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ABSTRACT

This report is based on data collected in a 2-year study of the implementation of Chapter 2 of the Educational Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981, which combined the funds from 28 federal programs into a single block grant. This study investigated the effects of the act on 12 school districts, in an effort to obtain a better general understanding of how school districts operate, to assess the significance of a specific federal policy for them, and to share this information with the state education agency (SEA) officials charged with administering Chapter 2. This final report argues that three fundamental processes link external policies, the community, and internal initiatives to school district operations: (1) rational-bureaucratic (direct supervision, monitoring, and standardization); (2) political (informal communication, delegation of authority, negotiation, and persuasion); and (3) economic (resource allocations, trade-offs, and consumer decisions). After describing the study's research methods, the paper examines local perceptions about several influences on their systems: federal policies, state legislation, demographic trends, the local community, and central office directives. Next, influence sources are compared according to the processes that link them with local operations. Finally, the paper describes contextual conditions that affect district responses to the influence attempts. (TE)

INTENTIONS AND IMPACTS: A COMPARISON OF SOURCES OF INFLUENCE ON LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS

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Preface

This report is based on data collected in a two-year study of the implementation of Chapter 2 of the Educational Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981. Chapter 2 combined the funds from 28 federal programs into a single block grant. Congress enacted the legislation as an effort to increase states' and school districts' control over the use of federal money. Each state received a grant and, in turn, allocated the funds to districts, primarily on the basis of public and private school enrollment. This insured that all systems could participate --both public and private, should they choose to do so. Such was not the case, of course, with the competitively awarded antecedent programs.

Research for Better Schools (RBS), a private, non-profit educational laboratory, initiated a study of the effects of this switch in federal funding on twelve school districts. The primary objectives were to obtain a better understanding of how school districts operated in general, to assess the significance of a specific federal policy for them, and to share this information with state education agency (SEA) officials charged with administering Chapter 2. As a result, the study was conducted in a cyclical fashion. First, SEA officials were asked what issues were of most interest to them. Second, these issues were combined with RBS' already-developed research questions to comprise an interview schedule. Third, field visits were made to each district. Fourth, interim results from data analyses were shared with SEA and district staff. And, finally, these conversations were factored into the resulting reports. This cycle was used in each year of the study.

The report that follows is the final one for the project. Appreciation is expressed to John Connolly, Bill Firestone, Susan Fuhrman, and Keith Kershner for helpful comments, to Elaine Krolikowski for word processing, and especially to the SEA and school district staff who supplied their time and thoughts.

INTENTIONS AND IMPACTS: A COMPARISON OF SOURCES OF INFLUENCE ON LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Everyone has an opinion about the quality of public education--the scholar, the layman, and the policy maker. If the spate of recent reports on the topic is any indication, everyone also has ideas about how to improve it. Some, of course, are in better positions than others to exercise influence; and those that can inevitably try. The resulting reforms, regulations, and recommendations would seem to buffet local school districts. But, do they? This paper, which is based on research that initially focused on Chapter 2 of the Educational Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981 (ECIA), has two purposes. First, it compares the relative impact on school district operations of various sources of influence, including Chapter 2, other federal and state policies, community characteristics and preferences, and internal initiatives. Second, it offers an explanation for variations in the degree of locally perceived influence among the various sources.

Generally, based on the literature, one would predict that influence attempts from afar would have a minimal impact and that closer-to-home stimuli would have a greater one. For example, although Kirst and Jung (1980) offered an optimistic view of the beneficial impact of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), researchers have not been very sanguine about most federal programs (Bardach, 1977). Indeed, research during the early and mid 1970s on federal interventions in curriculum and instruction showed extremely modest accomplishments, at best (Welch, 1979; Firestone and Corbett, 1985). Later, it was acknowledged that change was more likely when the program invited the input and

involvement of the local system (Berman and McLaughlin, 1976).. This local participation (in planned change, at least) bred understanding of the changes and, ultimately, commitment to them (Huberman and Miles, 1984). Characteristics of the change target have been increasingly recognized as key determinants of the magnitude of impact of any attempt to alter local operations (Berman, 1981; Elmore, 1980). Because these characteristics are more likely to be known and used to an advantage by sources closest to a school district, it follows that proximate sources would be most influential.

This paper argues that, in addition to proximity, there are three fundamental processes that can link external policies, the community, and internal initiatives to school district operations: rational-bureaucratic, political, and economic. The first type includes direct supervision and monitoring, standardization of procedures, standardization of outcomes, and standardization of skills and knowledge. Second, political processes include informal communication, delegation of authority, negotiation, bargaining (formally and informally), and persuasion. Third, economic processes involve resource allocations, trade-offs, and consumer decisions. The impact of any influence attempt on a district is a product of the way that influence is exercised and the district's contextual conditions, primarily its priorities and capacity to achieve them.

After describing the study's research methods, the paper examines local perceptions about several influences on their systems: federal policies, state legislation, demographic trends, the local community, and central office directives. Next, influence sources are compared according to the processes that link them with local operations. Finally, the paper

describes contextual conditions that affect district responses to the influence attempts.

Study Methods

Twelve school districts from three states participated in the two-year study. Because the research's original focus was limited to Chapter 2 of ECIA, the districts were selected using criteria related to this program. Chapter 2 was a redistributive policy that merged 28 categorical programs into a single block grant that allocated money to districts on the basis of student enrollments, with factors for low income and special student populations. It was most important, therefore, to obtain a mix of districts that had gained and lost funding in the shift from categorical programs to the block grant (Chapter 2). Winning districts had to have a 100 percent increase; losing districts had to have suffered at least a 33 percent loss. Variation was also sought on district size (as measured by the number of students) and type of community served (rural, suburban, or moderately-sized urban areas). The 12 systems were not selected to be representative of a larger population; the intent was to obtain a set of districts that would illustrate a range of prospects and problems associated with Chapter 2. Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper when the districts are mentioned.

A field researcher visited each district for two days during the spring of 1983, one day in the fall of 1983, and one day in the spring of 1984. Open-ended interviews were conducted with several central office staff, building-level staff, and community members. Categories for interview questions were identified in advance by the research team and, as

the study progressed, field researchers increased the emphasis on comparing Chapter 2 to other sources of influence. In all, six question categories were used: (1) local decision-making about Chapter 2; (2) antecedent program operation and Chapter 2 changes; (3) local reactions to these and other changes in the system; (4) local context issues; (5) the major sources of influence on how the school system operates; and (6) assessments of the impact of Chapter 2 compared to these other sources. During a visit, each interview ranged from 15 minutes to well over an hour, depending upon an informant's knowledge within each question category.

After the site visits, researchers wrote reports that described each visit, summarized data related to the six interview question categories, and identified emerging cross-site findings. Then the researchers used field notes and the reports to answer a set of common questions about each district. These answers were converted into display charts to facilitate cross-site analysis. Periodically, the results of analyses were fed back to study participants. Their reactions helped improve the accuracy and validity of the findings.

Pressures to Change

Chapter 2, Title IX, P.L. 94-142; graduation requirements, new standardized tests, certification requirements; declining enrollments, school closings; latch-key children, children from single-parent homes, handicapped children; budgets, bond issues; curriculum revisions. This laundry list is but a small sample of the pressures for change that staff in the twelve local districts identified as affecting their work. Not surprisingly, the impacts of each pressure varied. This section describes

and synthesizes the districts' assessments of the relative magnitude of the sources' influence on their work.

Local district staff identified four categories of influences that had an impact on their operations: (1) federal policies, (2) state initiatives, (3) community demographics and preferences, and (4) internal initiatives. Because of the unstructured interview mode, local informants generated the influences and attributed magnitude of impact to each; researchers did not use a pre-determined list of influences to stimulate responses. Impact was comprised of (1) perceived intensity, defined as local assessments of the magnitude of effects stimulated by the source of influence and (2) frequency of mention, defined as whether most informants named the source as an influence. Perceived intensity was determined by how local staff described the impacts: whether a source was described as affecting much of daily operations and whether that effect was strong. In determining frequency of mention, responses of central office administrators and building level staff were combined. This presented a more complete picture of the district than could either group alone. Interview statements were coded into one of three categories: major, moderate, and negligible impact. Where most informants in a district described an influence as affecting much of their daily operations, it was coded a major influence. Sources of moderate influence affected some portion of the daily work; informants mentioned these sources more than those of minor impact. Sources of negligible influence were described as affecting little and were mentioned infrequently.

Local staff attributed negligible influence to federal policies and regulations. In general, central office staff described federal sources as

having a minor impact, while building staff did not mention the federal level at all. Those who felt federal influence was major argued that policies influenced districts through categorical programs to promote national priorities, such as special education legislation and desegregation support. In two districts, individuals noted that although minimally influential, federal programs subtly assisted change by making funds available to the district to use for innovative projects. Federal influence was mentioned most frequently by central office staff; building-level administrators and teachers had less knowledge of distinct federal programs.

The districts' overall assessment of Chapter 2 was that it operated at the margin of school district functions and had minor influence on daily operations. For winners, Chapter 2 was an opportunity either to begin new programs or to expand existing ones. In Seamarsh, the federal programs coordinator knew that categorical programs were going to be blocked into Chapter 2 and had developed a plan for installing and using computers in the district's schools. When the district's Chapter 2 allocation came along, she had a prepared argument for its use. Richfield, in contrast, already had an extensive computer program. Increased Chapter 2 funds encouraged expansion of the program into the industrial arts area.

For losing districts, Chapter 2 had both substantive and symbolic effects (Corbett, Rossman, & Dawson, 1984). Substantively, districts had to cope with reduced funds and the concomitant effects of this: Programs were reduced or eliminated, local funds were reallocated, staff were laid off, and library staff had to fight with their colleagues for a portion of the funds. However, these substantive effects were softened by a

district's contextual characteristics and Chapter 2's relatively small percentage of the local budget. Symbolically, Chapter 2 signaled to local districts that the era of close inspection and federal programmatic direction was ending. This created some concern for advocates of special student populations that had been targeted to receive services through the categorical programs. For example, a Richfield teacher expressed concern that the Chapter 2 funds would be diverted from special needs students and would become discretionary funds to be used as top central office staff saw fit--with little or no input from other staff, parents, or the community. Additionally, Chapter 2 signaled that districts would have to become independent of substantial federal monetary support; indirectly, it encouraged districts to cultivate alternative sources of program support. Because of this, Chapter 2's effects were not major, with the exception of Crab Cove where the loss of funds represented 14 percent of the local budget.

The reported influence of state initiatives varied among the three states, depending on the elaborateness of the state's school improvement program. Across all three, however, state sources were seen as having a moderate influence on the districts, largely through curriculum requirements. Interestingly, a few central office staff described state initiatives as insinuating themselves into local decision areas--a complaint heard not too many years ago about the federal government. The state's increasing demands for accountability required certain responses from the district. Local reactions were both positive and negative, and varied between central office and building level staff. In Montvale, for example, a principal described how the state school improvement initiative

encouraged the elementary school to focus on writing skills; in Brook City, a state evaluation precipitated an internal re-assessment and evaluation that became a valuable process for the elementary school. Central office staff, however, viewed state initiatives more suspiciously. For example, in Newpark, a staff person described the state as "merely tolerated"; in Riverport, the district had filed suit challenging certain of the new high school graduation requirements; and in Brook City, a central office staff person saw graduation requirements as creating a new elitism and a whole new class of high school dropouts. Thus, there was variation between central office and building level educators regarding their assessments of the impact of state initiatives.

Overall, federal and state policies and regulations were removed from the districts' daily operations. Their reported influence was not high, except in certain programs. Central office staff most frequently mentioned the federal and state levels; building-level staff seemed less aware of specific initiatives. Principals' and teachers' assessments of Chapter 2, however, reflected a concern for previously protected initiatives, such as desegregation. They were not hopeful that national priorities would be pursued without external input.

Local districts had to cope with much closer-to-home pressures, opportunities, demands, and needs than policies emanating from far away. These local influences had a significant impact on local educators' daily workday lives and can be disaggregated into two sources: (1) local socio-economic trends and (2) community preferences. Whereas state and federal policies had been largely notable to central office staff, local

sources were mentioned more equally by both central office and building level groups.

Socio-economic trends included declining enrollments that precipitated decisions about program cuts or school closings, as well as increasing numbers of "latchkey children" and children from single parent families. All three trends pressured local schools to respond. In the case of school closings, local districts had no choice but to deal with the issues arising in the community. With the special needs of latchkey and single parent children, however, a district might or might not perceive a need and respond with programmatic changes. Its response or lack of one appeared to depend on contextual conditions. For example, Richfield had developed a deep and lasting commitment to serving children with special needs. The city's school population had changed over the past decade: more poverty-level, bilingual families lived within the district's boundaries now than ten years ago. As this population increased, the district's moral imperative to serve these children did not wane and was reflected in programs for latchkey children and children from single-parent families.

Local economic factors also affected the schools profoundly, such as regional employment prospects for youth and the capacity of local taxpayers to support higher costs for schools. A local politician in Riverport described the employability of youth as a major problem that would increase as the curriculum became more narrowly academic in focus, a trend the new high school graduation requirements encouraged. His concern was that all children needed marketable skills, even the college bound (to help finance their educations). As the curriculum narrowed, emphasis on these skills

would be squeezed out, creating a cohort of children unprepared for the world of work.

Community preferences included pressures from the community to improve: to teach the basics, to install more computers, to be more practical and vocationally-oriented. Where a community was perceived as becoming more conservative, as was the case in Rolling Hills, then local townspeople demanded changes in attendance policies and alterations in the structure of the elementary and middle schools.

These pressures to improve reflected a cyclically recurring disenchantment with schools. Districts responded to this by engaging in public relations campaigns and marketing strategies designed to rebuild local confidence. Especially where competition from parochial and independent schools was intense, districts (and individual schools) developed sales strategies. For example, Lincoln High School in Brook City was under increasing competition from private institutions; public school staff felt compelled to go into the local junior and middle schools (both public and private) to sell prospective students on the high school. As one Lincoln teacher observed, "You've got to be sure that people in the community know you're doing a good job so they can spread the word."

The source of change discussed most frequently by central office and building staff as having a moderate or major impact on daily operations was internal initiatives. Typically, these were initiatives from the central office or the individual school for curriculum revision or revitalization. However, also evident were internal drives for volunteer programs, business partnerships, or faculty development programs. Some of these initiatives can be seen as local interpretations of societal trends, e.g., for

computers or for school-business partnerships. That is, because computer literacy had become so important for American society, school people felt under intense pressure to provide access to and training in the use of computers. The pressures were expressed through national media, state education agencies, and local citizens who did not want their children to be computer illiterates. Similarly, the Reagan administration strongly encouraged school and business collaboration, as a part of a revitalization of private initiative. As a directive from the President, this goal had considerable force; schools felt they must respond.

However, whether the national rhetoric was pursued with energy and commitment varied from district to district. In one example of a highly successful school-business partnership program, the national rhetoric supporting such programs was translated into action. By funding a new central office position to coordinate the program, Richfield made a visible and tangible commitment, the impact of which was not lost on others. As an elementary school principal remarked, the partnership idea had been around for a few years but was not visible or productive until a new position was created. Now, he felt, "you can point to him or her and say, 'that's the person who honchoes it!'"

In another district, Riverport, few school-business initiatives were started because no single individual assumed responsibility, top leadership did not encourage it, and there were no perceived rewards for venturing into new waters. A district administrator felt that changing leadership might help: an incoming top manager had expertise in that area and might provide direction. Thus, a strong initiative was anticipated for the

future, illustrating the potential of internal pressures to change. The next section presents an explanation for why internal and local influences were so much greater than state and federal ones.

Process and Pressures to Change

Several researchers have attended to the problem of how actions within and among systems get tied together. For example, Mintzberg (1983) identifies five mechanisms that coordinate action within an organization: (1) mutual adjustment through informal communication, (2) direct supervision and monitoring, (3) standardization of procedures, (4) standardization of outcomes, and (5) standardization of skills and knowledge. The first, mutual adjustment, is an informal process that relies on interpersonal relations. The other four are rule-like and depend on an authority system for control.

Elmore (1980) argues that greater policy impact is found when two forms of control are used: hierarchical and delegated. Hierarchical attempts to bring a subordinate agency into compliance; delegated diffuses decision-making in hopes that the implemented program will more closely achieve the intents of a policy. Hierarchical control relies on authority, while delegated depends on more informal, negotiated, context-specific agreements among local school people over the shape and specifics of a program.

In addition to hierarchical, rule-dependent control processes and informal, negotiated, context-dependent control processes are economic ones that determine resource allocations (both distributive and redistributive). Mitchell and Encarnation (1984) describe seven mechanisms through which the

state can influence local school performance, two of which are explicitly economic: revenue generation and resource allocation. Of the remaining five, four (program definition and accreditation, personnel training and certification, testing and assessment of student achievement, and curriculum materials development) appear to depend on hierarchical control mechanisms. The final one, structural organization, has the potential to rely on informal communication because it affects roles and relationships among actors in the organization.

In this study, three types of processes were used to influence school district behavior. The first, rational bureaucratic, was rule based and authority dependent. It related to Elmore's (1980) concept of hierarchical control and four of Mintzberg's (1983) coordination processes and involved the codification and enforcement of rules, standards, and criteria through the exercise of authority. Political processes entailed informal communication, negotiation, persuasion, and deal-making. These echoed Mintzberg's (1983) idea of mutual adjustment and Elmore's (1980) delegated control mechanism. Political processes also included the reorganization of roles and relationships, as suggested by Mitchell and Encarnation (1984). Economic processes were the means by which resources were distributed or redistributed among competing demands. Although this type of process overlapped and interacted with the first two, it deserved separate attention because it was a significant avenue of influence. Essentially, the three processes corresponded to Mitchell and Iannaccone's (1980) legislative control mechanisms of rule making, ideology articulation, and resource allocation.

Prior to the block grant, federal education policies and regulations were linked through bureaucratic processes like formal coordination and standardization of procedures, processes that local educators described as requiring excessive amounts of paperwork. However, ECIA represented a significant departure from these historic programs and their attendant rational-bureaucratic linkage mechanisms. The Act was designed to promote local autonomy in decision-making, reduce the paperwork burden of reporting requirements, and foster use of funds that would be responsive to local needs and priorities. It deliberately reduced any formal mechanism for coordinating or monitoring local responses. This relegated the evaluation function to the states and loosened former categorical restrictions.

State initiatives, in contrast, increased as federal involvement became streamlined. Partly as a result of societal pressures for the reform of public education, states enacted regulations affecting the curriculum and graduation requirements and began considering changes in teacher training and certification standards. These state initiatives were linked to local districts through standardization of outcomes (as with graduation requirements) and skills and knowledge (as with teacher training programs). Similarly, state-required testing programs administered at various grade levels emphasized standardization of outcomes (i.e., minimal competency levels) and economic incentives. For example, Pennsylvania's newly-implemented Chapter 5 legislation required the demonstration of competency in grades 3, 5, and 8. For each student falling below the minimal level, a district received funds for remediation. In this manner, the legislation provided a financial incentive for a district's participation.

Demographic shifts set in motion political processes involving the local community and the district. Declining enrollments usually meant school closings. When threatened with the loss of a school, communities often banded together to put collective pressure on the district to keep that school open. In an era of rising fixed costs and Proposition 13-type legislation, the alternative for the district was to cut programs. Central office staff balanced the consequences of each alternative and often made decisions on both political and financial grounds. Processes that linked demographic changes to district decision making were largely political--especially negotiation and confrontation, although with state funds linked to per capita enrollments, there was an economic component as well.

Community preferences encompassed a variety of demands. They were expressed through criticism of current school operations, either publically (as in newspaper editorials) or privately in conversation among local residents. Although the schools periodically underwent intense criticism and managed to survive, each wave was a crisis of legitimacy. In response, districts began marketing and public relations campaigns. Slogans, mascots, and promotional coffee mugs were given to potential supporters. Education entered the era of the hard sell, as expressed by a Brook City central office administrator who described education as being under intense pressure now to legitimize itself:

> If you're isolated in a schoolhouse with closed doors and suddenly the doors open, it becomes a glass schoolhouse. It becomes the national agenda and it becomes a whole new ballgame. We are now playing for the world and issues take on great magnitude.

These political pressures required negotiation, advocacy, and bargaining among competing special interest groups and the priorities of the district.

Internal initiatives took the form of top-down reform of the curriculum, tightening up course standards, examining the testing program, and the like. These sources of influence on the district's or school's daily operations were expressed through both rational-bureaucratic and political mechanisms. Curriculum reform required standardization of procedures and outcomes, while faculty inservice programs suggested standardization of skills and knowledge. Any new program, moreover, may have been monitored more closely from the district office.

In addition, negotiation and bargaining accompanied successful implementation of any new programs or curricular reforms in schools. School staff typically modified and adjusted new programs to fit their unique circumstances. Over a decade of research on planned change, moreover, suggests that change is more durable when this "mutual adaptation" (Berman & McLaughlin, 1976) occurs. Adaptation, however, did not proceed placidly, as individual staff members and schools work out the details of a new initiative that were acceptable to the central office.

In summary, each source relied on one or more processes to translate its intents into action. Federal policies have historically been linked through the highly structured, closely regulated oversight, monitoring and reporting requirements inherent in many of the categorical programs. Further, these programs were designed to promote certain national priorities such as equity and desegregation. Chapter 2, however, represented a different set of federal priorities: fostering local autonomy and flexibility, reducing accountability to the federal government, and promoting state administration of the program. Chapter 2, therefore, used weak rational-bureaucratic mechanisms (i.e., reporting and

evaluation guidelines). State initiatives supplemented strong rational-bureaucratic processes with economic ones. As the source of influence moved closer to home, the mechanisms for their expression become more overtly political. Demographic trends and local preferences were articulated through the political processes of negotiation, bargaining, and advocacy. Finally, internal initiatives typically combined rational-bureaucratic and political mechanisms.

The most significant sources of influence made use of political linkage mechanisms, while the less important ones relied solely on rational-bureaucratic processes. Elmore (1980) would agree only if influence on the programmatic aspects of school operation is the focus; rational-bureaucratic processes tend to have greater effects on the district's administrative structure. The data cannot be sorted clearly enough to disaggregate between programs and administration. Internal initiatives and community preferences were also closest to a local district which suggested that proximity also played an important role in the influence process. Although this finding suggests that political processes and proximity have the most effect, magnitude of influence is also determined by local context. The next section describes how local characteristics also shape a district's response to pressures for change.

Local Response: The Interplay of Context and Linkage Mechanism

Among the twelve districts in the study, local responses to pressures for change were consistent: federal and state influences were described as the least significant while closer-to-home sources were seen as more pressing. The more significant sources exerted influence through political

processes or through a combination of political and rational-bureaucratic processes. Thus, magnitude of influence was partially a function of both proximity and process.

District responses to the sources of influence also were shaped by two contextual conditions: defined and shared priorities, and the local capacity to address them. These contextual characteristics can be clustered into two role types that correspond to those described by McDonnell and McLaughlin (1981) in their analysis of state education agency (SEA) postures relative to the federal government: (1) independent actor, and (2) junior partner. Independent actor districts had a plan for where they were going and the local capacity to get there. When pressured to change, the district co-opted, adjusted, adapted, molded, and modified the influence attempt to fit local purposes, or the influence attempt was encapsulated to limit its impact as much as possible. Initiatives from other sources were not accepted wholesale; rather, the district actively chose its response. Junior partners adopted a more passive stance, often out of necessity, relative to sources for change. They did little more than comply with directives from external agencies and/or funding sources, primarily because of the lack of institutional capacity to do otherwise. Thus they were easily distracted, and other agencies defined their goals and purposes. Overall, five districts in this study were independent actors and seven were junior partners. Three of them are used to illustrate how district priorities and capacity intermingled with sources and the influence process to shape local impact.

Independent Actors: Richfield and Riverport

Richfield was a small urban district located near the state capitol. Situated in the midst of lush farmlands, the district was quite small geographically, encapsulating the inner city of a small urban area. Although not affluent, Richfield was not suffering the dire financial problems of many small urban areas in the state. However, Richfield served a poor, underemployed population and had evolved a dedication and commitment to that population that superseded all other interests. The mandate to serve the population's special needs had become a moral imperative for Richfield's educators that guided its programmatic and funding decisions.

Richfield's commitment to underserved children was uniformly shared. This vision of the district, forged over the years of shifting populations, provided a clear goal, a sense of purpose, and an unswerving direction. Building level staff expressed the same commitment as central office staff. Two principals saw population shifts as dramatic, creating educational situations where special needs were the norm. One was deeply concerned about helping children out of the cycle of poverty. In her words, "We aren't channeling Hispanics and, to a degree, Blacks into an educational program that allows them to prepare for a professional job, to raise their economic status. This is an area that we're very much concerned about--the schools could become much more involved in enhancing their expectations."

Through a process of program consolidation, reorganization, and reliance on local funds, the central office staff maintained services to these children through the vicissitudes of federal funding. Pressures from

other sources were subsequently shaped and molded to fit this, their primary goal. For example, over the past decade, low income families had been attracted to the area and many had settled within district boundaries, largely because of the rich and varied social services available there. During this time, funding for Title I programs serving the children of these families was based on 1970 census data. By 1982, the older data no longer accurately reflected Richfield's populations: Title I funding was woefully inadequate for a growing low income population. In addition, the absolute amount of Title I funds had been reduced and further pressured an already insufficient budget.

Despite the lack of adequate funds, Richfield's schools had continued to serve children in need of Title I programs. By consolidating some programs, targeting services at the primary grades for intervention rather than remediation, and using local funds to pick up services for intermediate grade children, the district was able to continue serving children in need and meet its highest priorities.

Riverport was another independent actor. Its commitment was to the instructional program and it fiercely rebuked perceived external raids into this territory. This was most clearly reflected in the district's posture relative to the SEA and the state school board. Riverport's central office administrators saw the district as a maverick in the state. They described how the district had refused to participate in the state's school improvement program, refused all money associated with it, and filed suit challenging certain of the state's newly-enacted graduation requirements.

One administrator described their complaints as follows:

> We are the only district who is fighting graduation requirements from the state because there is a lot of Mickey Mouse in them, like 100 hours of volunteer time and you must earn five credits a year to have sophomore status. We're not messing with math and things like that.

They felt the state had very little to offer in terms of knowledge and expertise. They regarded the money made available through various initiatives as unwanted if too many strings were attached. Moreover, central office staff rated the schools as superior and not needing state oversight and monitoring to keep them that way. One used an analogy to teaching gifted students. He said that state policy for Riverport was like the teacher of the gifted who could not individualize his instructional approaches and so continued teaching to the median. State policies were generated for the smaller, poorer districts that needed the pressure of state monitoring to change; Riverport was well beyond that. State policies had become obstacles and distractions for them.

Riverport's goals and commitment to the educational program arose from the dynamic leadership of a recently retired superintendent who, with an eye to the whole picture, began a revitalization program of the schools. First, the program addressed the physical plant and an impressive number of new elementary, middle, and high schools were built. Next, the focus shifted to curriculum revision. The first step in this process was forming a team of teachers who were granted leave from the classroom for one year to write a long-range curriculum plan, one feature of which was considerable building level choice in developing the instructional program.

The district office staff guarded and protected this building autonomy and independence. Just as they valued their own independence from the

state, so too they encouraged the same among the staff. In one administrator's words,

> In this district, there is still an element of freedom. You do not have to be on page 25 by the end of September in reading or history. Sometimes it's hard to hold onto because we've had Board members who feel we should use only one textbook in first grade reading. We believe that you get to know your clientele and you do what you need to to serve them best.

Thus, Riverport retained its independent actor status because of the district's shared priorities and capacity to pursue those priorities. The district's capacity was comprised of energetic and committed staff and resources to apply towards achieving valued goals.

Junior Partners--Montvale

Junior partners developed passive stances relative to influence attempts whether distant or close to home. They were also buffeted by strong demands and pressures, and were unable to forge a counter response. This was attributable to the lack of shared priorities and a lack of local capacity to do little more than comply.

In this study, Montvale was illustrative of junior partners. Contributing heavily to Montvale's status as such were its confusing and multiple goals. Although there was high dedication, commitment, energy, and creativity among staff, a sense of common purpose was not evident. The central office was deeply committed to programs for children with special needs: four-year-old kindergartens, intensive remedial programs for children falling behind, summer programs to provide extra tutoring. In direct competition with this priority was the major priority of a new school board which was committed to keeping schools open, despite declining enrollments. Faced a budget deficit, the Board had to make decisions

regarding school closings or program cuts. Because there were insufficient resources to do both, central office staff and the Board were at loggerheads.

Building level staff, on the other hand, expressed involvement and commitment to the educational program. One administrator described how she prodded the faculty in her school out of complacency and fostered an atmosphere of experimentation and risk-taking. Thus change for her came from within. Other sources were largely peripheral to the everyday operations of her school. Another principal was sensitive to shifts in the economy and the student body his school served. Despite the need to develop and offer programs that were relevant and could provide students with job skills, he saw the basics movement as a valuable counterthrust to the mini-course and electives mania of the 1960s and 1970s. He described the culture of his school as one of unusual caring and felt this attitude was encouraged by the central office:

> Our district does an excellent job in providing for the needs of the students. Even if there are cutbacks, they don't take books and pencils away from kids; they cut from other places.

The central office people, the building level staff, and reports about the Board presented very different views of the future for education in Montvale, the current state of education, pressures for changes, and the sources of those pressures. These conflicting and multiple goals and perceptions contributed to a sense that Montvale was not coherent enough internally to respond from a position of strength to external pressures for change. Battles on the home front (against a recalcitrant Board and an inflexible budget) and demands from federal programs sapped the energy and

commitment necessary to forge a diverse population into a working, effective unit.

This splintering was evident in recent events in Montvale. Federal funds had been used to develop and implement an intensive remedial program for third grade children. When the money supporting the program was blocked into Chapter 2 of ECIA, local funds had to be found to support it. The superintendent and other central office staff valued the project highly and even wanted to expand it. Children made enormous gains during their year in the program although some of these gains were lost when they re-entered regular classrooms. Central office staff felt that this indicated that the program for high-risk children should be extended. The newly-elected board, however, saw it as indicating that the effort was a failure. They were unwilling to allocate local funds to support what they believed was a marginal program.

Translating Intentions into Impacts

The complexities of implementing a policy and achieving its intents are now somewhat more visible. The potency of any influence attempt on a local district depends on at least three factors: the proximity of the source, the process that links policy to local operations, and the contextual features that shape local response to pressure. Based on data from the 12 districts in this study, the closer a source of influence is to the district, the greater its influence. Thus, informants tended to identify internal initiatives as having the greatest impacts, followed by community preferences and demographic changes, the SEA and state legislature, and the federal government.

However, proximity is not a sufficient explanation for impact. Influence attempts become linked to the district through one or more of three processes: rational-bureaucratic, political, and economic. The major sources of external influence were coupled to districts through political or political and rational-bureaucratic processes. The significance of the messier, subtler, and more ambiguous political processes has been only recently recognized in the literature (see, especially, Hill, 1979). Despite their unpredictability, bargaining and negotiating--because they require one-on-one interaction, informal communication, and mutual adaptation--are perceived by districts to have more profound effects than the more tidy and precise rational-bureaucratic processes. Policies like Chapter 2 are linked with districts mostly through economics, with minimal regulatory requirements and almost no informal contact. This arrangement probably shapes local behavior in a particular direction the least of any, once the administrative structures created to manage the previous programs have been dismantled. The overall impacts may, nevertheless, be substantial but idiosyncratic from district to district.

The role a district adopts viz a viz influence attempts is a third factor that makes policy implementation and outcomes more complex. Essentially, districts are either independent actors that determine their own fates or junior partners that do not have shared priorities or the local capacity to buffer themselves from influence attempts. At least three points seem worth making when one juxtaposes the processes that link policy to local behavior and these two role types. First, independent actors seem to resist rational-bureaucratic processes the most. Too much

emphasis on compliance may lead to the district's encapsulating its response to a policy. As a result, it minimally complies while assuring that the impact will be constrained to a small arena. Second, policies that rely also on political processes improve the chances that some intents will be realized, although independent actors will be able to bend the policies to fit their purposes. As a result, strict compliance with some regulations may not be attainable. Third, based on districts' responses to Chapter 2, independent actors and junior partners alike value a policy that links itself to districts only through resource allocation (see Report in Education Research, 1984). Independent actors can do whatever it is they planned to do anyway without having to divert energy to protect this activity; and junior partners may, for the first time, have a taste of what it is like to have a little discretionary money to use for its own purposes. However, creativity is likely to be hindered by a concern for the external agency's "hidden regulations" or competing interest groups' designs for spending the money on already existing programs.

All of this augurs a dim prospect for substantially changing schools from afar. Indeed, most federal and state initiatives have two strikes against them: (1) greater distance from local operations, and (2) a tendency to rely heavily on rational-bureaucratic processes. As a result, independent actors continue to divert resources to their own priorities and junior partners devote much of their energy to compliance. In either case, original programmatic intents get moved aside. This suggests that policies should make provision for some political processes through which the policy and targets can be linked. Some staff from the policy-making agency may have to have frequent face-to-face contact with districts and have the

flexibility to ignore selectively certain violations. But, it also means that misunderstandings about the policy intents can be addressed and that encouragement and reinforcement can be given to attend to the policy's objectives. The end result is likely to be programs that fit local needs best, with the policy-making agency having at least some input into defining what those needs are.

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