workshops for school board members in order to assume their responsibilities to the children of North Carolina. Also, to shape public opinion.

John Dewey defines responsibility as follows: Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying, and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and more secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it.¹⁰

In terms of professional board members being able to shape public opinion, John Dewey adds: We are beginning to realize that emotions and imagination are more potent in shaping public sentiment and opinion than information and reason.¹¹

¹⁰
Ibid, p. 115

¹¹
Ibid, p. 109

We have focused on some of the needs of the North Carolina School Boards with emphasis on making them professional. However, there are some specific problems inherent in lay board control of public education which we will discuss next.

Part II. Some of the Problems of North Carolina School Boards

Let us explore some of the major problems facing our local school boards in North Carolina that require the expertise of professional school boards.

Here is John Dewey's explanation of problems. Problems are solved only where they arise — namely in action, in the adjustments of behavior. But, for good or for evil, they can be solved only with method; and ultimately method is intelligence, and intelligence is method.¹²

This being true, we definitely need educators on our local boards because the board's policy making sessions are usually the breeding sessions for educational problems. Consequently, the professional school boards would have the know-how to solve the problems where they arise, namely on the local administrative level.

Here are some of the most prevalent problems that our children are now struggling with as a result of lay boards:

Lay boards are amateurs in the educational arena, and our children are unfortunately the targets for their trial and error decisions.

How can we stand by and watch our children get short changed by policy making boards consisting of some board members who are barely literate themselves? Keep in mind that any qualified voter is eligible for board membership and there is no minimum educational requirement. Some board members may have as little as a sixth grade education; who knows? Worse than that, who cares?

The function of education is to help the growing of a helpless young animal into a happy, moral, and efficient human being. The educative process is a continuous process of growth, having as its aims at every stage an added capacity of growth.¹³

12
Ibid, 106

13
Ibid, p. 32

What do lay boards, better known as amateurs, know about the different stages of our children's growth? How many of them have only an elem. ed., a high school education, some college or technical school training, a college degree? As responsible citizens, parents, and educators, we should find out.

Fundamentally, the confusion between public and professional decisions in education is one aspect of our failure to clarify the role of the expert in a democratic society. As a result of this failure, we count noses to answer questions which should be settled by reference to experts, and we rely upon experts to answer questions which should be settled by counting noses. In education, the first type of mistake is most prevalent. Public education developed in the United States in the absence of a teaching profession. Teachers simply accepted without question instructional materials, and methods as well as the board purposes of education. Teachers often questioned whether the community was exercising its rights wisely, but they never questioned the legitimacy of these rights.¹⁴

The elected representatives of the people have the right to say what goes on in their schools; if they have said that Robin Hood tends to justify stealing from the rich to give to the poor, we must drop Robin Hood —or else.¹⁵

The above mentioned problems are just a few of the complications plaguing our present educational systems in North Carolina as a result of lay board control.

The School board program that follows will offer some solutions to these problems.

Part III. A School Board Program

It is not in the public's interest as an employer to insist upon lay control of professional matters.¹⁶

Therefore, we will discuss a proposed program which will place educational policy making with those who are prepared to act in the best interest of all children in the public schools of North Carolina. This program requires change.

¹⁴
Ibid, p. 66

¹⁵
Ibid, p. 67

¹⁶
Ibid, p. 70

According to our instructor of administration in Public Schools, Dr. Naren Tambe, the change will be more effective and more lasting when the people are prepared for it. That is, the administrative leaders must get the people conditioned for the change. Another precaution is not to make such a drastic change overnight.

Taking the above precautions into careful consideration, the following program is being offered in phases as a method of preparing the people gradually for a much needed change. The ultimate goal of the change is for the upgrading of our educational systems in order to provide the best education possible for each child in our care. Lay boards are perhaps doing the best they can with what human resources they have to offer, but because of their lack of professional training in education, they are out of date and so are their methods.

Phase I. As an interested citizen, study the handbook for N. C. School Board Members. This handbook can be requested from the School Boards Association, Inc. P. O. Box 2476, Raleigh, N. C. 27602 or call 919 - 832 - 7024. Attend board meetings, and ask pertinent questions. Begin to seek members for a caucus.

Phase II. Develop a Community Caucus Committee to canvass, screen, and nominate the best available candidates for board membership based upon the four criteria in the introduction. Study the handbook for board members as mentioned above, attend board meetings, raise issues, seek satisfactory answers, share findings with the public, and be active on the Team Management Group.

Phase III. Elect officers, hold Caucus Meetings, and discuss input from citizens, educators, and students on suggestions regarding qualified board members. Present findings at board meetings and to the public.

Phase IV. Establish a Team Management System by including the Community Caucus, the local school board (lay or professional) which automatically includes the school superintendent, educators (teachers and administrators) and student representatives from all levels (Elem., Middle or J. H. S., H. S.). This team will do a needs assessment of students, staff, facilities, equipment, materials. They will also develop strategies for meeting the needs of each of the above and by certain dates. Additionally, they will formulate several lists of behavioral objectives for students as follows: One list for gifted

and talented students; another list for average students; and a final list for mentally handicapped children (EMR, LD, ED) according to their school level (Elem., Middle or JHS, HS).

Phase V. Elect officers and hold regular Team Management Meetings to provide for quality education, Keep the public informed about the issues at each session and how they were handled. Welcome input from the public.

We will begin in our discussion with Phases II & III. (A Caucus for Board Member Recommendations).

Whether a board member is elected or appointed, his chief qualifications should be those outlined in the introduction. Here are some research findings on elected vs. appointed school boards.

There are few large differences between appointed and elected boards, and it is sometimes unclear whether these are genuine differences or whether they result from the fact that appointed boards are heavily concentrated in the North Eastern region where this study was taken. The study pointed out the following:

1. Wealthy men have a better chance of being elected where the school board does not have competitive elections.
2. Board members in appointed cities are not better educated and do not have more prestigious occupations than those in cities where board members are elected.
3. Appointed board members seem more likely to be elitist and non-political (lobbyless). Most answered "No" when asked, "Do you believe you might be interested in running for another elected office?"
4. Appointed boards seem to be more aggressive in dealing with the school system which in turn tends to generate conflict with the board.¹⁷

17
Crain, Robert L., Et al., (ED061633 Microfiche), causes and effects on School Board Recruitment Patterns, Johns Hopkins Univ., Baltimore, M. D., Dept. of Soc. Rel., Feb., 1972, 29P.

Sometimes a caucus can help.

Some communities —among them Evanston, Ill.; Ithaca, N. Y.; Great Neck, N. Y.; San Francisco — use or have experimented with the caucus plan of school board member selection. Many claim it's an excellent way to involve the whole community in the selection process.

A school board caucus is a body of school district volunteers who canvass, screen and nominate the best available candidates for board membership, whether the final selection is by election or appointment.

Caucus members usually are selected from the civil subdivisions of the district or from community organizations. Or they may be chosen on a combined basis with the following underlying principles serving as guidelines:

- * The caucus body should be broadly representative enough of the school district so as to deserve the confidence and support of the entire community.
- * It must be completely independent of any civil, political or community organization.
- * Caucus members, whatever the basis for their selection, should be individually dedicated to the best interests of the schools.
- * Membership should be on a rotating basis with a one-third to one-half carryover of old members into each succeeding period of operation.
- * The period of service of a caucus body should extend from one school board election or appointment through the next with a sufficient number of meetings to accomplish the following tasks:
 1. Select a caucus chairman, secretary, committees and such as stipulated by the constitution and bylaws of the caucus organization.
 2. Obtain suggestions from citizens regarding qualified candidates for board service.
 3. Gather complete data on each potential candidate and set up screening procedures.
 4. Interview and obtain consent from candidates finally chosen by the

5. Present names of candidates to the proper authorities.
6. Publicize caucus selections to the district including supporting data and a plea for community support for caucus candidates.
7. Arrange for selection and orientation of new members of the caucus body for the next period.¹⁸

Let's continue our discussion with phases IV & V (Team Management System)
How to Approach and Influence Your Board

Usually ideas for change don't originate in school boards. They come from professional educators as a rule. But the motivation to make improvements often comes from individuals and groups outside the school system. The speed of change depends on how receptive your board is to new ideas.¹⁹

Can one individual do much? yes. Say experienced citizens and board members: Yes, if you go about change in the right way. First, you must understand how school boards work — study their handbook, attend board meetings, ask questions, inform yourself by reading and talking about the issues which concern you. Often these "issues" are phrased in questions, such as:

1. Are testing procedures giving us an honest picture of our children's potentials?
2. Should we require students to be all-around-good in sciences as well as English and foreign languages, even in athletics and public speaking?
3. Are our children getting good counselling?
4. Are our children being fairly graded and how should they be grouped?
5. Should we build a new middle school or enlarge an old one?
6. Should there be more emphasis on teaching students how to study, think, organize their work?²⁰

18

American School Board Journal, July, 1972, What Works Best: An Elected or An Appointed School Board?, p. 23

19

Eric Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools (EB096077 Microfiche), How Well Do They Represent You? A Handbook for Parents and Other Citizens, Aug. 1974, 24p.

20

Ibid

If you have a grievance and a remedy to suggest to your school board, what is the first step when you are prepared to speak? Let the board president or presiding officer know, so he can schedule you on the program or agenda.²¹

You will have more impact if you find school administrators, and other school patrons or citizens whose concerns and ideas are similar to yours. When you have considerable support for your views you become an "influential" even if you have never thought of yourself as part of the community's power structure.²²

The Community Caucus Group and the Team Management System are the two recommended groups through which the "influential" citizen may work.

What do you do if your board is responsive to public wishes? Sometimes you can generate enough interest in a parent-teacher membership to get things done. But if the PTA is too dominated by the "establishment", the next step usually is to form a school council of interested citizens.²³

The writer suggests the Team Management System.

How do you go about this? Arrange for a meeting. Place and invite everybody you feel would be interested. At the first meeting you should elect a chairman to preside and plan, and a secretary to keep minutes of the meetings. Other officers can be added as needed. Right away you need to discuss what your purposes are. Everyone should have an opportunity to contribute until a consensus is reached. Eventually you may want written goals and policies. Giving the school board a copy of these will help keep relationships clear. Also this will cut down on suspicion and rumor. The board may need to be reminded that school council can generate public support for constructive change that might be difficult or impossible for boards and professionals to accomplish.²⁴

21
Ibid

22
Ibid

23
Ibid

24
Ibid

Some of the topics school councils discuss: needed changes in the curriculum, current methods of teaching, new buildings and facilities, salaries, adult education, additional help on reading and the language arts in elementary grades, counselling and guidance, more financial support for schools.

The Portales, N. M. list added food services, in-service training for principals, philosophy of discipline, special programs for various I. Q. levels.²⁵

How Do You Proceed When You Agree On Your Objectives?

1. Analyze yourself as a group — the talents and interests you have. You may need to ask others for help — The school librarian, retired people, experts from universities.
2. Visit other councils to see what they are doing and what they have accomplished.
3. Set yourselves some priorities — what should be done and by what target dates.
4. Study attitudes of the community; you can do this by informal telephone surveys and conversations with friends and neighbors. (A Handbook on local Rural School Boards for Parents and Other Citizens - for sale by ERIC Clearing House on Rural Education and Small Schools., Box 3AP/ Las Cruces, New Mexico, 88003. Price \$1.00.
5. Build confidence between the Council and teachers who otherwise might feel threatened.
6. Continue to evaluate your group by asking what you are achieving, what remains to be done. Sometimes a group will disband after a bond issue has passed or a busing fight resolved. But if you are going to make any significant improvement in the quality of education, some dedicated people may have to devote years — not just weeks.²⁶

25
Ibid

26
Ibid

There will be less friction if your group constantly explores ways to work with the school board, not just against it. This takes patience, tact, open-mindedness on everyone's part. The essential need: to keep lines of communication open both ways.²⁷

7. Borrowable Ideas You Might Consider:

- A. Schools can become learning centers for everybody, regardless of age, and thereby enrich the whole community. For example: the district of Hancock County, Ky. (population 5,000) has opened a building for an art show, sponsored a Little Theater, hired professionals to stage a Shakespearan play. Now people feel the schools (one new, others remodeled) really belong to them.
- B. A student school board in Norfolk, Va. successfully, advises the official one - and administrators, too - on courses the older ones consider "relevant", on a final exam policy, on wallet I. D. cards for high school students. The student board reports what it is undertaking to the "regular" board once a month. And once a year the two boards have a joint luncheon for free discussion of mutual problems in a social atmosphere.
- C. Students have worked with adults to up-date policies of the Shoreline School District, Seattle, Wash. These were adopted after free discussion of: use of alcohol by students, attendance in class and assemblies, conduct, dress, drugs, freedom of expression. Each policy is followed by an explanation referred to as "Interpolation" which breaks the policy down so that it will be easily understood by all.²⁸

27
Ibid

28
Ibid

Phase V (Team Management System)

Here is how the board can get the public involved in the system's educational pursuits (The Team Management System).

1. Involve the public in discussions on controversial issues such as sex education, proposals for a bond issue, etc. The Canadians advise: Divide the audience into discussion groups with 10 to 25 per group. Later the full audience needs to hear reports from all groups.
2. Newsletters - to parents on activities in the schools and issues at hand.
3. Annual reports - to the public on what the schools are doing and why, plus clear explanations of finances.
4. Handbooks for parents - how can mothers and fathers help their children by providing an "atmosphere of learning" at home? Also, how to prepare for a parent visit to the school.²⁹

Alaska has a training manual for members of school boards.³⁰

Here is another version of the Team Management System.

The Case for Replacing Your Districts "Hierarchies" With Teams

The Traditional Hierarchical Organization (THO) is an organizational method borrowed 40 to 50 years ago from the then - modern military. THO puts people in ranks, with the person in a higher rank having more (1) money, (2) power, (3) knowledge, (4) fringe benefits than anyone below him.³¹

The Team Management System is a recommended program. It can structure and coordinate information, recommendations, and decision making from three important groups in any school system. Also, manage expenditures and budget control.

29
Ibid

30
Ibid

31
American School Board Journal, Vol. 162, July-Dec. 1975, P. 35, The Case For Replacing Your Districts "Hierarchies"/

Group 1. Students/ Citizens / Educators

Group 2. Educators (teachers and administrators)

Group 3. School board³² (including the superintendent).

This Team Management System worked well in the Shawnee Mission (Kansas) Public Schools with 45,000 students.

An informed community and school district staff is the best aid any board of education could want.³³

CONCLUSION

In conclusion local lay boards of North Carolina are not prepared to make decisions essential to the promotion of quality education for our children. Therefore, we need professional boards or at least a Team Management System.

CRITIQUE

I found this term paper topic very difficult to deal with for several reasons. One, it is a controversial topic in as much as laws, customs, and reason dictate that public education be controlled by lay boards of education. On the other hand, there is a segment of the public, namely some educators, who feel that education should be controlled by professionals. Thus, creating a conflict of interest concerning our children's education.

Two, very little research is available to document the effectiveness of a professional board since this is non-existent in the United States.

Three, the education of our children is not a top priority in this country. Yet we confess that our children are our prize possessions.

In my opinion, this is a vital topic which should be developed in depth and presented as a proposal for action to Congress, the U. S. Office of Education, HEW, the N. C. General Assembly, The N. C. Board of Education, the N. C. Dept. of Public Instruction, the N. C. School Boards Association, NEA, NCAE, ACT, and the local school boards, educators, parents, other citizens, and student representatives. Also, a copy should be shared with the American School Board Journal.

Finally, I wish to thank Dr. Naren Tambe, my instructor at North Carolina Central University of Durham, N. C., for inspiring me to write this paper on professionalizing the school board.

32
Ibid

19

33
Ibid

THE END

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APPENDIX

1. ED-061-633 (Microfiche No. 1), Causes and Effects of School Board Recruitment Patterns, Robert L. Crain, Et. Al., Johns Hopkins Univ., Baltimore, Md., Dept. of Social Relations, Feb. 1972, 29P.
2. ED-096-077 (Microfiche No. 2) How Well Do They Represent You? A Handbook On Local Rural School Boards For Parents And Other Citizens , New Mexico State Univ., Univ. Park, ERIC Clearinghouse On Rural Education and Small Schools, Aug. 1974, 24P.
3. North Carolina School Boards Association, Inc., Letter from Mr. Charles Bridges, October 18, 1976.
4. Letter from Mr. Charles Bridges, November 2, 1976.
5. A Handbook For North Carolina School Board Members.
6. Department of Public Instruction, State of North Carolina, letter from Ms. Brenda Dail, November 4, 1976.
7. Letter from Ms. Brenda Dail, November 19, 1976.