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ABSTRACT

The research project summarized here assesses the potential for child advocacy as a strategy for improving schools--especially for poor, minority, handicapped, and female children. Research activities included 50 weeks of observation and interviewing to assess the work of eight experienced child advocacy groups. The resulting qualitative data were used as a basis for making quantitative ratings of the extent of improvement brought about by specific advocacy projects. This summary highlights the study's most important conclusions and recommendations. Findings are reported in each of the following areas: (1) the nature of child advocacy, based on similarities and differences among advocacy groups; (2) the accuracy of advocates' claims about inequities experienced by various groups of children at risk; (3) the effectiveness of child advocacy at the state and local level, and the circumstances in which it is effective; and (4) the role of advocacy at the federal level, and the effects of federal-level advocacy on the quality of services to children. Drawing on these findings, conclusions are drawn regarding the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of child advocacy. The overall conclusion of the report is that school-focused advocacy experienced considerable success in improving educational services during the 1970s and that these successes are relevant to the changed circumstances of the 1980s. Recommendations are drawn from the study for advocacy groups and policy makers, and a final essay addresses educational policy implications of the report. (TE)

STUDY SUMMARY

# Child Advocacy & the Schools

## PAST IMPACT AND POTENTIAL FOR THE 1980s

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A Report to
Carnegie Corporation of New York
by Designs for Change, Chicago

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# PREFACE

The research project summarized here assesses the potential of child advocacy as a strategy for improving the schools -- especially for poor, minority, handicapped, and female children. Research activities included, for example, 50 weeks of observations and interviewing to assess the work of eight experienced child advocacy groups. One important aspect of the research plan was to use qualitative data as the basis for making quantitative ratings of the extent of improvement brought about by specific advocacy projects.

This summary highlights the study's most important conclusions and recommendations, which, of course, leads to the omission of many specifics of research methods and data analysis and of illustrative examples that are important for a full understanding of study results. Readers who are interested in a fuller discussion are referred to the following publications:

- Child Advocacy and the Schools: Past Impact and Potential for the 1980s. The full research report.

- Abridged Version. Child Advocacy and the Schools: Past Impact and Potential for the 1980s. A shortened version that nevertheless includes a detailed explanation of study methods, conclusions, and recommendations, and includes many pertinent examples.

- Standing Up for Children: Effective Child Advocacy in the Schools. An explanation of those study results that are of most interest to child advocacy groups active at the state and local levels. Describes and illustrates effective advocacy methods.

To obtain information about these publications, write to Designs for Change, 220 South State Street, Suite 1616, Chicago, Illinois 60604.

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# STUDY BACKGROUND

The twenty-year period from 1960 to 1980 was a major reform period in American education, in which the effort to address educational equity was high on the reform agenda. Various approaches were attempted for improving the quality of education for low-income, minority, handicapped, and female children -- children at risk. During this period, a controversial strategy for achieving educational equity came to prominence: child advocacy.

Independent child advocacy groups, which employed such tactics as issuing investigative reports about the schools, litigation, filing complaints with government agencies, and lobbying, began operating at federal, state, and local levels in the late 1960s.

Carnegie Corporation of New York provided financial support to a number of advocacy groups that worked for school reform. In 1977, Carnegie Corporation asked Designs for Change to carry out a research study concerning the effectiveness of child advocacy in the schools. Designs for Change agreed to conduct an applied research study that would distinguish among various approaches to child advocacy as they were actually carried out in practice, would assess the impact of these various approaches on the educational programs and services actually provided to children day-to-day, and would yield useful recommendations both for policymakers and for the advocacy groups themselves.

While the research study was being carried out, major changes took place in American education. A waning reform period focused on equity concerns ended with the election of Ronald Reagan, who launched an assault on many of the changes the advocates had supported. However, by 1983, it appeared that a new reform period was getting underway -- this one focused on improving educational quality so that the United States can better compete in the world economy. Thus, one of the research team's important objectives has been to assess the relevance of an advocacy movement that grew up in the 1970s for the very different circumstances of the 1980s.

# STUDY DESIGN

The study addressed the following primary research question: What is the potential of school-focused child advocacy for improving equal educational opportunity for children at risk? Five related questions that shaped the investigation focused on: (1) an appropriate conceptual model to guide the study, (2) how school-focused advocacy is actually carried out in practice, (3) how the functioning of the educational system squares with advocates' claims about the way it operates, (4) the effectiveness of federal, state, and local advocacy in improving educational services for children at risk, and (5) the characteristics of effective advocacy.

## Three Study Components

Component 1 of the research study entailed a review of research literature from the reform period from 1960 to 1980 concerning the way the educational system works, how it changes, and how it resists change. This review aided the development of the service quality model, the conceptual model that guided the study.

Component 2 entailed intensive field studies of eight experienced advocacy groups: Advocates for Children of New York (New York City), Chicano Education Project (Denver), Children's Defense Fund (Washington, D.C.), Children's Defense Fund Mississippi Project (Jackson, Mississippi), Federal Education Project (Washington, D.C.), Massachusetts Advocacy Center (Boston), Parents Union for Public Schools (Philadelphia), and Student Rights and Responsibilities Project (Dayton, Ohio).

The research team spent a total of 50 weeks on site gathering data about these eight groups -- observing the advocates at work; conducting interviews with the advocates, those parents and students they sought to assist, and the educators with whom they dealt; and gathering documentary and statistical evidence.

A major focus of Component 2 was an analysis of 52 state and local advocacy projects carried out by these eight advocacy groups. In these projects, the advocates were attempting to change state and local

policies and practices in ways that they thought would benefit substantial numbers of children at risk. This investigation employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, described below in explaining study results.

Component 3 entailed the analysis of the federal-level history of six educational equity issues from 1960 to 1980, such as the extent to which appropriate educational services were being provided to handicapped children. The analysis of these federal-level histories enabled the research team to investigate both the role of advocacy groups at the federal level and the impact of the advocates' federal-level interventions on the quality of services to children.

## Service Quality Model

The research project was guided by a conceptual model for understanding the educational system and assessing the effectiveness of educational reform strategies that we call the service quality model. The service quality model suggests that child advocacy (as well as other school reform strategies) should be assessed in light of its effectiveness in improving the quality of services actually provided to children in schools and classrooms day-to-day. The service quality model specifies three standards that were used as touchstones for assessing the impact of child advocacy:

- Increasing children's opportunities for access to school itself and to specific school services (Access Standard).

- Increasing children's opportunities to receive extra or different services that reflect a coherent effort to respond to critical special needs (Coherent Response to Special Needs Standard).

- Increasing children's opportunities to receive services shown through research to enhance student progress toward high priority educational objectives (Research-Based Practice Standard).

These three standards were applied in assessing claims made by advocates about the inequities various groups of children were experiencing in the schools and in assessing the effectiveness of advocacy in eliminating these inequities.

## Findings and Recommendations

Through the components of the research study, the research team developed a series of findings responsive to the study's major research questions. These findings, summarized in turn below, fall into the following areas:

- The nature of child advocacy in the schools -- similarities and differences among advocacy groups.

- The accuracy of advocates' claims about inequities experienced by various groups of children at risk.

- The effectiveness of child advocacy at the state and local levels and the circumstances in which it is effective.

- The role of advocacy at the federal level and the impact of federal-level advocacy on the quality of services to children.

Drawing on these findings, the research team developed a series of recommendations concerning the potential of child advocacy in the 1980s. In addition, the research team reached some conclusions about the educational reform process relevant to current public policy debates -- above and beyond recommendations specifically focused on child advocacy. These conclusions and recommendations about child advocacy and about the process of reform are discussed in the final two sections of the summary.

# FINDINGS: NATURE OF CHILD ADVOCACY

The research analysis indicated that school-focused child advocates share a set of four basic beliefs:

- Children at risk are being systematically shortchanged in terms of the quality of educational services they receive.
- These inequities will continue unless advocates speak and act vigorously to obtain improved services for children.
- Changes in policy are an important resource for stimulating these needed improvements.
- Policy changes will not be implemented in ways that benefit children without vigorous independent monitoring of the implementation process.

This set of beliefs about the process of reform has a long tradition in U.S. political history, but the immediate antecedents of the school-focused advocacy groups we studied were in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The founders of all the groups studied had been active in the civil rights movement, and they emerged from this experience with a set of ideas about how to continue the process of social reform, as the mass movement for civil rights ebbed in the late 1960s. One lesson of the civil rights experience for these advocacy group founders was that they needed to focus on a particular social institution and press it to change over an extended period. The groups we studied chose to focus on the schools.

Operating within the set of basic beliefs listed above, various advocacy groups active during the 1970s undertook projects that operated at different levels of the educational system (federal, state, local), focused on different issues (special education, children out of school, etc.), and employed different methods. For example, Advocates for Children of New York pressed the New York City public schools to adopt and carry out new policies for addressing the school system's huge truancy and dropout problem. Chicano Education Project helped draft a state bilingual education law in Colorado and then aided parents in monitoring its implementation in rural communities.

Massachusetts Advocacy Center prepared a report on racial discrimination in special education in Massachusetts and then pressed for state enforcement to change the assessment and placement practices of local school districts.

Through studying such advocacy projects, the research team identified a set of important similarities and differences in the activities of various advocacy groups, which were manifested in five areas of advocacy group activity:

- Area 1. Building and Maintaining an Organization. Leadership. Decision making. Hiring and training staff. Making sure work gets done. Fund-raising. Administrative support.

- Area 2. Developing a School Improvement Strategy. Deciding what is wrong with the schools, how specifically the schools could operate better, what you can do to change them, how well your approach is working out.

- Area 3. Gathering Information. Understanding the systems you are trying to change and the people inside them. Documenting educational problems with facts and statistics. Documenting solutions to problems.

- Area 4. Building Support. Finding allies inside and outside the educational system. Organizing parents and citizens. Getting media coverage.

- Area 5. Intervening to Improve the Schools. Making presentations to school boards. Filing litigation and formal complaints. Negotiating with school officials. Lobbying.

Analyzing these five areas of advocacy group activity was the basis for the research team's investigation of effective versus ineffective approaches to child advocacy, which are described later in this summary.

# FINDINGS: ADVOCATES' CLAIMS ABOUT INEQUITIES TO CHILDREN

One major claim made by advocates to justify the need for advocacy in the schools is that the educational system, left to its own devices, provides inequitable services to certain groups of children, and that the practices of educators at various levels of the educational system contribute directly to these service inequities.

To investigate this claim, the research team reviewed evidence about the quality of services provided to children in 1970 with respect to the six equity issues studied in Component 3 of the research:

- The extent to which appropriate educational services were being provided for handicapped children.
- The extent to which minority students were being provided with appropriate vocational education programs.
- The extent to which appropriate compensatory education services were being provided to low-income children through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- The extent to which appropriate educational services were being provided to Hispanic students with limited English proficiency.
- The extent to which female students had access to the full range of educational programs and services.
- The extent to which children were being inappropriately suspended from school.

We examined conflicting claims about service quality and about federal and state enforcement with respect to these six issues in 1970, at the time the advocates began to intervene. Data about 21 specific service quality problems were evaluated in light of the standards of the service quality model.

This analysis indicated that the extent of service quality problems experienced by various groups of children at risk was considerable in 1970. The existence of major barriers in access to school and in access to specific school programs is

apparent through analysis of educational services provided to handicapped students, minority students in vocational education, females, and students suspended from school. For example, 48 of the 50 states legally sanctioned the exclusion from school of some categories of handicapped children in 1970, and at least 300,000 students were barred from school as a result of these policies. To cite another example, the site locations, attendance boundaries, and admissions requirements of a national network of Area Vocational Education Schools sharply limited minority student access to quality vocational education programs in 1970.

Substantial inequities in responding to special needs were revealed through the analysis of educational services provided to handicapped students, low-income students entitled to receive compensatory education services, and Hispanic students with limited English proficiency. For example, many school districts in 1970 were using federal compensatory education funds as general aid not targeted to the students who were supposed to be served with the funds. To cite another example, only 11% of Hispanic students in the Southwest with limited English proficiency were receiving any form of bilingual or English-as-a-second-language instruction in 1970 -- the rest were left to sink or swim in the standard school program conducted in English.

These service quality problems existed despite the fact that there had been an unprecedented rise in the funds available to the educational system during the decade from 1960 to 1970, including funds that school districts were free to spend for any purpose they chose and funds targeted toward improving services to children at risk. The educational system was frequently not employing these added resources to address serious service quality problems experienced by children at risk.

Further, despite the existence of these deficiencies in service quality, the federal government had failed up to 1970 to initiate coherent monitoring and enforcement activities with respect to those problems that specific federal and state agencies had a clear legal obligation to address. In three of the six areas studied -- vocational education services for minority students, compensatory education services for low-income students, and services for Hispanic students with limited English proficiency -- the federal government had legal responsibilities stemming from the Vocational Education Act of 1963, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to monitor resource use and service provision and see that federal resources were employed for the benefit of intended groups of children at risk. In each of these areas, the failure of federal enforcement activities either contributed to or failed to diminish inequities in the services provided to children at risk.

Thus, a review of evidence from 1970 in light of the standards of the service quality model substantiates a significant percentage of the advocates' key allegations about the extent of deficiencies in service quality for children at risk and the failure of the federal government to take actions to increase service quality.

It remains, of course, a separate question whether the advocates' interventions contributed to any improvements in service quality that ameliorated these problems.

# FINDINGS: STATE AND LOCAL ADVOCACY

## Impact of System Advocacy

System advocacy is the effort to improve educational services for substantial numbers of children who face a common problem (for example, handicapped students in a particular city who can't get appropriate special help). The impact of system advocacy at state and local levels was assessed through a detailed analysis of 52 system advocacy projects (such as the effort by Massachusetts Advocacy Center to eliminate racial discrimination in the state's special education programs). For each of the 52 projects, the research team collected documentary, interview, and observational data about how the project was carried out; how it was perceived by the advocates, school officials, and others involved; and what effects the project had on the quality of services to children. Based on a data file about each project, two members of the research team independently carried out a detailed set of quantitative rating procedures to answer the following questions:

- Did a beneficial change take place in policies affecting children at risk and services to children at risk that was related to the objectives of the advocacy project? Beneficial change was judged in light of the Access Standard, the Coherent Response to Special Needs Standard, and the Research-Based Practice Standard described above.

- Did the advocacy group play a substantial role in bringing about any beneficial change in policies or services that was documented?

- What was the extent of beneficial change in policy or services that was documented?

The extent of beneficial change in policy or services was determined by rating (1) comprehensiveness of improvement in a child's overall school experience, (2) number of children affected in this way, and (3) durability of the change. Based on a composite score for each project that combined these three rating scores, the impact of each advocacy project on both policy and services was judged to be highly significant, significant, moderate,

minor, or no change. Projects rated highly significant in improving services to children, for example, brought about a major comprehensive improvement in children's school experiences, affected more than 1,000 children, and were very unlikely to be reversed.

The major finding from this analysis of the impact of state and local system advocacy was that 22 of the 52 projects brought about highly significant or significant improvements in both policies and services that were beneficial to children at risk. Further, the analysis indicated a close relationship between improvement in services to children and improvement in related policies. Finally, a cost analysis of projects that brought about highly significant and significant improvements in services indicated that their costs ranged between $3,000 and $331,000, with the average project costing about $99,000.

The research team considers the fact that 22 of the 52 advocacy projects had significant or highly significant impacts on services to children to constitute strong positive evidence concerning the potential of system advocacy in improving equal educational opportunity for children at risk. This conclusion is warranted because:

- Very stringent criteria were used for judging the extent of improvement; the improvements documented in this study compare very favorably with the extent of improvements observed in studies of other school reform strategies.

- Close investigation of individual projects allowed an analysis of possible negative effects of the advocates' interventions, effects that were weighed in judging each project's impact.

- Improvements documented were achieved at a relatively low cost in terms of advocacy group resources expended, compared with the costs of other approaches to school reform.

- As discussed below, successful advocacy projects consistently used particular advocacy methods identified by the research team, suggesting the possibility that advocates can learn from their successes and increase the proportion of successful advocacy projects in the future.

## Characteristics of Effective System Advocacy

Building on research findings about the impact of system advocacy at state and local levels, the research team analyzed the methods employed in effective system advocacy and the ways in which local situations influenced advocacy group effectiveness. Below, we first describe the research methods employed in this analysis and then its results.

At the same time that advocacy projects were rated for their impact on policy and on services to children, they were also rated using the Advocacy Group Methods Inventory, a series of 21 four-point scales reflecting the extent to which the advocates had employed 21 specific advocacy methods (see Table 1). These 21 advocacy methods, identified initially through field observations and interviews, appeared to be consistently present in those advocacy projects that brought about substantial improvements in services to children. As reflected in Table 1, these 21 effective methods fall into the five major areas of advocacy group activity listed earlier.

In developing this list of effective advocacy methods, the research team attempted to identify advocacy group methods that were effective across the varied situations in which advocacy group projects were carried out. However, field investigations indicated that there was one crucial difference among local situations

# Table 1

Brief Explanations of Items on the
Advocacy Group Methods Inventory

AREA 1.
MAINTAINING A STRONG ORGANIZATION

1. Leadership for the project
   - Rating 4 - Strong leadership and direction are provided for the project.
   - Rating 1 - Weak leadership and direction are provided for the project.

2. Staff dedication to improve services for substantial numbers of children at risk
   - Rating 4 - The staff exhibits intense dedication to improving services for substantial numbers of children at risk.
   - Rating 1 - The staff exhibits limited dedication to improving services for substantial numbers of children at risk; rather, they are dedicated to achieving other purposes.

3. Commitment to improve the group's maintenance activities (e.g., clear definition of responsibilities, accurate internal communication, clear decision making)
   - Rating 4 - The group exhibits high commitment to improving its maintenance activities.
   - Rating 1 - The group exhibits low commitment to improving its maintenance activities.

4. Sustaining needed funds
   - Rating 4 - Sufficient funds are maintained so that funding problems do not force the group to curtail or halt work on the project.
   - Rating 1 - The group fails to obtain sufficient funds to continue work on the project, so that funding shortages force the group to curtail or halt work on the project.

AREA 2.
DEVELOPING A SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT
STRATEGY THAT SHAPES ACTION

5. Cycle of intervention and analysis
   - Rating 4 - The group's school improvement strategy is refined through a cycle of direct intervention to improve the schools and analysis of that intervention that modifies subsequent actions.
   - Rating 1 - This cycle of intervention and analysis is lacking.

(continued)

(TABLE 1 continued)

6. Clarity of the advocates' strategy for improving services for substantial numbers of children at risk
   - Rating 4 - The group begins the project with a clear strategy for improving services for substantial numbers of children at risk, or develops such a clear focus after an initial period of exploration.
   - Rating 1 - The group's change strategy remains unclear.

7. Focus on a subsystem of the education system that shapes services to a particular group of children at risk
   - Rating 4 - The group focuses persistently on changing a subsystem of the educational system that shapes services to a particular group of children at risk.
   - Rating 1 - The group fails to focus persistently on a subsystem that shapes services to a particular group of children at risk.

8. Focus on central issues determining the quality of services to children
   - Rating 4 - The group focuses on central issues determining the quality of services to children.
   - Rating 1 - The group focuses on minor or peripheral issues not crucial in determining the quality of services to children.

9. Envisioning a clear solution
   - Rating 4 - The group develops an increasingly precise understanding of what specific changes in children's school experiences would address the problem they are concerned about, and they press for these changes.
   - Rating 1 - The group does not develop an increasingly specific understanding of what specific changes in children's school experiences would address the problems they are concerned about.

10. Bringing about or capitalizing on a major policy change
    - Rating 4 - The group brings about or capitalizes on a major policy change supportive of the changes in services they desire.
    - Rating 1 - The group does not build its efforts to change services on a major policy change that they bring about or capitalize on.

11. Focus on implementation
    - Rating 4 - The group vigorously monitors the implementation of promised changes in practice to make sure that improvements actually take place in services to children.
    - Rating 1 - The group fails to monitor promised changes in practice to make sure that improvements actually take place in services to children.

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(continued)

(TABLE 1 continued)

AREA 3.
GATHERING COMPREHENSIVE
ACCURATE INFORMATION

12. Documenting problems and solutions
    Rating 4 - The group carefully documents the problems it is concerned about and appropriate solutions to these problems.
    Rating 1 - The group fails to document adequately the problems it is concerned about and solutions to these problems.

13. Gathering comprehensive accurate information about the educational system
    Rating 4 - The group develops an accurate "map" of the educational system, including its formal and informal aspects.
    Rating 1 - The group develops only a sketchy "map" of the educational system, focusing almost exclusively on the formal aspects of the system.

AREA 4.
BUILDING SUPPORT

14. Using media effectively
    Rating 4 - The group uses its own media (reports, newsletters, etc.) and the mass media to communicate its views effectively to others.
    Rating 1 - The group is ineffective in communicating its views through the mass media or its own media.

15. Developing a support network
    Rating 4 - The group develops an effective support network (among members, among sympathetic groups and individuals, through participating in coalitions) that helps further its objectives in the project.
    Rating 1 - The group fails to develop an effective support network

16. Building a committed constituency
    Rating 4 - The group builds a well-organized committed constituency that is capable of mobilizing substantial political power.
    Rating 1 - The group fails to build a well-organized committed constituency.

(continued)

(TABLE 1 continued)

AREA 5.
INTERVENING TO IMPROVE THE SCHOOLS

17. Intervening at multiple levels
Rating 4 - The group intervenes at multiple levels of the educational system as appropriate in pursuing its objectives in the project.
Rating 1 - The group intervenes at a single level of the educational system, overlooking other points for intervention where action would help achieve project objectives.

18. Using multiple tactics
Rating 4 - The group uses multiple intervention tactics (e.g., face-to-face negotiations, filing complaints with government agencies, commenting on regulations) in pursuing project objectives.
Rating 1 - The group uses a small range of intervention tactics.

19. Carrying out specific intervention tactics competently
Rating 4 - The group carries out specific intervention tactics that they decide to employ with a high degree of competence.
Rating 1 - The group carries out its intervention tactics incompetently.

20. Bargaining orientation
Rating 4 - The group views specific tactics as creating a bargaining advantage that must be capitalized on through continuing direct pressure on and negotiation with educational decision makers.
Rating 1 - The group believes that by carrying out a specific tactic (e.g., filing and winning a lawsuit), it can set in motion a chain of events that will lead to desired changes in services to children.

21. Persistence
Rating 4 - Whatever the level of competence of their efforts judged on other criteria, the group persists in working on the same issue over a period of years.
Rating 1 - The group does not persist in working on the same issue over a period of years.

that appeared strongly and consistently to influence the extent of improvement in services to children: the degree of resistance that the advocates encountered from key decision makers whose policies and practices the advocates were attempting to change.

The research team found that some local situations were characterized by "moderate resistance," while others were characterized by "high resistance." High resistance situations occurred when (1) one or more key decision makers was an ideologically committed opponent of the advocates' objectives or (2) the advocates sought changes that would take away jobs or other resources that key decision makers already controlled. Each project was rated as to whether it was carried out in a moderate resistance or high resistance situation.

Data about the extent of improvement in services to children brought about by an advocacy project, the advocacy methods employed, and the degree of resistance encountered were examined through a multivariate analysis of variance. The results of this analysis, which are reflected in Table 2, help clarify the methods that advocates can employ to be effective in moderate and high resistance situations.

In moderate resistance situations, the higher the project scored on the inventory of those advocacy methods that the research team judged to be effective through its fieldwork, the greater the extent of improvement in services to children. When resistance was moderate -- essentially pragmatic -- decision makers gave ground to the extent that the advocates were able to mount an effective campaign for improved services to children. In moderate resistance situations, there were sometimes a few committed supporters of the advocates' reform agenda in important decision-making positions inside the system, and this inside support made the advocates' work somewhat easier. However, resistance in such situations was still moderate, because pragmatic decision makers still controlled many of the key decisions and activities that were critical to the appropriate implementation of the reform the advocates wanted.

In the high resistance situations, there was no clear progression in the relationship between the advocates' methods and the extent of their success in improving services to children (see Table 2). By and large, the advocates who faced high resistance were using most of the methods that the research team had found to constitute good advocacy. However, using these methods was a necessary but not sufficient condition for success. A close examination of the sequences of events in high resistance situations indicates why.

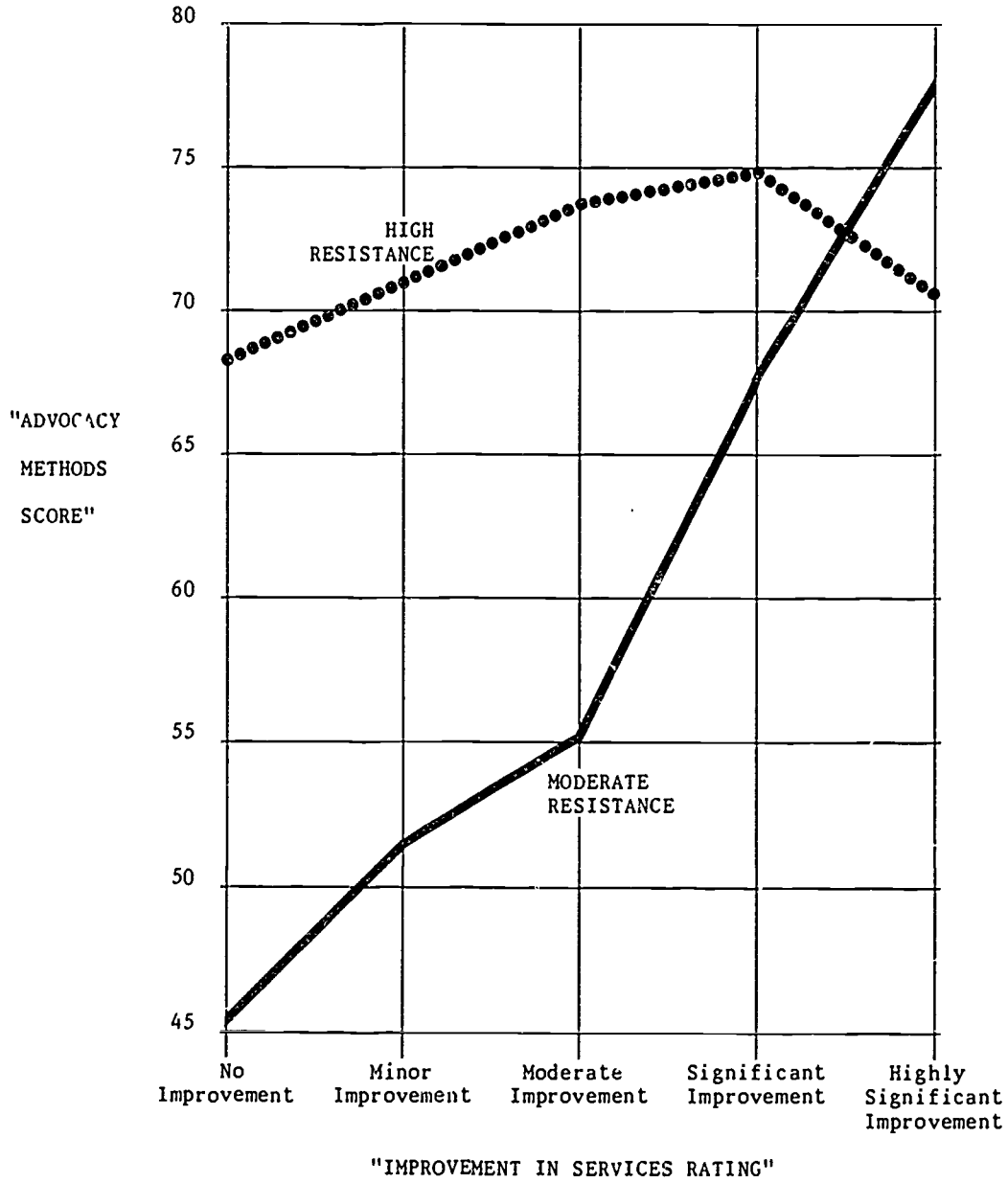
Opponents who perceived that the advocates threatened their basic personal values or were attempting to strip them of their control over jobs and money did not pragmatically retreat in the face of a well-implemented campaign by the advocacy group. Instead they were much more tenacious in resisting the advocates' initiatives. They were often willing to risk contempt of court charges or loss of their jobs in opposing the advocacy group. Advocates who were effective change agents in high resistance situations tended to use almost all the methods that would give them a high score on the Advocacy Group Methods Inventory. However, when they were successful in improving services to children, success came suddenly and often after a long series of frustrations, as their opponents lost an election, were fired, resigned under pressure, or the like.

Further, in these high resistance situations, two methods included in the Advocacy Group Methods Inventory were especially important: (1) persistence over a period of years and (2) success in building a highly committed constituency, as opposed to a loose network of supporters.

# Table 2

Relationship of "Improvement in Services Ratings" to "Advocacy Methods Scores" for Projects Encountering Moderate and High Levels of Resistance

Note: This table indicates the relationship between the "Improvement in Services Ratings" and the "Advocacy Methods Scores" for projects encountering moderate levels of resistance and for projects encountering high levels of resistance. For projects encountering moderate resistance, the more the advocacy group used the methods that the research team judged were effective, the greater the improvement in services for children. The table further indicates that most advocacy groups involved in high resistance situations were using advocacy methods the research team had judged were effective, but their use of these methods did not consistently lead to substantial improvements in services to children.



# Impact of Individual Advocacy

In addition to system advocacy projects, the other major approach to improving the schools employed by state and local advocacy groups is "individual advocacy" or "case advocacy." Advocates' interventions on behalf of individual students can range from a single phone call to a school principal to an extensive project entailing meetings with the family, conversations with school officials, and the preparation of numerous letters, memoranda, and formal appeal statements.

Some advocacy groups don't undertake any of these individual cases. Some groups undertake a limited number as a part of system advocacy projects. Some groups devote a substantial portion of their staff and volunteer resources to handling large numbers of individual cases.

The research team's analysis of the impact of case advocacy focused on 47 case advocacy efforts to which advocates in five different advocacy groups had devoted a significant amount of time. Based on an information file compiled for each case, the case was rated in terms of the extent of improvement in services it brought about for the individual child involved and the extent of improvement in policy it brought about that was beneficial to other children (e.g., by setting a precedent helpful to other children).

This analysis indicated that case advocacy was helpful in winning improvements in services for individual children in situations where (1) significant time was devoted by the advocate to working on the case, (2) there was a strong formal policy supporting the child's right to receive desired improvements in services, and (3) the objective was to obtain an entirely new placement for the child rather than to improve an existing placement. However, case advocacy tended to be ineffective in helping the individual student when these conditions were not present.

An analysis of the systemic impacts of individual cases, beyond bringing improvements for the individual child, indicates few instances in which such broader improvements took place. Further, the evidence does not support the view that parents assisted solely through case advocacy frequently become active advocates on behalf of their own or other children.

Weighing this evidence about the impact of case advocacy, the research team concludes that case advocacy by itself has limited potential for improving policies and services affecting large numbers of children, although it can make a useful contribution to system advocacy projects when a limited number of cases are undertaken as one part of a larger effort to achieve systemic changes.

# FINDINGS: FEDERAL-LEVEL ADVOCACY

The research team's analysis of federal-level advocacy had two parts, focusing first on the role that advocacy groups played at the federal level and second on the impact of this advocacy on services to children.

## Role of Advocacy

The research team analyzed the role that independent advocacy groups (as well as other independent groups and government officials) played at the federal level in efforts to address a cross section of important educational equity issues. This analysis was based on annotated case studies of the history of six educational equity issue during the reform period -- issues affecting handicapped children, minority students in vocational education, low-income students entitled to compensatory education, Hispanic students with limited English proficiency, female students, and students suspended from school.

The six case studies constituted the basic "units of analysis" for the investigation. Each case study focused on the following federal-level activities critical in shaping federal action on these issues:

- Raising service quality problems to place them on the federal agenda.
- Pressing for federal legislation intended to address service quality problems.
- Pressing for focused federal regulations intended to address service quality problems.
- Pressing for court decisions intended to address service quality problems.
- Pressing for focused enforcement of federal requirements.

Conclusions about these activities were proposed and refined by the research team based on a review of the case studies and related reference material.

Note that we did not assume, in focusing on these federal activities, that those groups who lobbied for legislation, worked for focused regulations, etc., were necessarily taking actions that improved

services to children. (This impact issue was the second part of the federal-level analysis discussed later.) Rather, this approach was useful in shaping our understanding of the roles that various groups played at the federal level on important educational equity issues.

Based on this analysis, federal action on service quality problems is most accurately viewed as a continual process of conflict and bargaining in which organized interests seek to maximize the power and the control over resources of those they represent (as would be predicted by many political scientists). For example, lobbyists for teachers unions, chief state school officers, school principals, and local school boards consistently opposed almost every effort to establish focused federal requirements and enforcement aimed at solving specific service quality problems affecting children at risk. Rather, they consistently sought federal resources for their constituents with a minimum of federal control. When these groups lost one round in the bargaining process (for example, when legislation was passed that they disliked), they sought to blunt any perceived negative impact on their constituents by intervening in other bargaining arenas (for example, they sought to influence the content of regulations or the vigor of federal enforcement).

Within this political process, those groups who pressed for specific requirements and enforcement to address particular service quality problems included school-focused advocacy groups representing particular groups of children at risk, parent groups representing specific groups of children at risk, educator groups closely identified with specific groups of children at risk, and reform factions within the legislative and executive branches of government.

Separating out the role of school-focused advocacy groups, the data about the six issues suggest a series of conclusions about the part that these groups played in raising service quality problems, pressing for federal legislation and regulations, pursuing litigation, and pushing for vigorous enforcement.

Raising service quality problems (such as the exclusion of handicapped children from school) to place them on the federal agenda is a necessary first step toward obtaining related policy changes. School-focused advocacy groups played a major role in raising service quality problems and successfully placing them on the public policy agenda. For example, when advocacy groups published Title I of ESEA: Is It Helping Poor Children?, they started a process that is generally credited by historians with reversing the drift toward using Title I funds as general aid.

Once a problem is placed on the federal agenda, one major avenue open to those seeking to improve service quality is to obtain the passage of federal legislation. School-focused advocacy groups were frequently key proponents of federal legislation intended to address specific service quality problems, either alone or in collaboration with others. For example, advocates were key to developing and passing Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Public Law 94-142 -- two key pieces of legislation establishing the rights of handicapped children to an appropriate education at public expense.

The process of developing regulations to interpret a law is typically not a neutral technical process, but rather an extension of the political struggle begun in Congress over the legislation itself. School-focused advocacy groups were frequently the only groups external to the federal government pressing for detailed regulations focused on specific service quality problems. For example, women's advocacy groups were critical in pressing the government to address numerous specific

problems in preparing regulations to interpret Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the basic civil rights law outlawing sex discrimination in education.

Besides pursuing the passage of legislation and related regulations, a second major avenue for addressing service quality problems at the federal level is through litigation. Plaintiffs' attorneys in important federal lawsuits focused on specific service quality problems were frequently independent advocacy groups. For example, the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund was instrumental in the filing of Alexander v. Richardson, a lawsuit aimed at increasing federal oversight concerning discrimination in federally funded vocational education programs.

Once a judicial decision has been rendered or federal law passed and the related regulations adopted, federal enforcement becomes crucial. School-focused advocacy groups were the major groups external to the government pressing for more vigorous enforcement focused on specific service quality problems. For example, advocacy groups issued reports on lack of federal enforcement in the areas of sex discrimination, special education, and Title I fund use, and followed them up with campaigns for increased federal enforcement activity.

How should the value of the advocacy groups' interventions at the federal level be assessed? In the first part of the federal analysis, the research team only analyzed the role of school-focused advocacy in shaping the formal policies and the customary practices of the federal government, and we did not analyze whether the advocates' interventions were effective in improving services for children at risk.

However, even dealing only with evidence about the role of federal-level advocacy, there is a persuasive rationale for concluding that school-focused advocacy made an important contribution. As stated earlier, federal action on educational equity issues results from continual conflict and bargaining among various interest groups. The realities of this bargaining process itself suggest one important justification for federal-level child advocacy. This justification rests on (1) the consistent observation that organized associations of teachers, state superintendents of schools, local school boards, etc., almost always represent the immediate interests of their members and not the interests of children at risk, and (2) the value judgment that children at risk have as much right to organized representation in federal-level bargaining as do these other groups who are affected by federal policies about the public schools.

## Impact of Advocacy on Services to Children

Critics of the advocates' reform efforts have argued that although the advocates may have been well-intentioned, the changes in federal policy and practice that the advocates won have failed to improve the quality of services provided to children at risk. To investigate this issue, the research team reviewed evidence assembled about the history of the six equity issues to answer the following questions:

- Question 1. Was there evidence of improvement in service quality in the period from 1970 to 1980 with respect to the six educational equity issues studied in the federal component of the research project, and was there evidence that federal-level initiatives made a substantial contribution to these improvements?

- Question 2. What were the characteristics of action at the federal level (both inside and outside the federal government) in any instances where substantial improvements in service quality took place?

■ Question 3. To what extent did federal-level advocacy groups help bring about federal-level actions that improved service quality for children?

To answer Question 1, the research team analyzed evidence about changes in the quality of services to children from 1970 to 1980 with respect to 21 specific service quality problems. Improvement was judged in light of the three standards suggested by the service quality model: the Access Standard, Coherent Response to Special Needs Standard, and Research-Based Practice Standard.

Contrary to the view that federal initiatives have had little or no positive impact on the quality of services to children at risk, the evidence indicates that in some circumstances federal initiatives have had a very substantial impact in improving service quality (as in the case of special education), in some instances they have had a moderate impact (as in the case of sex discrimination), and in some instances the national impact has been minor or nonexistent (as in the case of inappropriate suspension from school). Evidence on which this conclusion is based is summarized in Table 3.

For instance, reform carried out at the federal and state levels during the 1970s virtually eliminated the practice of directly barring handicapped children from attending school, a practice that affected at least 300,000 handicapped children in 1970. Further, from 1970 to 1980 the number of children attending school who were receiving special education services increased by 1,000,000, despite a decline in overall school enrollment. This change left some children worse off than before -- for example, special education funding has provided some incentives for student misclassification. However, studies of the local implementation of special education reform indicate that the increased availability of special education services has, on balance, led to major benefits, including the establishment of special education programs to deal with such problems as emotional disturbance and hearing loss where none had previousiy existed, an increase in the availability of special education programs that facilitate contact with the regular classroom, increased availability of such "related services" as physical therapy, improvements in the care with which students are assessed for special education placement, and the individualization of student instruction.

Having identified varied improvements in service quality across the six issues studied, the research team then attempted to determine whether any particular types of federal-level action consistently occurred when service quality improved and whether there was evidence of a linkage between particular types of federal action and changes in service quality (Question 2 listed above). The research team analyzed the six case histories to identify federal-level actions that were consistently present when major improvements in service quality occurred and consistently lacking when little or no improvement occurred. Based on this analysis, federal-level reforms were most likely to stimulate major improvements in service quality for children when:

■ An independent political constituency was active at the federal level in seeking reforms that addressed specific service quality problems, and this activism was sustained through each of the key federal-level activities that shaped services to children.

■ A reform faction within the federal government pressed for reforms that addressed specific service quality problems, and this activism was sustained through each of the key federal-level activities that shaped services to children.

# Table 3

Extent of Improvement in Services to Children at Risk from 1970 to 1980 -- Rank Ordering of Six Equity Issues and Brief Explanation of Ranking

| EXTENT OF IMPROVEMENT IN SERVICES TO CHILDREN AT RISK FROM 1970 to 1980 -- RANK ORDERING OF SIX ISSUES | | EVIDENCE OF IMPROVEMENT IN SERVICE QUALITY BY 1980 CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING RANK ORDER | CRITICISMS OF FEDERAL REFORMS AND EVIDENCE OF CONTINUING SERVICE QUALITY PROBLEMS IN 1980 CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING RANK ORDER |
|---|---|---|---|
| RANK | ISSUE | | |
| 1st | The extent to which appropriate educational services were being provided for handicapped children (Special Education) | • The process by which handicapped children age 6 to 17 were forthrightly barred from attending school was virtually eliminated by 1980. At least 300,000 handicapped children a year had been barred from school in 1970. | • Insufficient educational programs had been established by 1980 for handicapped children age 3 to 5 and 18 to 21, and children in these age groups were not vigorously sought out to attend school. |
| | | • The number of children receiving special education services in elementary and secondary schools increased by one million from 1970 to 1980. Case studies of local implementation of special education reforms indicate that the positive benefit of this expansion of services far outweighed negative impact. Programs were established to deal with a wider range of handicapping conditions, placements that facilitate varying degrees of involvement in mainstream educational programs were steadily made more available, and there has been a sharp increase in the availability of related services. | • There was still a substantial unserved group of handicapped children who were attending school but not receiving services. The failure of the federal government to provide promised increases in funding for special education has contributed to limitations on the expansion of services.<br>• Substantial numbers of children have been misclassified as learning disabled. |
| | | • Regular classroom teachers serving handicapped children who are pulled out part-time for special education instruction consistently judged that special education resource rooms provided needed services for children that the regular classroom teacher could not provide. | |
| | | • Special education assessment for students improved during the decade because multiple assessment procedures and multiple perspectives were more frequently employed in evaluation and placement. | • Assessment procedures continued to fall far short of the ideals embodied in the law. |
| | | • Racial disproportions in classes for the mentally retarded decreased in some states and school districts that made a concerted effort to eliminate the problem. | • No overall reduction occurred in the national rate for assigning black students to classes for the mentally retarded, which was 3.35% at the end of the decade. |
| | | • Unnecessary segregation of handicapped students diminished, as more part-time resource placements were established, the number of separate public schools for the handicapped decreased, and children who had been institutionalized were returned home and attended public schools. | • Substantial unnecessary segregation of handicapped students remained in 1980. |

(continued)

(TABLE 3 continued)

| EXTENT OF IMPROVEMENT IN SERVICES TO CHILDREN AT RISK FROM 1970 to 1980 -- RANK ORDERING OF SIX ISSUES<br>RANK | ISSUE | EVIDENCE OF IMPROVEMENT IN SERVICE QUALITY BY 1980 CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING RANK ORDER | CRITICISMS OF FEDERAL REFORMS AND EVIDENCE OF CONTINUING SERVICE QUALITY PROBLEMS IN 1980 CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING RANK ORDER |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1st | (continued) | | • Specific studies of the paperwork entailed in complying with PL 94-142 conclude that paperwork is substantial, but falls primarily on administrative staff supported by state and federal funding and that the paperwork makes, on balance, positive contributions to coordination of services. |
| 2nd | The extent to which appropriate compensatory services were being provided to low-income children through Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Compensatory Education) | • Title I resources were increasingly targeted toward eligible participants and provided them with identifiable services. Title I resources amounted to $3.22 billion in 1980, and established programs that served about five million students. | • Sufficient funds were allocated in 1980 to provide services for only 57% of the approximately nine million students eligible for Title I. |
| | | • Specific nonsupplanting and comparability requirements increased the percentage of school districts that used Title I resources to provide extra services to Title I students. | • Supplanting and noncomparability remained a problem throughout the decade, and federal officials were inconsistent in enforcing related regulations. |
| | | • Use of Title I for questionable equipment and materials virtually disappeared over the decade. | |
| | | • Research indicated that most regular classroom teachers who sent children to Title I viewed Title I teachers as providing needed services that the regular classroom teacher could not provide. | |
| | | • Studies of Title I student achievement indicated that carefully designed Title I programs brought about significant increases in basic skills achievement. | • Achievement gains for Title I students only partly closed the gap between them and their more advantaged fellow students. |
| | | | • Specific studies of the administrative and paperwork burden entailed in Title I conclude that the federal requirements were not excessively burdensome. |
| | | | • 50% to 70% of Title I services at the elementary level were provided on a pullout basis. Advocates of Title I were often insensitive to the potential dangers of pullout programs, such as student segregation. However, research comparing the impact of part-time pullout programs with the impact of allowing a child to remain in the regular program without any special help indicates that well-designed pullout programs can bring positive benefits in academic achievement. |

(continued)

(TABLE 3 continued)

| EXTENT OF IMPROVEMENT IN SERVICES TO CHILDREN AT RISK FROM 1970 to 1980 -- RANK ORDERING OF SIX ISSUES<br>RANK | ISSUE | EVIDENCE OF IMPROVEMENT IN SERVICE QUALITY BY 1980 CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING RANK ORDER | CRITICISMS OF FEDERAL REFORMS AND EVIDENCE OF CONTINUING SERVICE QUALITY PROBLEMS IN 1980 CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING RANK ORDER |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3rd (tie) | The extent to appropriate educational services were being provided to Hispanic students with limited English proficiency (Limited English Proficiency) | • The percentage of Hispanic children receiving some form of special programming responsive to limited English proficiency approximately doubled over the decade. | • In 1980, 77% of those Hispanic children with limited English proficiency were not receiving any form of special programming responsive to their linguistic needs. |
| | | • Evidence that well-implemented bilingual education boosted student achievement and attendance increases the credibility of the claim that this approach can meet students' special needs. | • Research indicated that many bilingual programs being carried out in 1980 were poorly implemented. |
| | | | • Bilingual education programs sometimes increased student segregation, and bilingual education advocates were often not sensitive to this problem. However, some approaches to bilingual education that were in fact implemented fostered continued contact between Hispanic and non-Hispanic students. |
| 3rd (tie) | The extent to which female students had access to the full range of educational programs and services (Sex Discrimination) | • Formal rules barring female participation in traditionally male programs had been largely eliminated by 1980, as had active attempts by school staff to discourage girls who wished to participate in nontraditional programs. | • In most school districts, voc ed programs remained overwhelmingly segregated by sex, with females clustered in those programs that prepared them for the lowest-paying jobs. Most voc ed programs did nothing to positively encourage male or female participation in nontraditional programs -- such as establishing informational programs for students about nontraditional jobs or working with employers to encourage the hiring of females or males for nontraditional jobs. |
| | | • Discriminatory occupational guidance instruments, such as the sex specific interpretive scales for the Kuder Vocational Preference Test, had been eliminated. | |
| | | • Female participation in competitive public school athletics increased seven-fold, from 300,000 in 1970 to 2,000,000 in 1980. | • In 1980, only half as many girls as boys were participating in competitive athletics. Girls' teams still were receiving unequal financial resources compared with boys' teams. |
| | | • The percentage of white teenage mothers attending school nine months after the birth of their child increased from 5% to 17% over the decade. For black teenage mothers, the increase was from 15% to 40%. Formal policies barring pregnant students from school had largely been eliminated. | • Few positive steps had been taken by the schools to help the pregnant student or the student with children remain in school. The increase in the percent of teenage mothers remaining in school may be due primarily to larger cultural changes in societal attitudes, rather than to changed educational practice responsive to federal law. |

(continued)

(TABLE 3 continued)

| EXTENT OF IMPROVEMENT IN SERVICES TO CHILDREN AT RISK FROM 1970 to 1980 -- RANK ORDERING OF SIX ISSUES<br>RANK | ISSUE | EVIDENCE OF IMPROVEMENT IN SERVICE QUALITY BY 1980 CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING RANK ORDER | CRITICISMS OF FEDERAL REFORMS AND EVIDENCE OF CONTINUING SERVICE QUALITY PROBLEMS IN 1980 CONSIDERED IN DETERMINING RANK ORDER |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5th | The extent to which minority students were being provided with appropriate vocational education programs (Voc Ed Discrimination) | • Black student enrollment in Area Vocational Education Schools (AVESs) increased over the decade. Black students comprised 10% of the enrollment in AVESs in 1979. | • Black student enrollment in AVESs (10% of the total AVES enrollment) still did not approach the percentage of black student enrollment in public schools (16%). |
| | | | • Within AVESs, black students were underrepresented somewhat in technical and trade programs, although some progress was evident in these areas. However, black students were markedly overrepresented in low-paying traditionally female occupations, suggesting that black females in AVESs were still especially likely to be enrolled in programs that prepared them for low-paying jobs. |
| | | • Researchers concluded that without the federal set-aside requirement, most states would not have been devoting even the limited resources that they were devoting to voc ed progrms for disadvantaged students in 1980. | • In fiscal year 1979, a substantial minority of states did not spend required voc ed set-asides to provide services to disadvantaged students. Further, available evidence indicates that the states were not matching the federal set-aside with state and local funds. Thus, problems in the use of set-asides that had existed in 1970 had not changed significantly. |
| 6th | The extent to which children were being inappropriately suspended from school (Inappropriate Suspension) | • In individual schools and school districts that made a concerted effort to reduce their overall number of suspensions and to reduce racial disproportion in suspensions, reductions were achieved in ways that did not undermine school discipline. | • There was no change in the national rate of suspension from public school during the decade, which remained at approximately 4% annually. There was also no change in the rate of black student suspension, which rose slightly during the decade to almost 8% annually. |
| | | | • By focusing on due process procedures in the suspension process, some advocacy groups active on the suspension issue diverted attention away from other education practices important in reducing excessive suspensions. |

■ Federal requirements mandated change in those specific practices that were most important in shaping services to children at various levels of the educational system (i.e., federal requirements were "appropriately specific").

■ Focused financial incentives were provided for complying with federal requirements, and procedures were implemented for monitoring the use of federal funds.

■ Federal requirements gave program beneficiaries at the local level and their advocates formal opportunities to monitor the consistency between local service provision and federal requirements.

■ Federal enforcement was carried out with at least moderate vigor and persistence over a period of years.

To answer Question 3, the last step in the analysis of federal-level advocacy was to determine whether federal-level advocacy groups played a substantial role in bringing about the types of federal-level actions that improved service quality for children. Based on this analysis, some federal-level advocacy groups made substantial contributions toward bringing about the types of federal-level changes that improved the quality of educational services for children at risk. Such effective federal-level advocacy groups helped organize political constituencies that pressed for requirements and enforcement that later benefited children; they supported internal reform factions within the government; they developed proposals for federal requirements that mandated change in those specific practices most important in shaping services to children; they espoused focused financial incentives for appropriate state and local changes and the monitoring of related federal fund use; they pressed to establish a formal role for program beneficiaries in monitoring local implementation; and they pressed for federal enforcement. (Of course, other federal-level advocacy groups, who failed to carry out such activities, were ineffective.)

The research team concludes that some forms of federal-level advocacy have made an important contribution to improving service quality for children. The analysis further suggests what types of federal-level advocacy are likely to lead to improved service quality, and what types of advocacy group interventions are likely to be ineffective.



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# IMPLICATIONS FOR THE 1980s: THE POTENTIAL OF CHILD ADVOCACY

The research study indicates that child advocacy at the federal, state, and local levels led to some significant improvements in the quality of services for children at risk in the reform period that ended in 1980. However, one must consider with some care the relevance of these results for the very different circumstances of the present decade.

Upon assuming the presidency, Ronald Reagan attempted to dismantle many of the programs and requirements that advocacy groups had had a key role in putting into place. However, this effort has been only partly successful. For example, the requirements of P.L. 94-142, which the Reagan administration described as the most intrusive federal education program, have been successfully defended by a coalition of parents, special education advocates, special educators, and sympathetic administrators and legislators against efforts to abolish them.

In the first half of 1983, new proposals for the reform of the public schools have emerged, which focus on increasing the quality of education to enable the country to compete more effectively in the world economy. Reports that have helped launch this movement all reaffirm in general terms the importance of a continued national commitment to equity and express the view that equity concerns do not have to be sacrificed to improve educational quality. All are to some extent critical, however, of the equity-related reforms of the 1970s.

Additional reports on the condition of education and new legislative proposals are emerging weekly, and the reform of public education will be an important issue in upcoming elections. A new reform period may be underway.

For child advocates, this new situation raises many difficult problems, but it also opens up new opportunities to press for changes in educational policy and practice beneficial to children at risk. Drawing on the results of this study, the research team concludes that a skillful, vigorous advocacy movement that adjusts to the changed circumstances of the 1980s can greatly benefit children at risk. Present

opportunities will be missed, however, unless child advocates can both capitalize on the strengths of child advocacy that were apparent in the research study and overcome the weaknesses and needs that the study underscored.

## Strengths of Child Advocacy

The research study revealed several important strengths of advocacy that indicate its significant potential for improving education in the 1980s.

First, the fact that a substantial portion of system advocacy efforts studied -- including those initiated at the federal level and at state and local levels -- have brought about significant improvements in services to children indicates the potential of child advocacy as a school reform strategy.

Second, analysis of those advocacy projects that were effective indicates that the methods employed in successful advocacy projects were distinct from those employed in unsuccessful and minimally successful projects. These results suggest that advocacy groups can improve the percentage of their efforts that are effective in the 1980s, if they increasingly employ the methods of effective advocacy identified in earlier advocacy projects.

Third, effective advocacy projects had moderate costs, compared with the benefits that these projects achieved for children. For instance, state and local advocacy projects that achieved significant and highly significant improvements cost only $99,000, on the average. These costs compare very favorably with the costs of other reform strategies; they suggest that advocacy should be a highly attractive investment for funders because of its cost effectiveness.

Fourth, allegations made by advocacy groups about the nature and extent of service quality problems were by and large verified; an examination of pertinent data indicates that the advocates' analysis of these problems has pinpointed major defects in the country's effort to achieve equal educational opportunity, defects that deserve continuing examination. Problems of access to school, access to particular school services, and the clear inadequacies of efforts to meet critical special needs were frequently pinpointed by advocates during the reform period, while being largely overlooked by major educator groups and mainstream educational researchers. Thus, the advocates' past record of identifying service quality problems, drawing on a frame of reference that identifies problems many others have overlooked, strongly indicates that their approach has continuing relevance in formulating educational policy.

Fifth, a number of the advocates' key claims about how the educational system functions are supported by the research analysis. The recently released reports calling for educational reform, as well as the legislative proposals that are now being advanced, are frequently based on assumptions about how the educational system works that are challenged by advocacy group views -- views whose essential accuracy was supported by the research team's investigations. For example, many legislative proposals currently being advanced call for federal and state allocations for broadly stated reform purposes (such as "strengthening instruction in mathematics, science, computer education, foreign languages, and vocational education"), with virtually no focused requirements about how these funds should be used. But advocacy groups have repeatedly documented, as have a number of independent social scientists, that funds granted for such broad purposes are used primarily to support existing programs rather than to initiate new ones, as has been the consistent experience, for example, with programs funded under the federal Vocational Education Act.

Balancing the strengths of advocacy are several important weaknesses and needs, which should also be taken into account in assessing advocacy's future potential.

## Weaknesses and Needs of Child Advocacy

As reflected in Table 1, the study identified specific characteristics of ineffective advocacy efforts; the research team found, for instance, that some advocacy projects were ineffective because advocates were failing to analyze their reform efforts and adjust them based on this analysis, or failing to envision clear solutions to the service quality problems they were trying to eliminate, or failing to use the media effectively.

The failure of many advocates to employ the methods of effective advocacy constitutes a weakness of the advocacy movement. Since advocacy is a relatively youthful reform movement that has often operated with limited resources, the research team concluded that the ratio of effective to ineffective advocacy efforts among those studied was high. However, especially as advocacy groups face the changed circumstances of the 1980s, it is essential that advocates learn from their past experience and increase their effectiveness

Some weaknesses of the advocacy projects we studied represent a failure to apply in practice methods that most advocates would agree are appropriate (for example, failure to monitor the implementation of a policy change because the advocacy group shifted its attention to other issues). However, other important weaknesses of the advocacy projects we studied deserve particularly careful attention, because remedying them will require significant shifts in the way many advocates think and act, rather than merely devoting greater effort to doing those things that advocates already regard as important. These special areas of need are discussed in more detail below.

Reactive Approach. Very frequently, the role adopted by advocacy groups has been to document and to react to shortcomings in the policies and practices established by others. For example, advocates have presented data about the disproportionate number of minority children in isolated special education classes and about the low quality of these classes. Or they have contested the use of minimum competency testing programs when it became apparent that these testing programs would not stimulate school systems to provide extra help to low-income and minority students, but would merely bar them from graduating. However, advocates have often not developed their own positive plans for addressing the problems that gave rise to such objectionable programs.

Further, advocates have seldom taken positions on the nature and quality of education in the mainstream educational program, but rather have monitored programs -- like special education and remedial education -- that exist, to a substantial extent, because the mainstream educational program deals inadequately with children who fall outside a narrow range considered "normal."

However, our research at federal, state, and local levels indicates that advocacy groups were most effective when they went beyond a reactive stance and framed specific solutions to service quality problems, including policies and practices designed to avoid problems before they developed. Proactive approaches to developing educational policy and practice seem especially appropriate in the present situation. It appears that advocates will be most successful if they map out plans for reform that tie concerns about quality and equity together -- for example, by indicating how higher standards can be achieved for a broad range of students. Thus, while the role of

critic will continue to be important, school-focused advocacy will be greatly strengthened if it moves from a reactive to a proactive stance.

Lack of a Strong Base of Support. Child advocacy groups came into existence during a period when the resources available for education were increasing. These increases came both in the form of general aid and of funds targeted toward specific educational problems. Thus, it was often possible during the reform period for advocacy groups to pursue their reform objectives by cutting slices from an expanding economic pie. Even when the pie was expanding, however, the advocates' success at local, state, and national levels was proportionate to the strength and persistence of the committed constituencies and support networks they were able to organize.

Given the static or shrinking resources available in the present situation, it is likely that advocates will confront intensified resistance to their reform agendas, especially if they insist that general statements about equal opportunity be translated into specific requirements and fund allocations. The research indicates that advocates can be effective in such high resistance situations only if they organize a sizable, committed constituency of supporters, of the type formed in the past only by advocates for the handicapped.

There are some reasons to believe that such well-organized movements might be possible. Blacks, Hispanics, and women are becoming increasingly better organized and are increasingly insistent that they will exact specific commitments in return for their support. If school-focused advocacy groups can work with the leadership of these constituencies to frame an educational agenda responsive to the needs of children at risk, child advocacy groups can potentially be in a strong position to see this agenda acted on over the next few years.

Inadequate Mechanisms for Training and Analysis. The civil rights movement of the 1960s was the training ground for those who founded school advocacy groups; of the thousands of people who were involved in the civil rights movement in some way, a handful emerged with the knowledge and skills that formed the foundation for the school-focused advocacy movement. Subsequently, most of those who learned how to be advocates mastered these skills through a long-term direct association with these advocacy group founders. This apprenticeship approach to becoming an advocate lacks many of the more formal mechanisms through which occupational skills are often learned. Yet there has been a general skepticism within the advocacy movement about the value of more formalized approaches to training and analysis.

Our research suggests, however, that the historical situation in which most advocacy group leaders learned their skills is not likely to be repeated, that the unstructured apprenticeship approach by itself is an ineffective way to train competent advocates, and that the limited opportunities available for collaborative analytical work among advocates are insufficient to provide advocates with a solid analytical base for facing the issues of the 1980s. Further, to the extent that advocates are to learn from their past successes and failures so that the characteristics of successful advocacy can be consciously incorporated into subsequent advocacy efforts, more adequate mechanisms for training and analysis will be essential.

Inadequate Financial Support. Historically, private foundations have been the primary source of funding for most of the advocacy groups that we studied. In addition, a few advocacy groups have been able to secure federal government funding for school-focused

advocacy under terms that didn't severely limit their independence. However, the availability of funds from these sources has recently been eroding.

While some advocacy groups have attempted individually to explore new approaches to fundraising (such as direct mail solicitation), there has never been a concerted effort within the school-focused advocacy movement to analyze its funding prospects and to work collaboratively to expand the total pot of money available for school-focused advocacy. Recommendations about capitalizing on the strengths and overcoming the weaknesses of school-focused advocacy to improve future effectiveness will be irrelevant unless the movement takes steps to address these increasingly critical funding issues.

Insufficient Opportunities for Collaboration. There has been some significant collaboration among advocacy groups in the past, typically focused on achieving specific policy changes or protecting specific programs at the federal level. However, most groups have functioned most of the time in isolation. In reviewing key needs of school-focused advocacy groups above, we have identified a number of areas in which increased collaboration among groups is essential to success: increasing the total funding available to advocacy groups, developing a proactive stance on educational issues, increasing analysis and training focused on the characteristics of effective advocacy, and increasing the base of committed supporters for school-focused advocacy. Success in addressing these areas of need will require substantially increased collaborative analysis and action among groups, such as the development and strengthening of national consortia of advocacy groups and regular opportunities for meetings to plan and take action on specific issues.

## Recommendations to Advocates and to Policymakers

Study recommendations are based on the overall conclusion that school-focused advocacy experienced considerable success in improving the quality of educational services for children at risk during the 1970s and that these successes have important relevance for the changed circumstances of the 1980s. We conclude that children at risk will benefit significantly if the child advocacy movement in education is given the opportunity to grow. The aim of the research team's recommendations is to build on the strengths and overcome the areas of need and weakness of school-focused advocacy that were summarized above.

Recommendations are made in related pairs, addressed respectively to advocacy groups and to policymakers. These recommendations are listed in Table 4.

## Special Note on the Funding of Advocacy

The research analysis identified characteristics of those state and local advocacy projects that improved educational services for substantial numbers of children. The analysis also identified federal-level actions that improved service quality -- actions in which federal-level advocacy groups played an important part. We have recommended that advocacy groups undertake projects that embody these characteristics of effective advocacy and that policymakers provide long-term financial support for such projects.

Because persistent advocacy focused on particular subsystems of the educational system is essential for improvement in services to children, private foundations, corporations, government agencies, and other

# Table 4

Study Recommendations

| RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADVOCACY GROUPS | RECOMMENDATIONS TO POLICYMAKERS |
|---|---|
| Advocacy groups should carry out system advocacy projects at the local, state, and federal levels that employ the effective advocacy methods identified in the research analysis. | Policymakers should provide long-term financial support for system advocacy projects at the local, state, and federal levels that employ the effective advocacy methods identified in the research analysis. Support for advocacy at multiple levels of the system is essential. |
| Advocacy groups should carry out a proactive analysis to identify policies and practices that will insure that quality educational services are provided to children at risk. This analysis should include policies and practices to improve the mainstream educational program. This analysis should capitalize on the current national interest in improving educational quality to insure children at risk benefit from this reform movement. | Policymakers should provide opportunities for advocacy groups to develop a proactive analysis of needed reforms. Policymakers should insure that advocates participate in the process of translating current public concerns about improving educational quality into new policies and programs. |
| Advocacy groups should develop strategies for building a strong committed constituency that supports improved programs and services for children at risk. | Policymakers should aid advocacy group efforts to build a strong committed constituency that supports improved programs and services for children at risk. |
| Advocacy groups should develop mechanisms for the continuing analysis of the qualities of effective advocacy and for systematic advocate training. | Policymakers should support advocacy group efforts to develop mechanisms for continuing analysis of the qualities of effective advocacy and for systematic advocate training. |
| Advocacy groups should undertake collaborative activities aimed at increasing the amount of funding available for the school-focused advocacy movement. | Policymakers should support activities aimed at increasing the amount of funding available for the school-focused advocacy movement. |
| Advocacy groups should develop mechanisms for ongoing collaboration among individual groups on a variety of issues crucial to strengthening the advocacy movement, including those issues that are the focus of the above recommendations. | Policymakers should support advocacy group efforts to develop mechanisms for ongoing collaboration on the issues that are the focus of the above recommendations. |

funding sources should be willing to support system advocacy projects that employ effective methods for extended periods. Advocacy groups should be expected to demonstrate regular progress in refining their capabilities and increasing their effectiveness. However, if such progress is visible, funders should be willing to support particular advocacy groups for a period of ten years or more. As the research results indicate, such long-term support can constitute an extremely cost-effective approach to school reform, when it is weighed against other possible investments in school reform (such as support for direct service programs).

Further, effective advocacy groups at multiple levels of the educational system are essential, and thus groups at various levels deserve support. We did not find one strategic point in the educational system where it was most beneficial for advocates to concentrate their energies; advocates in Washington or in the state capital, for instance, accomplish little without an active local constituency. Breakdowns in the implementation of reforms occur at the federal, state and local levels, and advocacy is necessary at each level to keep the reform process moving. Thus, the research team does not recommend that policymakers concentrate support on groups at a particular level of the educational system, but rather that they support effective groups at each level.

The research study indicates that a moderate investment in school-focused advocacy over an extended period can have a decisive effect on the educational opportunities of children at risk in the 1980s and 1990s. An advocacy group that can have a major impact on a state's educational system can be operated for $400,000 to $500,000 per year. Adequate funding for three federal-level advocacy groups, state-wide advocacy groups in the 25 most populous states, local advocacy groups in the nation's six largest cities, and several technical assistance and coalition organizations to aid these advocacy groups would cost about $18 million annually. This amount is about equal to the annual cost of operating three large urban high schools. It is the amount that our public elementary and secondary schools spend nationally every fourteen minutes.

# IMPLICATIONS FOR THE 1980s: THINKING ABOUT EDUCATIONAL POLICY

In the current period of renewed interest in educational reform, many of the reform proposals being advanced cite perceived lessons of the 1960s and 1970s as justification for their objectives and methods. It is quite common for particular interest groups to draw conclusions about the lessons of past experience that confirm their previously held positions, even if research evidence is at variance with these preconceptions. Thus it is not surprising that many of the reform proposals now being advanced ignore clear evidence from the reform period (such as evidence about the ineffectiveness of general aid or block grant funding as a means for stimulating reform), so that the new proposals are frequently retreads of ideas that have failed in the past.

Besides pointing to specific conclusions about the impact and potential of school-focused advocacy, the research analysis in the present study has allowed us to draw some broader conclusions about the functioning of the educational system that should be taken into account if reform programs now being proposed are actually going to improve the quality of services provided to children.

The research study allowed us to investigate in detail the quality of educational programs provided to children at risk in large cities like Philadelphia and small towns like South Panola, Mississippi. It allowed us to trace influences on service quality to school district, state, and federal levels. Conducting the study pointed us toward dozens of statistical reports and implementation studies dealing with such issues as the history and effectiveness of vocational education, the enforcement of sex equity laws in education, and the evolution of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

This combination of research activities yields a picture of the school reform process that is consistent with a large body of social science research about how large institutions change and resist change, but that is inconsistent with many currently popular views about how we can increase educational quality in the 1980s. These broader conclusions from the study merit careful scrutiny from policymakers and policy analysts who are attempting to

start a new wave of school reform and wish to see their efforts benefit a broad range of American children, rather than a few.

## Focus on Service Quality Issues

To an alarming extent, much policy analysis in the current discussion of educational reform fails to focus on the impact of proposed reforms on the nature and quality of services actually provided to children.

In some recent proposals, the degree of satisfaction with a particular reform strategy expressed by teachers or by local school administrators has become a dominant criterion by which the adequacy of the educational reform is judged, without an attempt to determine whether the reform is improving services to children.

Other currently popular approaches obscure service quality issues by focusing almost exclusively on the results of student achievement testing. When educators and the public focus exclusively on raising test scores without scrutinizing how a preoccupation with test results affects service quality, the benefits for children are frequently questionable. For example, students who are likely to score low are often removed from the mainstream program so they won't be tested (for example, through referral to special education or through the discipline system), rather than being given extra help within the regular classroom so they can improve their skills.

Our review of data about efforts to increase educational quality during the reform period strongly suggests that the detailed analysis of service quality should be placed at the center of efforts to improve education and should be a critical focus of evaluations of such reform efforts. When the nature and quality of services to children are ignored in designing and implementing reforms, the strong possibility arises that the reform effort will not really benefit children, but will be adjusted to serve the interests of educators, frequently in ways that are harmful to children at risk.

## Understand the Systemic Roots of Service Quality Problems

The suggestion that educators' preferences and practices may be at odds with students' best interests often brings disbelief and strong objections. How can schools carry out practices that are harmful to children when most educators enter the teaching profession for largely altruistic reasons -- because they care about children? As data from our study indicate, service quality problems do not arise because substantial numbers of educators are actively hostile toward children. Rather these problems arise, for instance, when a teacher decides a child will be "better off" and will receive more personal attention in a class for the mentally retarded, even though he is not retarded; when school counselors don't actively encourage girls to enter nontraditional courses because they feel these girls will be uncomfortable in predominantly male classes; when a state department official defers to the "professional judgment" of local colleagues and doesn't vigorously investigate the expenditure of Title I funds.

The roots of service quality problems are systemic. They are not grounded in the conscious attitudes of individual educators toward children, but rather in the organizational patterns, the economic incentives, the political bargaining, and the unspoken and often unrecognized frames of reference that stabilize the educational system as a social institution.

## Change Critical Practices That Affect Service Quality

Given the continued existence of serious deficiencies in services to children, what can be done to remedy them? Some policy analysts assert that very little can be done through top-down leadership and control. Evidence gathered in the present study, as well as recent implementation studies conducted by other researchers, contradict this view and indicate that changes in educational policies can play a crucial part in increasing service quality. For example, our investigations of state and local advocacy projects indicated that major improvements in service quality occurred when advocacy groups achieved specific, well-conceived policy changes and then actively monitored their implementation. And our federal-level analysis indicated that major improvements occurred in service quality from 1970 to 1980 as a result of some federal-level reform initiatives.

Critics of such focused reform programs assert that efforts to tighten control merely lead to elaborate paper compliance efforts that detract from genuine improvements in services.

However, the choice is not between (1) implementing simple-minded top-down strategies aimed at total control of teacher behavior and (2) giving up on the possibility that changes in school district, state, and federal policy can improve service quality. Rather, the potential for reform lies in identifying a limited set of critical practices most crucial in increasing service quality and conducting a concerted campaign for their implementation. Policymakers need to base reform strategies on requirements that are "appropriately specific."

For example, an analysis of the process by which minority children become overrepresented in classes for the mentally retarded suggests that inappropriate referrals for special education assessment are one critical cause of racial disproportions. Inappropriate referrals can be reduced if teachers who make referrals receive help from an expert resource teacher in first attempting to deal with a child's learning difficulty within the regular classroom, before a child receives a full-scale special education assessment. Public policy that encourages school districts to provide such consulting help to regular classroom teachers is zeroing in on one set of critical practices that will help solve this misclassification problem.

## Understand How Multiple Levels of the System Affect Services

For an adequate conceptual approach to policy analysis, it is essential to understand how multiple levels of the educational system affect services to children. While it is sometimes acknowledged in principle that what happens in the classroom is affected by actions at other levels, few researchers or policy analysts attempt to apply this insight systematically by analyzing how actions taken elsewhere affect services to children, or which practices at higher levels of the system need to be changed to bring about desired improvement in services to children. Much research on educational policy issues focuses on one small piece of the system -- what happens in the classroom, state-level resource allocation, how the special education assessment process works -- without taking the broader view that is needed.

By taking a multi-level view, we have identified specific practices at the federal, state, school district, school, and classroom levels that interact to determine various aspects of service quality for children. The research team has documented, for instance, how federal funding for the development

of Area Vocational Education Schools, when coupled with weak federal and state enforcement, allowed local educators to develop a network of modern vocational schools that almost entirely excluded minority students.

Naturally, an adequate multi-level analysis must include an understanding of the classroom level -- the point at which services are actually provided to children and considerable discretion inevitably exercised. However, some policy analysts have sought to emphasize what happens at the point of service delivery to the virtual exclusion of other levels.

Our research indicates that this approach is misleading. Granting the importance of the classroom in the service delivery process, we are nevertheless struck by the extent to which educational practice at the classroom level is shaped and constrained by practice at other levels of the system. For example, given a principal who discourages teacher cooperation and fails to establish basic mechanisms for school-level service coordination, it is virtually impossible for individual teachers to carry out appropriate referral, assessment, and placement for special education. Or given the failure of a state to insist that local school districts provide some form of special services for students with limited English proficiency, almost no organized local commitment to address these students' problems typically exists, and individual teachers do not initiate any substantial efforts to deal with these problems.

## Understand the Federal and State Role in Achieving Service Quality

The past and potential contribution of the federal and state levels to achieving service quality is assessed inaccurately by many policy analysts.

Some assert, for example, that the schools were doing a better job for children at risk before state and federal intervention, and suggest that the hope for the future lies in returning to the policies and practices of the past. However, a careful analysis of the quality of services for various groups of children at risk at the time when intensive federal and state intervention was just getting underway clearly contradicts this view. As our review of service quality issues using data from 1970 suggests, each group of children at risk was experiencing serious service quality problems in 1970 that have been ameliorated to a greater or lesser extent by federal and state interventions in the decade of the 1970s, and we cannot find any group of children at risk that is, on balance, worse off as a result of these reforms. Often, the only organized efforts to respond to critical service quality problems that we observed in the school districts that we studied were the result of state and federal initiatives. Our data suggest (as other studies have indicated) that what will happen when we "get the federal and state government off the local educators' backs" is that these programs will atrophy, and that organized efforts to meet special needs will be largely abandoned.

Some assert that federal and state interventions create arbitrary restrictions that don't make sense at the local level, hamstring local educators, and create fragmentation in services to children. It is certainly true that federal and state interventions have such potential, and we observed instances in which these problems occurred. Most often, however, problems of fragmentation we observed were not primarily the result of state and federal intervention. Rather, we found that federal and state programs took their place in an

already fragmented service planning and delivery system. Sociologists and anthropologists have identified fragmentation as a basic feature of educational services for decades -- it was not a phenomenon introduced into the educational system by federal intervention.

Another objection to state and federal intervention that our data call into question is the claim that federal and state requirements constrain the "local community," keeping this community from providing the kind of education it wants to provide. However, when one analyzes decision making about the allocation of resources at the local level, one doesn't find any monolithic "local community" that is being constrained by state and federal initiatives. Rather, one finds, as the conflict and bargaining model drawn from political science suggests, many local interest groups striving to influence educational decisions.

Despite the frequent weakness of federal and state requirements and enforcement, federal and state initiatives have constituted, on balance, a helpful intervention on behalf of children who have historically been shortchanged in the local bargaining process. Groups espousing "local autonomy" are often speaking in their own self-interest, while presenting themselves as representing the entire local community and obscuring the unmet needs of groups that have fewer avenues for pursuing their needs through the local political process.

Finally, it is asserted that federal and state intervention diverts resources from service delivery that must now be used in completing paperwork and in conforming superficially with government regulations. However, as indicated by the federal component of the research, investigations of the actual impact of such paperwork requirements have typically failed to support the allegation that such paperwork cuts substantially into instructional time.

New federal and state initiatives on behalf of children can now be built on the extensive knowledge base created during the past twenty years that suggests the kinds of critical practices that can productively be mandated from the federal and state levels.

## Continue to Focus on Inequitable Services to Children at Risk

Recent reports calling for increased educational quality state in general terms that equity and quality are not mutually exclusive. However, the present research study has repeatedly demonstrated that, by themselves, generally stated commitments to achieve equity did not lead to improvements in specific educational practices, and there was little or no improvement in service quality for children at risk as a result.

The experience of the reform period indicates that there will be no meaningful action taken to deal with equity-related problems unless these problems become the focus of concrete policies, resource allocations, and pressure for implementation as part of the emerging reform movement for increased educational quality. For the needed concrete action to occur, conceptual approaches to understanding the educational system and the reform process must be adequate to focus attention on these service quality problems; studies of specific problems of access to school, access to specific school services, and inadequate response to special needs must be undertaken to put these problems on the public policy agenda; and groups must continue to advocate for focused policies and for policy implementation adequate to improve the day-to-day school experiences of children at risk.

## Recognize the Parent and Citizen Role in Improving Service Quality

With a few exceptions, most policy analysts ignore the role that organized parent and citizen groups have played and can play in pressing for reforms that will improve service quality. In the view of most policy analysts, the key actors in the reform process are administrators who attempt to manage the educational system and teachers who provide the direct services to children, with parents and citizens as bystanders or as erratic interveners in the reform process. However, the careful examination of federal, state, and local reform efforts that we have undertaken in this study indicates that organized parent and citizen groups and, especially, school-focused advocacy groups, have been at the center of a great many reform efforts that have improved service quality. Evidence from the present study indicates that policymakers who wish to design educational reforms that will improve service quality for children should think systematically about ways in which opportunities for advocacy by parents and citizens can be made an integral part of their reform strategies.

Taken together, the conclusions summarized above suggest an approach to improving educational quality in a manner that includes, rather than excludes, children at risk, and in a manner that incorporates, rather than disregards, lessons of the past 20 years about how the educational system actually works.