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ABSTRACT

This analysis of the changing balance in who controls the schools contends that local authorities have been slowly losing authority to the states. Moreover, within the local districts, the central offices are assuming more control in such matters as curriculum content and state testing programs. The paper begins with an overview of recent governance trends and the underlying reasons for central control. The next section moves to the particular case of increased state and district control of instructional policy and the consequent impact on teacher autonomy and professionalism. The problems of local school boards are highlighted in the next section because school boards are the key legal unit of local governance. The paper concludes with some alternatives for rethinking the balance of control. For example, the final sections address sorting out the responsibilities of each level, including such issues as flexible funds for school improvement and teacher professionalism. Several suggestions are advanced for trading state regulations for local school outcome incentives. Appended are 22 references. (MLF)

WHO SHOULD CONTROL OUR SCHOOLS: REASSESSING CURRENT POLICIES

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This paper will analyze the changing balance in who controls our schools. The basic thesis is that local authorities have been slowly losing discretion to the states. Moreover, within the local district the school sites have been losing discretion to the central offices. For example, the local school and classroom levels are experiencing significant erosion in their curricular discretion to central district curriculum staff and state testing programs. There are some sound and justifiable reasons for this trend including the concern about academic standards. But this gradual shift in control has progressed to the point where it is time to reassess which level of education should control what. This can only be done by understanding why higher levels have lost confidence in the policymaking capacity and results of lower levels. Consequently, the paper begins with an overview of recent governance trends and the underlying reasons for central control. It then moves to the particular case of increased state and district control of instructional policy and the consequent impact on teacher autonomy and professionalism.

The problems of local school boards are highlighted in the next section because school boards are the key legal unit of

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local governance. The paper concludes with some alternatives for rethinking the balance of control. For example, the final sections address sorting out the responsibilities of each level, including such issues as flexible funds for school improvement and teacher professionalism with its attendant relationship to increased teacher decision making influence at the school and classroom level. Several suggestions are advanced for trading state regulations for local school outcome incentives. The writer proceeds from a belief that the state should establish core values and curriculum, but more local flexibility is needed to adapt school policies to varied needs and better utilize the staff ability at the school level. The paper will not address parent choice as a control mechanism, because of the need to limit length. Choice deserves a separate lengthy analyses.

A partial framework for this paper is called "institutonal choice."[1] One of the crucial policy decisions is the choice of a decision maker. For example, courts have been reluctant to delegate civil rights protection to local school districts in Mississippi. Another type of institutional choice is whether to place various functions in the hands of markets (e.g., vouchers) or politics (e.g., school board elections). The recent state reform movement has included an institutional choice to enhance the curricular and testing role of state government.

Clune stresses that two general characteristics of available institutions are important: agreement on substantive goals and capacity to achieve those goals. Substantive goals are crucial because of the need to insure support for a policy. Courts may

be more enthusiastic about civil rights than school boards. But support must be butressed by capacity. Courts cannot run school districts. The method of choosing institutions can be called "comparative institutional advantage" which begins with district or criticism of a particular institution.

> Since no decision maker is perfect, the distrust directed at one decision maker must be carefully weighed against the advantages of that decision maker and both the advantages and disadvantages of alternative decision makers. In other words, although the logic of institutional choice typically begins with distrust, distrust itself proves nothing in the absence of a superior alternative.... The logic of comparative institutional advantage also implies the futility of seeking perfect or ideal, implementation of a policy.... The real world offers a "least worst choice" of imperfect institutions....[2]

A problem with institutional choice analyses is the tendency to confuse predictive with normative applications. In education, predictive connections concerning outcomes from institutional choice are often unclear, such as how much state control of curriculum will lead to how much decline in teacher professionalism. How does client control through vouchers lead to increased learning? The rate of substitution is equally unclear in terms of at what point increased federal influence in education leads to a decline in the state role. It is possible to avoid zero-sum properties through various win-win scenarios such as a state standardized curriculum which helps teachers communicate higher order thinking and does not interfere with teacher professionalism or autonomy. In sum, institutional choice is complex, uncertain, and subject to continual political change.

Americans have made some important choices about the formal

legal powers of the various institutions governing education. The provision of schooling is a power reserved to the states in the U.S. Constitution. The courts support the right of a state government to abolish any school district, or to take over its management and dismiss local officials. Despite legal primacy of the state government, important decision making power has traditionally been delegated by states to local school district officials. In the early years of the Republic, Americans feared distant government; they wanted important decisions made close to home. The doctrine of local control of public schools occupies a long and much revered place in American political ideology. Once heralded as a minor "branch of theology," recent events, however, have transformed the historic essence of local control of education. We now turn to a historical analysis of the balance of control.

The Loss of confidence in Local Authorities

Concern about the quality of American education has virtually exploded in the last year-and-a-half. This period of national interest in education has been characterized by an intense reponse on the part of the states that threatens to shift control of education in ways that may conflict with teacher autonomy and local flexibility. Some state policies include:

- Tougher high school graduation requirements have been approved in 48 states.
- Textbooks, tests, and curricula have been revised and aligned through state policy.
- Teacher policies have been revamped to upgrade

qualifications, create career ladders, provide incentives, and revamp evaluation.

States have already boosted school aid in the past three years by over 25 percent after inflation.[3] Much of this funding has resulted from state omnibus bills with up to 80 separate reforms.

The most striking feature of state/local relations in the last ten yers has been the growth in state control over education. Several decades ago, local education organizations of administrators, teacher, and school board members set the state policy agenda. Today, the organizations of professional educators and the local school organizations are making suggestions for only marginal change in state initiatives, led by governors, legislators, CSSOs and businesses. And under the Reagan Administration, the federal role has been restricted to the bully pulpit and sponsoring small pilot programs.

These trends promise a restructuring of state and local relations that will cede even more control of education to the states. Some of this loss of local discretion is deserved, but it can be excessive if current trends continue. However, this evolving state/local relationship will include an enormous range of variation in the aggressiveness with which states take control -- from the highly aggressive states, such as California and Florida, to the least aggressive states, such as New Hampshire and Colorado.

The recent spurt in state activity comes on top of the steady growth in state control throughout the 1970s, when states

began to get involved in such things as accountability, school finance reform, categorial programs, school improvement efforts, minimum competency testing, and civil rights regulations. But it was not until the 1980s that state governments provided the majority of the current operating funds for education and now exceed local expenditures by 6 percent.

The recent spate of reports on the state of education nationwide is indicative of a loss of confidence in the ability of local authorities to provide high-quality education. States are concerned about economic competition, and consequently, state legislatures have felt compelled to step in and preempt local discretion. State actions have been directed at the heart of the instructional process in order to upgrade the qualifications of the basic U.S. labor force.

The loss of confidence in local authorities has progressed over many years. In the mid 1960s, federal and state authorities contended that local schools were not "accountable." This in spite of the fact that there are about 100,000 local school boards elected for three or four year terms on a staggered basis. The accountability movement spanned new systems of teacher education, budget controls, and state testing. In the 1960s and early 1970s, federal and state authorities began categorical programs to earmark funds for target groups that were neglected or underrepresented in local politics. California ended up with 45 distinct federal and state categoricals for such areas as handicapped, disadvantaged, gifted, and limited English speaking children. States also earmarked more funding categories for

"special needs" such as vocational education and rural schools.

The mid 1970s was the height of the school finance reform movement that demonstrated local property tax bases were inherently unequal. States assumed more of the burden of financing and more state control followed the new state dollars. The mid 1970s was also the peak of new Court regulations on local schools, indicating that schools could not be trusted to guarantee student rights, or due process. The legalization of local education expanded state education codes and lawsuits directed at local authorities multiplied.

Discontent about local academic standards led states to prescribe stricter, more uniform standards for teacher and students starting in the 1970s, with minimum competency tests and accelerating after the 1980-82 recession. Yet the literature on effective schools suggests that the most important changes take place when those responsible for each school are given more responsibility rather than less. While centralization may be better for naval units, steel mills, and state highway departments, the effective schools literature suggests that it is more important that principals, teachers, students, and parents at each school have "a shared moral order."

Why is the 1983-86 wave of state influence taking a centralized course?[4] Basically, state governments do not believe local authorities pay sufficient attention to curriculum quality, teacher evaluation, and academic standards. Moreover, higher statewide standards do appear to be consistent with some parts of the effective schools literature. For instance, higher standards

can be used to foster clear instructional objectives and specify the content and outcomes of schooling. But new state curricula that specify the grade level at which particular math concepts must be learned (e.g., the Texas proposal), create rigid timetables that might destroy the kind of flexible school climate that usually characterizes effective schools. There is also conflict between state centralization and teacher autonomy which enhances teacher professionalism.

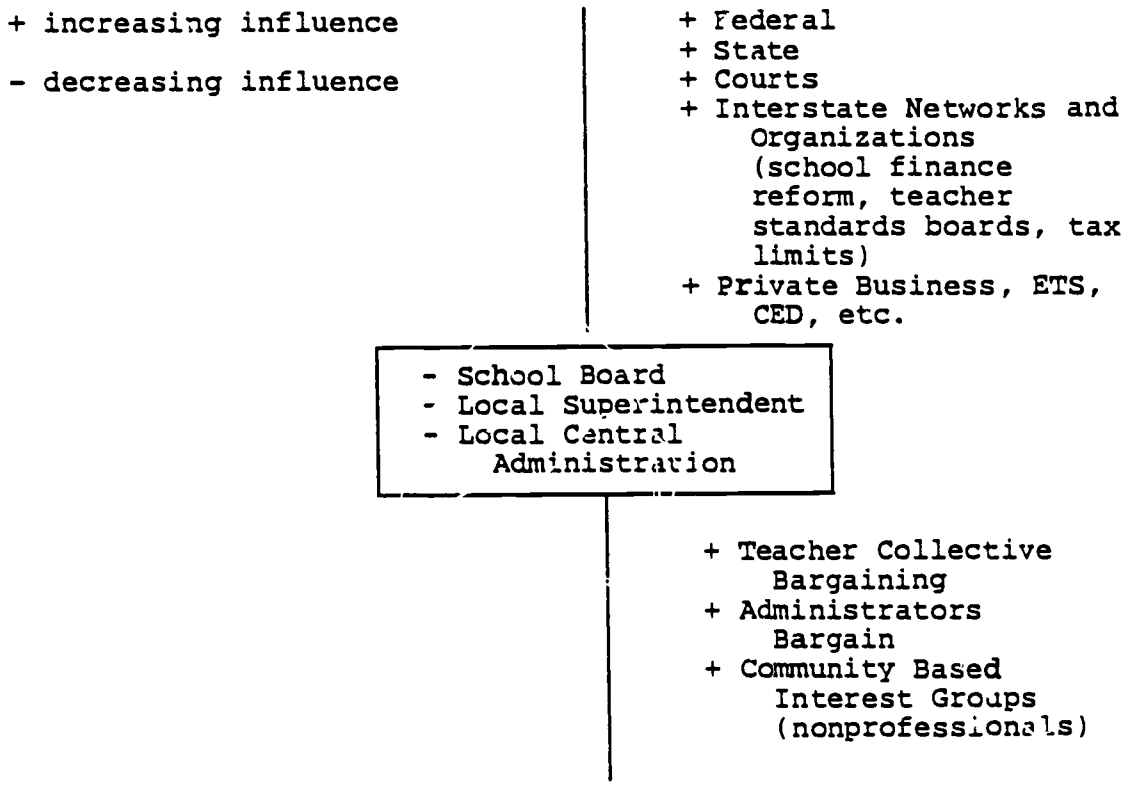
School Governance in the 1990s -- Everybody and Nobody in Charge

In my view, local school district discretion will continue to shrink unless some measures are tken to restore confidence in local authorities and increase their policymaking capacity. The increased reliance on non-local funding will be part of this. Specifically, local administrators and boards will continue to experience erosion in their once preeminent position in setting the policy agenda and controlling decision outcomes. The local superintendent and administrative staff are often a reactive force trying to juggle diverse and changing coalitions across different issues and levels of government. Many school reforms disappeared, but those that left a deposit generated structural organizational additions that could be easily monitored and created a constituency. Part of the legacy of the prior era was a tremendous growth in specialized functions of the school, including administrative specialists in vocational education, driver education, nutrition, health, remedial reading, and so on. Many of these new structural layers diluted the influence of the superintendent and local board. These specialists were paid by

federal or state categorical programs and were insulated from the superintendent's influence by the requirements of higher levels of government. Their allegiance was often to the higher levels of education governance rather than the loal community.

My basic thesis is that the discretionary decision zone of the local superintendents and the boards became squeezed progressively into a smaller and smaller area during the last two decades, and this trend must be arrested and reversed. I see nothing to reverse these trends in the late 1980s.

Trends in Educational Governance - 1950-1987



From the top, local discretion has been squeezed by the growth of the federal government, state government, and the courts.

Moreover, there was an expansionary influence of private interest groups and professional "reformers" such as the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation. Interstate organizations such as the Education Commission of the states and nationally oriented organizations like the Council for Exceptional Children increased their role. Superintendents and local boards found themselves squeezed in terms of their decision space from the bottom by such forces as the growth of local collective bargaining contracts reinforced by national teacher organizations. A study by the Rand Corporation documents the incursion of teacher organizations into education policy.

The sixties was a period of growing local interest groups, often resulting from nationwide social movements. These national social movements that penetrated the local system, included such topics as civil rights, women's roles, students' rights, ethnic self-determination, and bilingual education. These non-local social movements spawned local interest groups that began agitating for various changes in local standard operating procedures. They advocated such changes as: suspension of students, curriculum differentiation, and so on. Traditional parent groups such as PTA and AAUW that provide general support of local school authorities became less influential.

Beleaguered local policy makers found that as the 1970s came, their decision discretion became even less through outside forces, primarily economics and demography. The declining population of students and spreading resistance to increased school taxes further constrained local initiative and options.

The end of the seventies brought a period in many states of disillusionment with professinals in general and educators in particular. As the prior section demonstrated, the 1980's interventions from above have focussed on curricular and teacher issues.

All of this is exemplified by the accountability concept largely coming from federal, state, and Court sources to impact local decisions. Such diverse things as due process requirements and competency based graduation mandates are good examples. Moreover, social movements in the 1970s differed from the 19th century. The 19th century social movements, exemplified by Horace Mann, were interested in building up institutions like the schools; now, many social movements are interested in questioning these public institutions and trying to make them more responsive to forces outside the local administrative structure. Some would even assert that these social movements are helping fragment school decision making in such a way that local citizens cannot influence local school policy. The litany of the newspapers reflects violence, drug use, and declining test scores as the predominant state of public education and further encourages federal/state interventions.

In California, this situation has become so serious that schools suffer from shock and overload. The issue becomes how much change and agitation can an institution take and continue to respond to its local clients and voters. Moreover, Californians are confronted with numerous initiatives such as Proposition 13, vouchers, and spending limits. Local citizens go to the local

school board and superintendent, expecting redress of their problems, and find the necessary decision-making power is not there. The impression grows that no one is "in charge" of public education.

All of this does not mean tht local authorities are helpless, rather it means they cannot control their agenda or structure most of the decision outcomes as they could in the past. The local superintendent must deal with shifting and ephemeral coalitions at various government levels that provide marginal advantage for a brief period. Increasingly, policy items on the local board agenda will be generated by external forces (federal, state, and courts), or are reactions to proposals from the local interest group structures, including teachers. The era of the local administrative chief (e.g., superintendent) has passed with profound consequences. The 1983-1986 state-based reform strategy outlined above will intensify these trends favoring non-local influences on education policy.

It is simplistic to signify this changing governance structure as "centralization." There is no single central control point but rather a fragmented "elevated oligopoly." From the local school board perspective, this latter term refers to higher authorities (federal, state, courts), outside interests (ETS and Council for Exceptional Children), local internal interests (Vocational Education Coordinator) and other local agencies, such as police and health, with impact on education. Moreover, the shift of influence to higher levels has not resulted in a commensurate loss of local influence. Parents of

handicapped and bilingual students have considerably more impact in local settings than they did 25 years ago.

Moreover, the recent state reforms often were based on local citizens' desires.[5] In California, a new state superintendent was elected on a reform platform. In most other states, governors, legislators, and elected politicians led the charge for higher academic standards. Citizen voter preferences are as decentralized a mandate as one gets in a democracy. So the issue is not so much centralization in policy influence, but the progressive loss of local school board and administrative discretion.

Curriculum Influence at the State Level

State initiatives in the curricular area are a good example of the potential impact on teacher context. They also raise significant concerns about the potential conflict between teacher autonomy and state accountability. The new state focus is on curriculum quality and the appropriate capabilities of teachers to teach a curriculum that includes critical thinking and higher order skills. Moreover, new state and local curricular policies reinforce and interact with each other to expand the potential impact on teacher contexts.

Traditionally, states have left academic curriculum content specification largely to local discretion and been satisfied to specify a few required course titles and issue advisory curricular frameworks for local consideration.[6] States did respond to lobbies outside traditional academic subjects by specifying courses in driver training, physical education,

vocational education and health. Even in the most centralized states the appropriate role was thought to be minimum standards rather than the quality concerns that now dominate state agendas. The same type of policy activists who spearheaded the interstate diffusion of such 1970's "reforms" as school finance equalization and minimum competency testing for high school graduates have now turned their efforts to academic curriculum as a prime domain for new state policies. New technologies such as statewide curriculum alignment of tests, texts, frameworks, and accreditation are providing the reformers with methods that can significantly impact local policy and classroom content. Once again, the traditional subject matter organizations of educators (math, English, etc.) and major education lobbies (NEA, AASA) are mostly in a reactive mode as the state reformers conceive new curricular policies. The subject matter organizations were out-lobbied in the past by advocates of "new" subject areas seeking a place in the curriculum for physical education, driver training, and vocational education, and are now displaced by the "reformers."

Why the States Feel They Must Be More Involved in Academic Standards

The more aggressive state academic role is a direct result of the highly critical analyses of local education standards personified by the Nation At Risk report. States have developed major economic development strategies and see education as a crucial component for economic growth and international competition. State politicians became alarmed by allegations

that American school achievement lagged behind other nations and was a major cause of our inability to compete in a world economy. Governors and legislators were impressed by the arguments that local school officials had permitted academic standards to drop and were inattentive to the need for higher order skills and a more complex curriculum. Local school policy makers seemed to be overemphasizing the basics such as rote math and simplistic reading exercises. But future economic competition with our major rivals such as Japan and Germany required a more adaptable work force, with a breadth and depth of curriculum that local officials seemed unable to provide.

State Techniques for Control

Margaret Goertz has prepared a matrix of instruments that states use to influence local academic standards and overcome local resistance to state imposed curriculum.[8]

(Figure I here)

She distinguishes between state (1) performance standards that measure an individual's performance through tested achievement and observations, (2) program standards that include curricular requirements, program specifications, and other state requirements affecting time in school, class size, and staffing, and (3) behavior standards that include attendance requirements, disciplinary codes, homework, etc.

Her 50 state survey demonstrates dramatic increases from 1983-86 in state specification and influence in all these types of standards. A closer analysis, however, reveals that the 1983-86 reform wave only accelerated a state policy trend that began

Figure 1.

TYPES OF STATE EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

I Performance Standards

A. Student Test Scores
B. Teacher Test Scores
C. Grading Policy
D. Observation of Performance

II Program Standards

A. Curriculum:

Range and level of courses available
Curriculum guides
Instructional materials
Availability of academic, college prep, general education, vocational curriculum
Availability of special programs (special education, compensatory education, etc.)

B. Time in School

Number of days, class periods, length of day

C. Class Size

D. Staff/Student Ratio

E. Type of Staff

III Behavior Standards

A. Attendance

B. Discipline

C. Homework

D. Extracurricular Participation

Adacted from Margaret E. Goertz, State Educational Standards (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 1986).

over 15 years ago in such areas as compensatory and special education. But the 1983-86 state initiatives ae focussed on the core academic subjects rather than special services for target groups.

While the scope of state activity is very wide, the effectiveness of state influence upon local practice has often been questioned. Arthur Wise thinks it is quite potent, while John Meyer sees the reverse through "loose coupling" between state and local organizations. Curricular alignment is one concept states are using to more tightly control local curriculum and overcome the local capacity to thwart implementation. California is a particularly good example of the techniques for such alignment as presented in Fugure 2. The key is to have the same curricular content emphasized and covered across the state: curricular frameworks, tests, textbook adoption criteria, accreditation standards, university entrance content

(Figure 2 here)

expectantcies, and criteria for teacher evaluation. The identical content coverage must be a thread woven through all of these state policy instruments. Local control advocates will be appropriately concerned about such a strategy. Prior to 1984, major state curricular policy instruments were disconnected and shooting off in different directions. One unit devised state tests without much consultation or content integration with the state textbook division. The curricular frameworks were nominally coordinated with state texts, but not carefully embedded in the state criteria sent out to potential publishers

Figure 2.

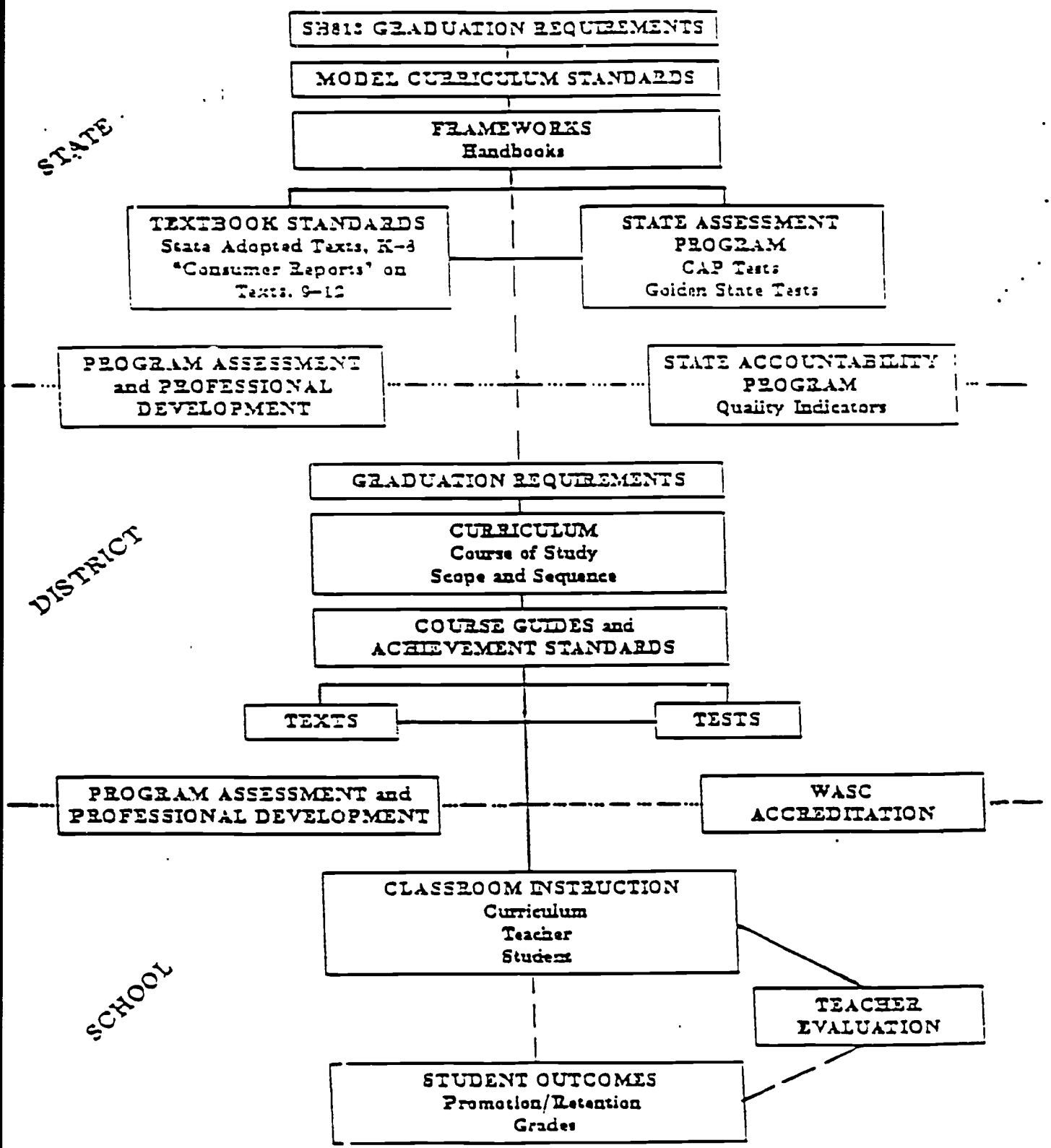


Figure 1 CALIFORNIA CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT

Source: Beverly B. Carter
School of Education
Stanford University

for bids. The 1987 California approach relies, however, on state curricular controls that do not exist in more locally oriented states such as Colorado or New Hampshire.

A major concern for future research is whether these increased state initiatives change the teaching context, and if so, how such state impact enhances or detracts from teacher autonomy and professionalism. A teaching context analysis should provide substantial information on whether state and local reform initiatives have created a conflict between accountability and teacher discretion.

The Special Problems of Local School Boards

School boards have been subjected to an unprecedented attack during the 1980s. A top federal official (Chester Finn) called them a "dinosaur left over from the agrarian past" while Albert Shanker, President of the American Federation of Teachers, called for a major overhaul modeled on hospital boards that meet less than once a month. The National Governors Association in 1986 recommended a state takeover and direct operation of school districts that had failed repeatedly to educate children. School board members in a 1986 national poll expressed strong concern about the intrusiveness of state control into local policymaking as a result of the recent state reform movement. State policymakers at the start of the reform era in 1983 contended that local boards were neglecting academic standards, curriculum policy, and teacher evaluation.

Many political observers believe the school board is in trouble and needs help. A national study by the Institute for

Educational Leadership found very strong local support for the concept of a local school board and an institutional buffer from state and professional administrative control.[9] School boards are deeply embedded in American political culture and appear to be here to stay. But the public does not necessarily support the school board in its own local community, rarely turns out for school board elections in greater numbers than 10 to 15 percent of the eligible electorate, and knows very little about the role and function of school boards. Neal Peirce concluded from the IEL study:

> If the school board's popular constituency misperceives their role and doesn't care enough to exercise its franchise in their selection, how fully or forcefully will the boards ever be able to function?

School Board Study Findings

In 1986, IEL conducted a national survey and nine metropolitan case studies of the status of school boards. Their findings that are congruent with other school board research include:

1. There is strong support for maintaining the basic institutional role and structure of the school board.

School boards are in trouble. As a grass roots institution, they confront a basic paradox. While the study found strong support among community leaders, parents, local citizens and educators for preserving school boards to keep schools close to the people, there concurrently was widespread public ignorance of their established roles and functions. There appears to be deep public apathy and indifference, as reflected in the difficulty of attracting quality candidates to serve as board members in many

communities and in the abysmally low voter turnout for board elections. This civic ignorance bodes even greater trouble for school boards in the future, as student populations become more diverse and creative leadership more necessary. Systematic efforts to promote greater understanding of the important role of school boards must be initiated in communities throughout the country.

2. Board members increasingly are perceived as representing special interests, and the trusteeship notion of service in which board members represent the entire community has been less prominent in recent years.

Board members, educators and the public said that divisiveness and the problem of building a cohesive board from disparate members, many with single constituencies or issues, are major factors affecting board effectiveness and community perceptions.

3. Boards, particularly in urban areas, have become more representative of the diversity in their communities and often include indigenous leaders from disparate constituencies within the larger community.

This is positive in terms of diverse populations gaining access to board service. However, when board members are not from traditional community leadership and power structures, they lack easy and influential access to civic, political and economic decision-makers.

4. Local boards and their members have only sporadic interaction with general government and tend to be isolated from

mainstream community political structures.

There is very little systematic communication between school system governance and general government, despite the fact that increasing numbers of students have learning problems associated with non-school factors. These include poor housing, lack of family support and resources and limited employment opportunities. In addition, when interaction between the school system and general government does exist, it often is only through the superintendent. Fiscally dependent boards which must interact with town/municipal government bodies frequently are mired in adversarial relationships. Some urban community leaders believe it may be time to rethink the non-partisan nature of school board elections. Perhaps election to the board through the mainstream political party structures is an issue worthy of debate in some communities. The majority of boards in the United States are non-partisan.

5. Board members are seriously concerned about the growing intrusiveness of the states as the reform movement evolves.

Boards feel they are largely reacting to state proposals rather than initiating them. The governors, legislators, and CSSOs have more media visibility and want to intervene more. Local board events are local media stories while statewide reforms get more coverage.

6. Board members continue to grapple with tensions over necessarily gray areas between a board's policymaking and the superintendent's administrative responsibilities.

In the districts in which board-superintendent relationships

are good, little attention is paid to this dichotomy. However, some school boards, particularly in larger heterogeneous districts, have or wish they could have staff serving board members directly. There appears to be less willingness in these districts to rely on the superintendent and administrators to "staff" the board.

7. The need for school board education and development is recognized generally, but too often it is merely informational and episodic.

There is minimal access to or involvement in developmental skills-building. Too little attention is given to development of working relationships among board members and to development of boards as corporate bodies. Boards which recognize the need for board development have retreats and goal-setting meetings, evaluate their performance and provide for oversight of the implementation of their policies. Such boards appear to have a greater sense of effectiveness.

8. Urban, suburban, rural and small town boards alike find more commonalities than differences among the challenges to their effectiveness. These include:

Public apathy

Lack of public understanding of the role of boards

Poor relationships with state policymakers

Need for board strategies to evaluate board effectiveness

Lack of time and operating structures to focus on education

Problems in becoming a board rather than a collection of individuals

Improving teaching in the framework of collective bargaining

The amount of time boards invest in their work verus satisfaction with accomplishments and ability to determine their own priorities

At the end of this paper, I will suggest several policies to improve the effectiveness of school boards.

Rethinking the Balance of Control

This paper has argued that:

- The total array of influences on school policy has tended to narrow the discretionary decision space of local authorities over the past 25 years.

- The traditional balance in state and local control has shifted to more state centralization over the past 25 years.

- The centralization of testing, curriculum and instructional policy at the state and district level is narrowing teacher autonomy in the classroom. If carried to extremes, this centralization could threaten movements to enhance teacher professionalism such as the Carnegie and National Governors Association's recommendation.[10]

- This shift in control can be attributed to several sequential but interacting forces, including (1) a loss of confidence by higher authorities in local decision makers including school boards; (2) the increased use of categorical grants; (3) changes in state funding patterns to enhance equity and place limits on local spending; (4) a growing legalization of the education process; (5) the tendency of the 1983-87 omnibus state reform bills to centralize more authority than it decentralizes.

- There appears to be nothing significant that will reverse these trends.

- The current challenge is to rethink the institutional choices that we have made through analyzing the purposes and mission of the schools and sorting out which level has the best capacity to best serve the students. The federal or state role, for example, is often crucial when redistributive policies are needed in areas of civil rights and school finance. Local politics preclude local substantive agreement with many policies that cause radical redistribution of resources. This task can be broken down into (1) state vs. local central office; (2) central office vs. school site; (3) influence within the school site. We start on this task with an analysis of the relationship between control and effective schools. What is the relationship between centralization and effective schools? If we can answer this question, we have an empirical basis for recommending changes in the current pattern of control.

Effective Schools and State Control

Some researchers see an inherent tension between a strong state and central district role and the flexibility needed for effective schools. Others believe that centralized and standardized policies can make more schools effective. The view of schools as complex institutions is linked to positive "school climate" stressed in effective schools research. Michael Cohen expresses this climate as:

> The norms and values which characterize the school community, and which unite individual members of the organization into a more cohesive identity, pertain both to the academic function of the school, as well as to the

> nature of the day-to-day interactions and social relations among staff and students.... However,...community in schools is dependent upon ... creation of a moral order, which entails respect for authority, genuine and pervasive caring about individuals, respect for their feelings and attitudes, mutural trust, and the consistent enforcement of norms which define and delimit acceptable behavior....The importance of a shared moral order should not be underestimated, for it can be traced to several fundamental properties of schools....(The) schools cannot rely simply on coercive power to bring about order. Rather, schools are normative organizations, which must rely on the internalization of goals, the legitimate use of authority, and the manipulation of symbols, as means of controlling and directing the behavior of participants....[1]

Much of the effective schools literature suggests that the most important changes are assisted by increased school site responsibility. While centralization may be better for naval units, steel mills, and highway departments, effective school research stresses a "shared moral order." Chester Finn observes:

> The point is subtle but powerful. Effective schools are more akin to secular counterparts of religious communities, than they are like army brigades, bank branches, or factory units. They share a belief structure, a value system, a consensual rather than hierarchical governance system, an enormous amount of psychic and emotional "investment" by participants, and a set of common goals and convictions that blur the boundaries between the private and organizational lives of their participants. Schools may not be the only public sector enterprises with these characteristics, but the others are apt to be elite, idiosyncratic and perhaps transitory enterprises--the White House staff, NASA's Apollo team, the military's "special forces"--rather than numerous, permanent, "ordinary" institutions...Bluntly stated, the existence--but rarity--of such "effective schools" itself tends to confuse the doctrine of essential uniformity, for it means that the schools in a given system or state are apt to be similar with respect to relatively superficial matters but dissimilar along dimensions that matter more; yet the inertial autonomy of schools qua schools also means that efforts to make ineffective schools more closely resemble effective schools in the ways that matter most are certain to be very difficult and quite likely to meet with little success. Moreover, policymakers seeking greater uniformity must be terribly careful lest they "level downward" through well-intentioned efforts that wind up sapping the vitality

of the most effective schools rather than invigorating the others.[12]

Higher educational standards appear consistent with the effective schools research in terms of clear curricular objectives and establishing specific cues on preferred instructional content and outcomes. But new state tests used in Texas specify the grade level that particular math concepts must be covered. This rigid instructional time table could shatter the inner-directed climate that effective schools display. Again, Finn expresses it well:

> The truly vexing paradox is that in seeking to overcome inertial autonomy by "tightening the couplings" in school systems--by replacing these elastic bands that allowed some schools to lag behind with steel bars meant to get them all moving at the same speed, as the public seems to demand and as the doctrine of essential uniformity would seem to dictate--policymakers would derail the very cars that had gotten themselves balanced on the tracks by allocating their loads and resources in proportion to their own capacities.[13]

One way to reconcile these problems is for the state or district to emphasize desired outcomes in very broad terms and not prescribe curricula or procedures (time spent) in detail. State education agencies (SEAs) and LEAs should encourage schools to be different except for some common core of skills and knowledge. The teachers at each school site can develop a "teamwork approach" that emphasizes shared educational goals. SEA and LEA policymakers cannot order schools to be "effective," but must somehow internalize norms and standards at the building level. We do not know how to do this very well, but the current all out push in many states for detailed control and methods (required minutes of writing) may not yield optimal results.

The same problems arise when one considers school effectiveness plans of local school districts. Usually, the central district office prescribes standard tests, curriculum

guides, and even textbooks. This "curricular alignment" holds some promise for improving standardized test scores, but what will it do to existing distinctive and unusually positive school climates? In the past, school site autonomy has helped a few outstanding schools to find their own best strategy, but many other schools have been free to continue their poor performance.

In the current climate of crisis and "unilateral educational disarmament," there is a rush to mandate these new effectiveness-oriented "reforms." But the California (and Florida) approaches are not attempting these changes in a systematic or interrelated fashion with an organizing impact perspective. Rather, various legislators have their favorite ideas and these are added to the statute with a staple gun! Missing from these action plans is what drives classroom teaching performance:

> To have a direct sustained impact on student performance and teaching practice, would require either structural changes in the conditions of teaching, a great deal of on-site-cooperative work with teachers, school site program planning and implementation, or some imaginative combination of these...The assumptions about improving high school performance through external mandates or legislative fiat...miss the mark of providing a solid conceptual foundation for important policies.[14]

In sum, the effective schools literature suggests a mix of top-down and bottom-up controls in education. There is no one best system to be imposed from the top, but it is unlikely that just bottom-up initiative will turn an ineffective school around. Overall, howeve, the effective schools literature provides a warning concerning excessive centralization either at the state or central office level. We now turn to the relationship between the state and local levels in school improvement.

School Improvement As a First Step

One technique for providing more local flexibility has been through state policies that encourage local initiative such as California's School Improvement Program (SIP). This program perhaps provides the most encouraging example of a new model of school governance. It (part of AB 65 in 1977) was designed in part to combine categorical programs in a comprehensive school site plan through a school site council. In a major break with prior categorical approaches, SIP provided discretionary money to school sites (about $100 per ADA) rather than a grant tied to specific state purposes. The funding is for neither basic maintenance nor categorical projects. Instead, SIP supports an individual school's assessment of its own priority needs and implementation of a program to address them. The fundamental concept is that the school and its local community, rather than the district or state, should take primary responsibility for setting local improvement objectives.

There are two key components of SIP: a school site council and the program review. The school site council is composed of parents, staff, and students (in secondary schools). The council governs the way SIP funds are used in schools. The council prepares a review of the school program and develops a plan for improvement that combines categorical funds with SIP's flexible allocation.

The program review is an assessment of a school's School Improvement Program conducted by a consortia of local educators

from outside the district. The review is structured by the program quality review criteria promulgated by the State Department of Education. Several research reports reveal that the program quality review criteria determine what is addressed in a school's improvement program.

While SIP's key planning elements remain, the Honig administration has revamped the program to emphasize curriculum improvement, core academic program, and redesign of programs for special populations to reinforce and complement the general educational program of schools. In addition, state department program advisories have urged local districts to use SIP funds to purchase supports needed to engage in a continuing change and improvement process -- training, staff development, coaching, curriculum materials and supplies, new technologies -- and not to restrict all funds for permanent staff such as teacher aides. Moreover, the program quality review criteria recently have been changed to focus attention on the substance and quality of a school's curriculum and to require that categorical programs provide services that reinforce that curriculum program. In short, SIP is now conceived as an implementation vehicle for improving local schools, with Senate Bill 813 providing the content and focus for those improvement efforts.

The Rationale for Maintaining a Strong Local Role

The initial sections of this paper diagnosed the drift toward state control. Coombs provides four reasons why the local role in education policy needs to be maintained and strengthened

in some states where it has declined precipitously:[15]

1. The public supports more local influence and less influence for the federal and state governments.

2. Local school district politics tend to be more democratic in several important ways than decisions made at higher levels of government.

3. The functional tension between state and local policymakers results in policy that is better adapted to diverse local contexts.

4. Further erosion of the local role risks diminishing public support for the public schools.

In support of the first point, Coombs cites this 1986 Gallup poll data:

	Level of Government		
Should have:	Federal Government	State Government	Local School Board
More influence	26%	45%	57%
Less influence	53	32	17
Same as now	12	16	17
Don't know	9	7	9
	100%	100%	100%

The biggest loser in this public referendum is the federal government, but note that local school board influence is preferred much more often than state government. There is also data in the 1986 Gallup Poll suggesting that the public is no less reluctant to increase local property taxes than other broad-based taxes. Public dissatisfation with the property tax peaked in the late 1970s and now has dissipated. Odden analyzed the

dramatic 25% real increase in spending for education from 1983 to 1986 and concluded one of the "secrets" of education reform funding has been the significant role played by the property tax.

> The big news at the local level is this large overall [property tax] increase that nationwide, nearly matches the rise in state revenues and actually exceeds big state rises in several reform states, such as Florida, Texas, and Virginia, where the state rise has received national attention. Despite national swings in sources of funding for schools, the property tax remains a robust revenue provider, even in the education reform era.[16]

Advantages of Local School Policymaking

There are numerous and conflicting positions on how well school politics meets the democratic ideal. The issue here is whether school politics is more democratic than control by federal or state authorities. Most citizens have a greater opportunity and more chance of policy impact in their local district than to influence policymakers or administrators at the federal or state level. Local school policymakers serve fewer constituents than state officials and are much closer geographically as well as psychologically. It is time consuming and difficult to get to the state capital.

Local school board elections provide a means to influence local policymakers that is much more direct than through a state legislator representing many areas. In the nation's thousands of small school districts, a significant proportion of the community knows at least one school board member. Local media provide better information and can capture the attention of citizens more effectively than reports from a distant state capital. All of this, is not meant to claim that local school politics approaches

the democratic ideal. Indeed, a Gallup poll revealed that 36% of a national sample of citizens knew "very little" or "nothing" about their local public schools. But local school officials can better anticipate the zone of tolerance that local school constituencies permit than state policymakers.

Most states are too large and diverse for uniform policies to be effective in all areas. As Coombs puts it in policy area after area, there exists "nested policy in which the states provide the general contours and the local districts fill in with more specified policies."[17] The "functional tension" tends to provide more appropriate and adaptable policies than statewide specification. There are large areas, however, like civil rights and equal opportunity where local flexibility must be greatly restricted. But most states, for example, have prescribed teacher certification requirements, but leave hiring and compensation issues to local districts.

The final argument for enhancing local discretion is based on the linkage between political efficacy and public support of schools -- citizens will participate in politics more if they believe that they can have impact upon policies. The local level offers the best opportunity for efficiency and, therefore, a dimunition in local efficacy will lead to less overall citizen participation in education policy. As Coombs stresses,

> ... a person is more likely to communicate his or her policy preference to officials when he or she perceives the probable impact of the communication on policy to be high ... if local government decision making enhances citizen participation in school politics, it follows that citizen confidence in, and support of, the public school system are apt to be strengthened as well.[18]

The reasoning here is tht people's satisfaction with the outcomes of collective decisions will be greater if they have participated in making those decisions. Consequently, less local control leads to more citizen dissatisfaction. In California, for example, local parents are told that the school board is too constrained to remedy their grievances. The citizen is referred to a state office or in some cases a court order. This may lead to alienation from the local public school.

Some Principles of School Governance

As ve begin this process of rethinking the balance of state and local control, it will be useful to keep several "ideal" principles in mind. What follows is not a comprehensive set of governance principles; rather, it serves illustrative purposes:[19]

* An ideal system retains decisions at the lowest governmental level unless there is a compelling reason regarding equity, liberty, or efficiency to elevate the issue.

* An ideal system permits of clear and reciprocal communication, from state policy makers to instructional personnel. Clear communication will enable the state to implement its policies with a minimum of inefficiency and, in turn to receive opinions and information from those directly connected with schooling about needed alterations and reforms.

* An ideal system eliminates unnecessary duplication of education services and ensures reasoned performance accountability.

* An ideal system protects the state's overall interests while simultaneously soliciting and implementing reasonable preferences of local clients.

* An ideal system is neither so large as to invite formation of impermeable and insensitive bureaucracies nor so small as to jeopardize equality of educational opportunity or risk absurd diseconomies of scale.

* An ideal system balances public control over one of its most

important institutions, schools, with the reasoned autonomy of education professionals.

* An ideal system is sufficiently stable as to encourage and maintain client and employee allegiance while simultaneously containing appropriate flexibility so as to accommodate inevitable changes in social and economic conditions over time.

* An ideal system possesses mechanisms for self assessment and adjustment so as to sustain its utility and vitality.

Recommended Changes in Other State Policies

States can take additional actions other than SIP to provide more local flexibility:

1. Many state education codes have grown incrementally and include outmoded and needless local restrictions. States should appoint a task force to review their codes and cut out unnecessary and outmoded regulations.

2. States should increase their use of waiver policies whereby the State Board can waive any part of the education code for justifiable reasons. Districts can petition for exemptions from the state code and the burden of proof should be on the state to justify why the waiver can not be granted.

3. States should remove limits on local revenue raising that preclude local election increases or establish a passing requirement of no more than a majority. Some states establish ceilings on locally voted revenue regardless of local sentiment and others require a two-thirds majority for tax increases.

4. States should pass or enforce laws that require the states to fully fund mandated programs or activities that must be carried out at the local level. Some states prohibit local

revenue increases and then mandate local expenditures without any state reimbursement. Obviously, this leads to much less local discretion.

5. States should provide model curricula to local districts and use state tests to assess whether a limited common core of knowledge has been covered locally. States should not specify the pace at which teachers should present content (e.g., which week) or define the entire details of local curriculum.

6. States should review the aggegate and cumulative effect of their policies upon teacher autonomy and professionalism. It is not any single regulation that is crucial but the totality of the state role.

Strengthening Local School Boards

In a preceding section, I sketched some major problems with school board effectiveness as well as the strong public commitment to the concept of a local board. Clearly, the issue is how to strengthen the school board rather than to eliminate or diminish greatly its role. The following recommendations meet many of the criticisms in the prior section.[20]

1. An effective board leads the community in matters of public education, seeking and responding to many forms of participation by the community.

2. An effective board exercises continuing oversight of education programs and their management, draws information for this purpose from many sources and knows enough to ask the right questions.

3. An effective board, in consultation with its

superintendent, works out and periodically reaffirms the separate areas of administrtive and policy responsibilities and how these separations will be maintained.

4. An effective board establishes policy to govern its own policymaking and policy oversight responsibilities, including explicit budget provisions to support those activities.

5. An effective board invests in its own development, using diverse approaches that address the needs of individual board members and the board as a whole.

6. An effective board establishes procedures for selecting and evaluating the superintendent. It also has procedures for evaluating itself.

7. An effective board collaborates with other boards through its statewide school boards association and other appropriate groups to influence state policy and the way state leadership meets the needs of local schools.

Rethinking the Balance Between the Central District Office and the School Site

Many U.S. school districts are very small and have minimal distance between the central district office and the school site. But when districts become over 15,000 students more problems arise in who should control education within the local context. Central offices must perform certain functions such as establishing the length of school days, raising and allocating revenue, planning for enrollment, reporting to state and federal authorities, and providing programs including special education and staff development. Most central offices go beyond this minimal role and specify a great deal of what must go on at the

school site. Moreover, central collective bargaining procedures also create uniform central standards.

There are several criteria for deciding what should be done centrally and what should be done at the site. But in crucial ways these are matters of philosophy in such diverse areas as the desirability of a common core curriculum and one's willingness to take risks with school site decision making. My own views have changed over the past decade to favor more curricular centralization because of concern about academic standards. But there are also questions of feasibility -- can each local faculty create a coherent English curriculum or rethink the need to embed critical thinking in the social studies curriculum. Many of these tasks are best completed through a committee of teachers and staff form many schools coordinated by the central office.

The main arguments for moving decisions to the school site are probably not economic or cost effectiveness. The functions still must be performed at some level. Levin posits several advantages for school site decentralization:[21]

1. District policies are typically made in a uniform fashion that ignores the enormous variety of student needs and characteristics at various schools.

2. Teachers and school-based educators may not accept responsibility for educational outcomes that they did not establish.

3. The teaching talent at the school district level is underutilized through centralized control that permits them few decisions.

There are several mechanisms for devolving control from the district to the school site. School site budgeting provides large unrestricted funds to school sites for them to decide the mix of resources utilized. Personnel decisions can be returned to the site but rarely are in toto. Most of the school site governance schemes include a site council. The council membership is inevitably embroiled in controversy because of such difficult issues as (a) teacher majority, (b) appropriate role of the principal, and (c) representation by lay persons. There is no one best system, but given the analysis at the outset of this paper, I favor more school site flexibility.

The recent proposals of the Carnegie Forum stress more teacher influence <u>within the school</u> through such devices as lead teachers, peer review, and other new types of roles. So far, other than isolated cases in Toledo, Ohio and Dade County, Florida, little has been done about these suggestions. A key question is whether teachers should be the main influence on what is taught (content) and/or how to teach the content. The effective schools literature stresses the principal as an instructional leader and benign dictator. This is a very different concept from a school site council controlled by a teacher majority. In the mid-1970s, I advocated a majority of lay persons on school site councils. But this concept conflicts with the Carnegie notion of building a "true teaching profession" through larger spheres of teacher autonomy. It is unclear what school site governance arrangement is optimal and more experimentation is needed. But this issue, similar to most

others in this paper, is more an issue of conflicting values and philosophy rather than technical feasibility. This conflict is indeed the essence of politics. The political implications were expressed precisely by Schaltschneider:

> All forms of political organization have a bias in favor of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others because organization is the mobilization of bias. Some issues are organized into politics while others are organized out.[22]

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