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ABSTRACT

This report presents a brief review of the results of sever years of work by the Field Studies Project of Research for Better Schools. The project's two major objectives were to study improvement processes in schools and to study the organization, roles, and functions of, and interrelationships among, agencies that support school improvement. The project conducted five separate studies, created two tools to support school improvement efforts, and generated several publications and reports. This report begins with a brief overview of the project's goals, objectives, and audiences, then describes the five major studies in terms of their purposes, design, problem areas, findings, and products. The five studies are the Local School Improvement study, the School Assessment Survey, the Federal Policies in Local Schools study, the Professional Cultures in Improving High Schools study, and the Regional Educational Service Agency study. The two tools created by the project were a training program for field agents involved in school improvement efforts and a survey instrument developed during the School Assessment Survey project. A bibliography lists 45 publications or reports providing further information on the studies, primarily issued by Research for Better Schools or authored by Field Studies Project staff members. (PGD)

# FINAL REPORT:

# FIELD STUDIES PROJECT



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FINAL REPORT: FIELD STUDIES PROJECT

This report presents a brief review of the results of seven years of work by RBS' Field Studies Project. During that time, the project conducted five separate studies, created two tools to support school improvement efforts, and generated one book, 20 journal articles and book chapters, as well as at least 18 reports that are available through Research for Better Schools. The diversity and volume of work conducted precludes easy synthesis. The reader who is interested in learning more about that work is invited to refer directly to those documents which are listed in the attached bibliography.

To summarize that work, this final report begins with a brief overview of the project's goals, objectives, and audiences. The contributions of the Field Studies work are presented in the next section. The following sections describe each of the five major studies in terms of its purposes, design, problems encountered, findings, and (where appropriate) products.

## Goals, Objectives, and Audiences

From its inception, Field Studies' goal was to contribute to knowledge about how schools change and can be helped to improve. To achieve this goal, two more delimited objectives were identified:

- To study improvement processes in schools.
- To study the organization, roles, and functions of agencies that support school improvement as well as relationships among them.

The first objective was intended to recognize the complexities of improvement processes at the local level. Since at least the early 1970s, researchers have been aware that the best laid plans of policy makers are often severely modified through school-based processes of implementation

and incorporation. Four of the Field Studies' five projects--the Local School Improvement Study (LSI), the project to develop the School Assessment Survey (SAS), the Study of Federal Programs in Local Schools (FPLS), and the Professional Cultures in Improving High Schools Study (PC)--focused on this objective. The second objective reflected the important efforts of state, federal, and other agencies to help improve practice through such means as the dissemination of knowledge, the provision of funds, and regulation. The Study of Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESA) addressed this objective.

The knowledge from Field Studies' research was intended for three audiences: the national research and development community, various constituencies within RBS' region, and RBS' staff and management. The national research and development community was an important audience because the problems in this region are not unique; they exist throughout the country. However, RBS does have unusual access to situations where school improvement efforts are underway. By taking advantage of that access, it was possible to conduct research that addressed a number of shared concerns of the national R&D community. These related to the management of the change process, the contextual factors that shaped that process, and means for improving educational effectiveness. To reach this audience, Field Studies wrote articles for national research and practitioner journals and made presentations at conventions of such professional associations as AERA and ASCD.

While the concerns Field Studies addressed were general, the settings of its studies were specific to the region so the information gleaned was useful to school districts, SEAs, and a variety of other agencies. Field Studies consistently maintained relationships with relevant regional

audiences from the start to the end of its studies. This practice ensured that research addressed specific policy questions and all results were shared with interested audiences. To that end, Field Studies worked with the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Unit Directors and the New Jersey Department of Education during its RESA Study and with state departments of education in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maryland during the FILS Study. This same concern prompted the decision to provide data-based feedback to schools piloting SAS throughout the history of that project.

Finally, Field Studies' research was designed to be useful to other units at RBS. Examples are provided below under the heading of collaboration. It will suffice here to note that units within RBS received useful feedback on developments in their sites through LST and that RBS' Urban Development unit has been a major user of SAS.

## Contributions

From the beginning, Field Studies made three contributions. First, the research findings added to an understanding of school improvement. Second, staff developed practical tools that were used to directly facilitate school improvement. Finally, Field Studies collaborated with others in RBS to help the laboratory work together as a more unified whole.

## Findings

Field Studies research explored and clarified three themes that recur in thinking about school improvement. The first, and perhaps most important, of these is the pervasive effect of the local context on efforts to improve practice. The effect of context was one of the great discoveries of the educational reform programs of the late 1960s and early

1970s. Early efforts to implement Headstart programs, the Followthrough Planned Variation Study, and the Berman and McLaughlin's studies of educational change at Rand all discovered that the same innovation took very different forms in different settings (LSI-1).*

One of the important puzzles to work out in the years that followed was to understand why these differences occurred. Field Studies made a number of contributions in this regard. In one study, Field Studies identified eight contingencies, or characteristics of the school context, that influence the course of the local change efforts. These included the availability of resources and incentives, the linkages or interdependencies among school staff, the fit of the innovation to local goals, and the frequency of turnover of key staff, among others (LSI-4). In several areas, this study went beyond listing contingencies to suggest ways to diagnose them and strategies to cope with them.

A more recent study explored the ways local cultures shape change efforts. It reinforced previous work in Field Studies by showing how schools develop collective conceptualizations of educational purpose that can differ in important ways from place to place, and even among subunits within the same organization. These conceptualizations are exceedingly powerful and persistent. They can be changed intentionally, but only with a great deal of effort and over a long period of time. Teachers reinterpret change efforts in light of their conceptions of purpose. Where those conceptions do not prevail, teachers will work at cross-purposes to the change efforts, not out of unreasoned stubbornness so much as firm convictions to the rightness of their goals (PC-1).

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*References are to the numbered items in the attached study bibliographies.

A third study identified systematic differences between elementary and secondary schools in terms of their agreement on basic purposes and centralization of control (elementary schools are more centralized and have greater consensus than secondary schools), explored the reasons for these differences, and speculated on the implications of these differences for school improvement efforts by suggesting why change and the achievement of effectiveness should be more difficult at the secondary level (SAS-10, 12).

Finally, Field Studies illustrated how the meaning of one major federal policy shift--the change to categorical funding through the Educational Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA)--depended upon local contextual features. This study examined the consequences of reduced funding and showed how those depended upon such local factors as the availability of alternative sources of support, whether the programs replaced by ECIA had been used for basic or ancillary purposes, the closeness of the district's relationship to local agencies of government and philanthropy, and the community's support for education (FPLS-1).

A second theme was the examination of the context and operation of dissemination agencies. The dissemination of educational knowledge has become a minor industry in the last three decades, an industry in which RBS as a whole is deeply involved. Both the participants in that industry and the policy makers and managers who oversee it want to understand the practices and organizational arrangements that facilitate successful dissemination. Field Studies' contribution was to examine the work of regional educational service agencies. These agencies are pervasive--existing in 39 states--but not highly visible or well understood. They have a great deal of promise as dissemination agencies although they usually have other purposes as well.

Field Studies' research on RESAs indicates the extent to which they live in different worlds from public schools. The political context in which they operate is quite different. Their marginality often makes survival difficult, but their invisibility actually helps. Often the survival interests of RESAs and local districts are directly at odds (RESA-1). The cultures of schools and RESAs are also quite different. While schools are inwardly oriented, rarely scanning the environment for new knowledge or opportunities, RESAs are more outward oriented. These political and value differences have the potential for creating conflicts between schools and RESAs that are serious enough to jeopardize the dissemination mission of the latter. However, the RESA study identified a number of organizational and staffing arrangements that help overcome these tensions and build relations that facilitate successful dissemination from these agencies to local schools (RESA-5).

The final theme was the exploration of the effects of the principal on school improvement and effectiveness. Doubts about whether principals make any contributions come from two directions. In education, since the first Coleman Report, there have been persistent doubts about whether anything schools do can overcome the effects of family background on student achievement. In management science one well respected school of thought has argued convincingly that organizational outcomes are more a function of a variety of environmental factors than of managerial action. One important contribution of Field Studies' research was a quantitative study which strongly suggests that principals' actions facilitate student learning even when aggregated student background characteristics are controlled. When the principal shares influence with teachers and supports their work, students learn more (SAS-3).

Other Field Studies work elaborated this theme by illustrating how principals make a difference in the life of their schools, The principal is a central communication node among a school's adults. She or he is therefore a major source of psychic incentives and disincentives for teachers, although willingness to provide those incentives may depend in turn upon the incentives offered the principal by district administrators (LSI-8). In fact the principal is strategically located to shape the school's whole professional culture. This can be done by buffering staff from external intrusions, providing an orderly setting in which teachers can teach, managing symbols in the school to clarify a coherent set of purposes that match teachers' and the community's expectations, and focusing attention on issues that are to be valued by culture (PC-1).

Tools

In two areas, Field Studies went well beyond the identification of research findings to develop tools that educators can use in their own school improvement efforts. The first was developed out of the LSI study. The final report of that study was a book clarifying the implications of that work for field agents--individuals in central offices or dissemination agencies who help schools conduct their improvement efforts (LSI-4). However, Field Studies realized that printed conclusions are not easily internalized. To facilitate the use of those findings, staff created a training program with exercises that help make them concrete and understandable to field agents. This program is offered by Field Studies staff and is also recorded in a manual that can be used as a training guide (LSI-3).

Second, the centerpiece of the SAS project is a survey instrument that can be used as a planning tool for school improvement programs. This instrument uses teacher reports to measure nine important organizational dimensions. In addition to conducting methodological studies on the instrument (SAS-6), Field Studies staff developed norms that are useful in interpreting results, and training programs to help educators understand study results and identify implications for their own improvement programs (SAS-1).

## Collaboration

Throughout its history Field Studies collaborated with other units in Research for Better Schools. This began during the early history of LSI when Field Studies conducted research in schools that were implementing and helping to develop RBS programs (Basic Skills, Citizen Education, and Career Development). Collaboration took place at two levels. First, researchers gave informal feedback to the field staff from the development units on progress in each school, always being careful not to risk the research role. In return the development units were an important source of information on events in the sites. Second, Field Studies reports were shared with the development units which provided them with information about the sites and perspectives for shaping their programs.

After data collection for LSI ended, Field Studies worked with the Dissemination Division (RDx) and Basic Skills on a number of occasions to identify research sites. As just one example, the Dissemination Division provided useful information on the state contexts for RESAs and helped Field Studies negotiate permission to conduct the study. In return Field Studies did a small report on RESAs for a unit in one SEA that wanted

assistance from Dissemination. Field Studies worked closely with the Dissemination Division as well in the initiation of FPLS, and with Basic Skills when negotiating entry to one site for the Professional Cultures Study.

Perhaps the most fruitful collaboration was with Urban Development in the creation of two school improvement tools. Urban Development provided a trainer/developer who was a coauthor of the LSI training program. That unit was also instrumental in the refinement of SAS. Urban Development helped identify dimensions for inclusion in the study, brainstormed on items for inclusion in dimensions, and recruited sites for the administration of SAS. These steps were mutually beneficial since SAS became an important element in the Urban Development training and school improvement programs. In addition, Field Studies and Urban Development staff worked together to develop the feedback and training devices to ensure that educators would understand the meaning of data on their schools and be able to use those data for improvement purposes. It can truly be said that the successful development of both tools depended upon the efforts of staff from both units. This general overview provides a context for the descriptions of Field Studies' five studies.

## Local School Improvement Study: 1978-1984

The Local School Improvement Study (LSI) was primarily a qualitative examination of curriculum change in 14 schools. Based on three years of fieldwork, the study's findings highlighted the effects of local school context on the change process. The products of the study were all directed to those who lead and/or facilitate school improvement.

## Initial Study Purposes

The Local School Improvement Study initially had four purposes: (1) to understand the dynamic process of change at the local level (as this process takes place when a school works with an outside agency); (2) to understand the characteristics of the school that facilitate or hinder the process; (3) to understand the characteristics of the external agency that facilitate or hinder the process; and (4) to identify the outcomes of the process. The study was the first Field Studies research project and stemmed directly from the objective "to study improvement processes in schools." It was stimulated as well by the presence of a gap in the change literature at that time concerning the actual process of implementation. Thus, the study sought to make the complexities of change less opaque.

## Study Design

LSI examined building level activities of 14 elementary, junior high, and high schools that were planning and implementing programs in career education, citizen education, and basic skills with RBS assistance. Field workers did not participate in the projects as technical assistance agents. They were observers who used unstructured interviews, observations of planning meetings with RBS, general observations of school life, and a formal survey to collect data about school context in general and the change process. Field notes were typed and coded on an ongoing basis, with codes deriving from the study's original conceptual framework (which highlighted change process stages) as well as school events. Data analysis focused on the interaction between phases of the change process and school contextual features. The survey results were incorporated into an analysis

of the implementation process (LSI-6). More on this survey is presented in the discussion of the School Assessment Survey.

Problems/Resolutions

To avoid having the study become an evaluation of RBS, the analysis of external agency characteristics was dropped for the most part--although close attention was paid to field agent activities (LSI-10). Due to termination of development projects within RBS, formal relationships with several schools ended prior to the study's conclusion. However, researchers maintained a presence in those schools to track the continuation of implemented changes. School staff were receptive to this continued researcher presence.

Findings

The basic finding was that existing school contextual conditions inevitably mingled with the change process to yield substantially different results from school to school. Indeed, the effectiveness of field agents' activities, how planning was carried out, the success of involving teachers in the process, how widely classroom changes were implemented, and how long the changes lasted were all acutely susceptible to the influence of eight contextual conditions in the schools studied. These conditions were: (1) the availability of school resources, (2) the availability and nature of incentives and disincentives for innovative behavior, (3) the school's organizational linkages, (4) existing school goals and priorities, (5) the nature and extent of faculty factions and tensions, (6) turnover in key administrative and faculty positions, (7) the nature of knowledge use and

current instructional and administrative practices, and (8) the legacy of prior change projects. Not all conditions were influential at the same time. Some posed obstacles early in the projects and subsequently disappeared, while others did not manifest themselves until changes were actually attempted. These findings have been fully reported in a book published by Teacher's College Press (LSI-4).

The major implications for field agents was that each school presented its own set of challenges that had to be met in ways uniquely appropriate for that school. Agents, then, had to weave their understandings of school conditions into the strategies they expected to use.

Products/Uses

The attached bibliography provides a list of the products, including eight journal articles and the book. In conjunction with the study, a training program to communicate study findings to building administrators, central office staff, and external agencies was developed by project staff. During development, actual training was conducted with SEAs, district curriculum coordinators, and principals. These field tests and continual revisions of the substance of the program resulted in a training manual (LSI-3) and a service now offered to RBS clients.

## Regional Educational Service Agency Study: 1979-83

The goal of this study was to examine the organization and operation of regional educational service agencies (RESAs)--those agencies located midway between the state and local levels of government--in order to understand how they contribute to knowledge use in schools. RESAs are well placed to provide training and technical assistance to school districts.

Their proximity makes them very accessible to districts and encourages them to be sensitive to local concerns. Every state can have RESAs, and about 39 do. As part of the state educational system, they have legitimacy. Finally, they have the time and resources to follow developments in a variety of fields and offer current, responsive training that might not otherwise be available.

## Initial Study Purposes

The RESA project was intended to meet the Field Studies objective of studying the organization, roles, and functions of external agencies that contribute to local school improvement, but it also met two more specific ends. First, because dissemination studies in the late 1970s had "discovered" the dissemination potential of RESAs, federal planners wanted to know more about them. Second, RBS' interest in linking its regional dissemination strategies to these agencies created a press to learn more about them.

## Study Design

The original design called for an exploratory study since relatively little was known about RESAs. It would have three major activities: an overview of the state contexts for Pennsylvania and New Jersey RESAs, case studies of about ten RESAs, and a survey of users of RESA services to learn their perceptions of RESAs.

## Problems/Resolutions

The study's major problem was site selection. Initially, Field Studies wanted to do a few exploratory case studies because of the limited

knowledge of RESAs then available. Case studies would be directly useful and would provide the foundation for later quantitative studies if needed. This strategy also took advantage of Field Studies' methodological strengths in qualitative research.

The difficulty was that SEA liaisons for the study insisted that more agencies be included because there was more diversity within each type of RESA than one or two case studies would capture. To accomodate these concerns, the study grew to 26 agencies (11 of Pennsylvania's 29 IUs, 10 of New Jersey's 21 County Offices, and two of New Jersey's four Education Improvement Centers). The exploratory, unstructured approach originally planned was dropped in favor of a more structured, survey-and-interview design. This design was somewhat premature given our knowledge of these agencies and did not allow us to explore the subtleties of organizational operations. Nevertheless, a number of useful findings resulted from this work.

## Findings

The results of the RESA study provided answers to four questions:

1. What services do educators prefer from RESAs?

Educators look for assistance in three broad areas: curriculum and instruction which includes support for any activity that affects what is taught and the way it is taught; administrative issues related planning, budget and cost control, staffing and scheduling, and facilities maintenance as well as training for practicing administrators; and knowledge of the outside world especially regarding changed regulations and mandates. Since most earlier dissemination studies focused on curriculum

and instruction, it was useful to learn that educators sought knowledge and assistance in a wider range of fields (RESA-5, 7).

Other studies indicate that long-term projects where an agency works with a school or district for some time are most effective in actually changing practice. RESAs do conduct long-term projects, but they are relatively rare. More common are workshops that stand alone, brief informal interactions--either face-to-face or over the telephone--and visits to a RESA resource center. These may not lead as directly to changed practice, but they set the stage for long-term projects and provide information that eduators can use when appropriate (RESA-5, 9).

2. What factors promote service delivery?

Two conditions are critical for effective services from RESAs: trust beween local educators and RESA staff and services that educators perceive tc be useful. Six factors affect trust levels and perceived usefulness of services.

a. Committee structures that foster regular, formal communcation between educators and RESA leadership. The personal communication about specific district needs in these committees builds trust by giving RESA leaders and staff an accurate understanding of local expectations (RESA-1).

b. Funding mechanisms that create stability in a RESA's budget. Heavy reliance on short-term grants reduces staff continuity and makes the services offered more responsive to funding sources than local needs (RESA-1).

c. Agency growth patterns. Growth is appreciated when it allows the RESA to provide more services, but it reduces trust when there is a perception that the RESA gets resources that could go to districts (RESA-1).

d. Such employee characteristics as conformity to local expectations for RESA staff, expertise in one's field, and interpersonal skills like knowledge of everyday life in schools and the ability to get along with others (RESA-5).

e. Network structures that promote working intimacy and mutual knowledge between educators and RESA staff (RESA-5).

f. RESA leadership that stresses taking initiative in offering services along with sensitivity to local concerns (RESA-1).

3. Can the RESA serve both the State Education Agency (SEA) and the local district?

Local educators want RESAs to help with program development, reduce costs through consortial arrangements, and find ways to minimize the impact of state and federal mandates and initiatives. SEAs want RESAs to ensure that districts implement state mandates and initiatives as intended. Sometimes RESAs must help the state enforce regulations. Often state and local expectations are contradictory. Yet, RESAs are tied to both kinds of agencies. Their basic purpose is to serve local educators who are often a critical source of support with the state legislature. Districts sometimes pay for services as well. The SEA has oversight responsibility for RESAs, administers funds going to those agenices, and is also a potential source of support with the legislature. In summary, RESAs must work with both levels, but they find doing so difficult where the interests of the two levels diverge (RESA-3, 5).

4. What conditions promote or reduce tensions between RESAs and the SEA?

The extent to which tensions arise between the RESA and the SEA depends on five factors:

a. The political culture of the state. Every state has its own political culture or pattern of shared orientations about rules for policy making and the responsibilities of each level of government. Where this culture is heavily regulatory, the legislature often puts great pressure on the SEA to monitor the actions of local districts. This pressure is often passed on to RESAs (RESA-3).

b. Historical precedent. Expectations about the RESA's primary client (the district or the SEA) are established early as are conflicts about these issues. Where shared expectations that the RESA's first responsibility is to provide assistance to local districts develop early, SEA-RESA tension is minimized (RESA-3).

c. Multiple RESA systems. In states with two or more RESA systems, tensions increase with the overlap between systems. They will be especially high when funds decline if the systems must compete for support from the SEA to cope with the legislature.

d. Match between mandates and funding sources. When RESAs are expected to meet the needs of the SEA but receive a substantial portion of their income from federal and local sources, tensions are likely to arise unless the interests of all parties are quite similar (RESA-1).

e. Enforcement mandates. When RESAs believe their mission is to serve local districts, they will resist efforts to associate them with regulatory efforts. When they have formal regulatory responsibility, they will still try to redefine their role to emphasize providing assistance, in spite of SEA interests to the contrary (RESA-6).

Since the last three factors are under control of the state legislature, that body can take steps to minimize SEA-RESA tensions.

## School Assessment Survey: 1979-1984

### Initial Study Purposes

The School Assessment Survey (SAS) project was initiated six years ago as a small-scale pure research endeavor. The focus of the early work was on empirically testing two theoretical images of how schools are organized. The first, a rational bureaucratic model, assumes there is a single set of goals for the organization, that there is a formal control system, that each part of the organization is integrated for the purpose of maximizing organizational goals, and that the system is closed with little impact from the outside environment. The alternative model, the loosely coupled system, is characterized by a lack of goals, the lack of collective choice, the presumption of competence, and the flexibility to respond to the environment. An initial data collection effort, a survey of teachers, to test these competing models was initiated with 14 schools as part of the

LSI project (SAS-13). Later, a more systematic test was conducted on a random sample of 50 schools (SAS-9).

The exclusive focus on research began to shift when the staff of the project designed a data-feedback session for the 50 principals. That early reality test indicated that the data accurately captured what was happening in those schools and that the results had practical utility. The survey was expanded to include a broader array of organizational conditions, and over the last three years a series of management training programs were developed to help school practitioners make use of diagnostic information on the organizational health of their schools as a tool for focusing on issues of school improvement. The project has grown from a pure research project to one that has important practical applications (SAS-1). During this process the project has also continued to make use of the growing data-base to explore important research questions (SAS-3, 5, 10).

## Study Design

The SAS project uses survey data from members to measure important organizational characteristics in schools. These characteristics were derived from literatures on organizational sociology, school effectiveness, and school improvement. The measurement approach follows the tradition of multi-informant, multi-organization research where a summary score combines teachers' reports used to characterize the school as an organization.

Operational indicators for each dimension were written using the advice of practice-based and research-based experts, as well as examples from earlier instruments. Each dimension is represented by four to seven questionnaire items. Statistical analyses were employed to assess the appropriateness of the item indicators as well as the dimensions (SAS-6).

To date, almost 400 schools participated in the project. The research activities include analysis of the relationships among organizational dimensions (SAS-9, 11), as well as their relationships with environmental and outcome variables (SAS-5, 3). The practitioner-based activities involved the design of easy-to-read data displays, feedback sessions, and training experiences to help school staff make use of the data in improvement activities (SAS-1, 7, 8).

Problems/Resolutions

While a host of problems had to be overcome in writing each of the research reports, the more important problems have dealt with the practitioner uses of the SAS instrument. Three problems stand out: the need to add practitioner relevant dimensions to the survey; the need to create easy-to-read data feedback devices; and the need to establish a viable dissemination strategy.

The first version of the SAS instrument drew variables from the literature on the organizational sociology: goals, control, conflict, communication, and rule enforcement. While intriguing to practitioners, they represented an incomplete list. With the growing attention being paid to the effective schools literature, such issues as leadership, discipline, teaching behaviors and expectations were high on the lists of principals. Using practice-based experts as informal consultants, the project staff built new variables that addressed these issues. An effort has been made to include a new dimension or two with each new data collection effort.

Statistical manipulations can deter even the most mathematically inclined person from using data. The second challenge was to present the

data for each school so it could be easily understood by many different practitioners. The solution was to design a profile, or portrait of the school, that allows a school administrator to answer three key questions:

- How well is my school doing relative to other schools?
- Are the groups of schools with which my school is being compared meaningful?
- How well is my school doing on one dimension relative to another?

In addition, easy-to-read item analyses for the distribution of responses for each question on the questionnaire have been prepared.

The third concern was to develop a dissemination strategy that allowed a wide range of practitioners to learn about SAS. A three-part strategy enabled study staff to handle information requests from well over 1000 potential users. First, an article was written for publication in a special issue of Educational Leadership that focused on school improvement. Second, a brochure was designed that effectively communicates the nature and use of SAS. Third, a data-management system was implemented to monitor the requests for information and to keep track of the progress from administering surveys in schools to preparing reports that summarize the data.

## Findings

Four major findings characterize the SAS project. The first three derive from the research efforts, and the final one from the practical applications of the data.

First, it is unrealistic to characterize schools as either rational bureaucracies or loosely coupled systems. Organizational arrangements form a continuum with the two ideal types on either extreme. Schools can be found all along that continuum (SAS-13). It is also true that centralization of control and goal consensus are highly correlated. If a

school scores on one end of the continuum in one dimension, it is likely to score at the same end on another dimension.

Second elementary and secondary schools are organized very differently (SAS-10, 9). Elementary schools are more tightly coupled with higher consensus on goals, more centralized control, and more frequent communication among organizational members than secondary schools. These differences have often unrecognized implications. Many educators are trying to adopt the effective schools research which is based on work in elementary schools to the secondary context, with mixed success. These organizational differences help account for the problems secondary schools face (SAS-12).

The most recent SAS research (SAS-3) suggests that decentralized control is associated with higher student performance. This third finding runs counter to much recent effective schools research. The effect of decentralization holds even when controlling for family SES. The research suggests that centralized control is counterproductive and that positive principal support, as operationalized in actions that encourage professional behavior of the teaching staff, motivates teachers to do more.

Finally, the experiences from using SAS for organizational assessment (SAS-8, 1) indicate that it can be a useful tool for identifying potential areas to focus school improvement efforts. The use of data to help inform the decision context takes on many different forms (SAS-1). These range from the principal using SAS to get a pulse on the organization to the incorporation of SAS into a long-term school improvement process. In the former case, few people see the data and no followup activities derive from the review of the data. In the latter case, SAS data are used as part of a larger, carefully planned and coordinated effort where the data are

discussed and used as the tool for clarifying weaknesses. Coupled with that latter application is a process for involving a number of people in the improvement effort and a commitment to implementation and institutionalization of the resultant changes.

## Study of Federal Policies in Local Schools: 1982-1984

The Federal Policies study examined the impact of federal policy changes on state and local school improvement efforts. The specific changes that were studied were those included in the Educational Consolidation and Improvement Act (ECIA) of 1981. That legislation superseded the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. Its intents were to deregulate the federal administration of funds and to increase local flexibility in the use of those funds. The study focused primarily on ECIA's Chapter 2, which consolidated 28 categorical programs into a single block grant. Funds that had been distributed through those programs were redistributed through state education agencies, primarily according to the size of the student population. This meant that some districts--primarily those that had received large sums of federal funds through categorial programs (particularly desegregation monies awarded through the Emergency School Aid Act, ESAA)--experienced substantial losses. Other school districts, particularly those which had received few categorical funds, experienced windfalls.

### Initial Study Purposes

The study's examination of the impact of Chapter 2 had two basic objectives: (1) to contribute to the understanding of dissemination systems, and (2) to provide state departments in RBS' region, and RBS

itself, with information to support policy planning. Those objectives directly addressed Field Studies' goals and objectives. Additional knowledge would be generated about whether and how federal policies help stimulate educational change, and about how states implement federal policies and give direction to local districts.

Study Design

The study design assumed that policy makers have limited control over implementation. Therefore, the study focused on the lowest system levels where effects were anticipated--that is, school districts and schools. Also, the study included local contextual variables that were likely to influence local responses to federal policies.

The study included 12 school districts in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland. The major criterion for selecting sites was the financial impact of the change from categorical to block grants. Districts that were selected were either big "winners" (receiving at least a 100 percent increase) or big "losers" (receiving at least a 33 percent reduction) An equal number of each was selected. Variation was also sought on district size and type of community served.

Data were collected primarily through on-site interviewing, document review, and follow-up feedback sessions to state agencies. Researchers conducted three rounds of one- to two-day site visits. Interviewees included district administrators and staff, building-level administrators and teachers, and a few community members. After each round of interviews, researchers visited state agencies to discuss their findings.

Problems/Resolutions

One problem that researchers encountered was that one state in this region declined to participate. Consequently, the sites were distributed among three rather than four states. Another problem was that the policy effects were less than anticipated. Researchers had the opportunity to identify other foci for the second and third rounds of site visits. Researchers decided to focus on Chapter 2 and, within that, to particularly examine how and where "losing" districts sought alternate sources of funding. Also, they examined the sources of pressure for change.

Findings

The study findings described the direct, intended effects of the change from ESEA to ECIA and the process of implementing ECIA--redistribution of funds, shifts in priorities, inputs into local decision making, and the reduction of administrative burden. It also analyzed how districts coped with loss and responded to various sources of pressure for change.

Redistribution of funds. When funds that had been awarded through categorical programs were redistributed through Chapter 2, the districts in the study that gained money tended to be those whose only federal funds had been allocated through Title IV-B. That categorical program which provided money for the purchase of instructional materials and library resources, was the only one that awarded funds on a formula--rather than a competitive--basis. Districts that lost money, on the other hand, had competed successfully for grants from at least two categorical programs other than Title IV-B, especially from the Emergency School Aid Act (to assist schools with desegregation), and Title IV-C (for local innovation and improvement) (FPLS-1).

Shifts in priorities. Many districts in the study allocated much of their Chapter 2 funds to instructional materials and equipment, reflecting a continuation of that federal priority. However, relatively few allocated major funds to other federal priorities such as desegregation and innovation. Desegregation activities were either discontinued or pursued at much lower level. Rather than use their Chapter 2 funds for new innovative efforts, districts salvaged, maintained, or expanded existing programs (FPLS-1).

Inputs into local decision making. Districts varied widely in their involvement of staff and community members in decisions about how Chapter 2 funds would be used. In at least one district, the superintendent made the decision alone. In another, a whole collection of existing committees were consulted during the Chapter 2 planning. The modal process was for the superintendent and several central office administrators to propose alternatives and make the decisions. Although there were a few instances of lively debate about allocation, little controversy (or even discussion) was evident between most districts and external interests (FPLS-1).

The reduction of administrative burden. Despite federal emphasis on ECIA's reduction of paperwork and other administrative requirements, most districts continued their prior practices. Decisions to continue those practices were made either at the state or local level. Officials in one state education agency feared that future federal audits and evaluations would require more documentation than that specified in the legislation. Therefore, they directed local districts to continue the procedures used with ESEA. The other two state agencies eased their requirements, but most districts continued to maintain similar records. They worried about the

potential for future audits and/or local needs for data on program effectiveness (FPLS-1).

Coping with loss. Some districts managed to cope with large funding reductions better than others (i.e., they continued services previously funded by categorical programs at essentially the same or modestly reduced levels--if they felt it desirable to do so--and maintained a sense of progress or vitality). A district's ability to cope depended on a complex combination of several factors: (1) the availability of alternative sources of support, (2) whether categorical funds had been used for basic or ancillary activities, (3) the district's relationship with its environment, and (4) support for education in the community. These findings indicate that the local context is an important determinant of impact of loss. Therefore, for policy adjustments to have maximum impact, differences in local context must be understood and taken into account (FPLS-1)

Sources of pressure for change. Districts perceived several sources of pressure for change: federal policies, state initiatives, community demographics and preferences, and internal initiatives. The potency of the various forces depended primarily on their proximity to the local district and on contextual features that shaped local responses to pressure. The findings suggest that federal and state policies will have little success in changing schools substantially unless they incorporate political processes through which the policy and the local districts can be linked (FPLS-2).

## Professional Cultures in Improving High Schools: 1984-1985

### Initial Study Purposes

The Study of Professional Cultures in Improving High Schools set out to explore the complex relationships between efforts to improve schools, the definitions of effectiveness or success which drive those efforts, and how these affect and are affected by the inner life of schools--their cultures. To do so, the research team selected three high schools that were improving. Field work in those schools was used to understand the cultures of the professionals in the schools, and how those cultures shaped both definitions of effectiveness and local improvement efforts. This interest in the relationship between professional cultures and improvement efforts reflects our recurring fascination with two practical issues. First, if one wants to improve schools, what should be changed? And second, if one should change cultural beliefs, how is that done?

### Study Design

A cultural perspective on the study of improving high schools suggested design features congruent with the perspective's assumptions. First, an intensive fieldwork approach was selected to understand teachers' experiences, beliefs, and values, and to view school life as they did. Second, three high schools were chosen for the study. This small sample maximized the time available for indepth exploration at each site. Thus, the selection decision favored depth over breadth. Third, detailed understanding was encouraged by relying on one researcher per site. Data collection averaged approximately thirty-five days per site and took place from January through June 1985. Some follow-up visits were also made this fall to gather more data on recurring organizational events.

The rationale for this indepth immersion in each site was threefold. First, it would maximize the validity of the study. Second, such immersion would ensure data analysis and interpretations that were empirically grounded and, hence, truthful and representative. And finally, indepth immersion would allow for the "thick description" so necessary for trustworthy qualitative reports.

Problems/Resolutions

Three major problems arose during the study, the first during site selection and the second two while negotiating access to the sites identified. Site selection was complicated by the study's overriding purpose to identify schools in the process of improving. To capture improvement or change as it was happening demanded that the schools have received some attention (usually local) for "doing good things." In addition, we sought statistical evidence that indicated trends in the preferred direction. Thus, we wanted at least two types of evidence that improvement was occurring: reputational and statistical trend data. However, the study's purposes also demanded that improvement efforts be in process; thus, we wanted schools where changes were on going now, not just part of the dimly-remembered past.

Locating high schools that met these criteria but were also near enough to be feasible sites for continuous fieldwork was not easy. Initially, eight possible schools were identified. Of these, two remained as part of the study. A third which had been identified during site selection dropped out of the study just before fieldwork was to begin. The final school eventually selected had originally been identified but was not chosen initially because the changes of interest had occurred a few years

ago. However, because it was urban, proximate, and willing, it was selected as an alternative.

The second problem arose during negotiations for entry at one of the schools. Fraught with tension, this high school had an embattled, unionized faculty deeply angered by top-down pressures for reform and by transient leadership. The fieldworker had to "pass muster" by the superintendent, the principal, and the union leader. Eventually, access was granted but cooperation was not assured. Each phase demanded sensitive negotiations with district level leadership and building administrators. Although negotiating entry and building trust are necessary for intensive fieldwork and part and parcel of field relations, both the problems of site selection and negotiations seemed heightened for this study.

The third issue arose over whether there should be one or two fieldworkers at each site. The initial study design stipulated two, primarily to ensure a holistic picture of each school. Having two fieldworkers proved unworkable in two sites. In the third site it was possible, although the second researcher played less of a role than the original design intended.

The reasons behind the decision to have only one fieldworker at two sites and primarily one at the other were two-fold. First, tensions were present in all three sites that made the building of relations a major, time-consuming activity. Our judgment was that the introduction of another person would have exacerbated local concerns. Second, each school selected was relatively small. Thus each site was manageable for one person.

Findings

The study resulted in three related case studies and a set of conclusions about cultures, improvement efforts, and definitions of effectiveness (PC-1). Each case focuses on different aspects of the relationships between these complex processes. In Westtown, school improvement efforts were acceptable to (and even embraced by) teachers if those efforts required new behaviors that were in agreement with their deeply-held beliefs and values about schooling. If the improvement violated an assumption or norm, then teachers felt threatened, angry and betrayed. The Westtown case study describes the teachers' deeply-held beliefs and shows how the school's improvement efforts either amplified or violated those beliefs. It suggests that professional cultures can block or enhance improvement initiatives, depending on how deeply beliefs in the area targetted for improvement are held. The teachers' cultural beliefs, then, define what is an acceptable improvement effort.

Monroe High School presents a related aspect of the relationship between professional cultures, improvement processes, and effectiveness. More diverse than Westtown, Monroe teachers held differing perspectives on teaching that affected their responses to externally mandated improvement efforts and long-term demographic changes. The Monroe case study provides evidence that improvement is possible without cultural change although how durable that change will be is questionable.

The Somerville case is a study of the role of the leader in shaping and maintaining a school culture that defines, supports, reinforces, and expresses the local definition of effectiveness. Historically, it reveals how cultural change that draws out and emphasizes deeply held beliefs (as in Westtown) about schooling has the greatest potential for durability.

The three cases, then, provide data for these conclusions about culture, change, and definitions of effectiveness:

- culture is build in part from elements outside the school, e.g., the local community or societal beliefs
- schools vary in the extent to which norms are shared
- the strength of norms to guide behavior varies within a school
- the strength with which changes are espoused depends on how well those changes fit central tenets of the local culture
- frequent communication and enforcement can lead to behavioral change
- cultural change depends on new patterns of behavior that result in the internalization of new norms and the reinterpretation of organizational structures, processes, and symbols.

The report concludes with a discussion of the ideology of improvement and effectiveness as it clashes with the comprehensive ideal of the American high school.

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