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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the effective restructuring of schools to accommodate at-risk children. Broadly, it addresses some issues of school structure and management for meeting the educational needs of this large and increasing group of students. Specifically, it defines and analyzes effectiveness within the accelerated schools model developed by Stanford University researchers to accelerate the academic progress of disadvantaged learners. It mentions the disadvantages that school districts face in the absence of such a model, suggests to administrators and policymakers how to shift district-based organizational decisions to school-based ones, and lists the advantages associated with this new arrangement. (JAM)

STRUCTURING SCHOOLS FOR GREATER EFFECTIVENESS WITH EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED OR AT-RISK STUDENTS

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STRUCTURING SCHOOLS FOR GREATER EFFECTIVENESS WITH EDUCATIONALLY DISADVANTAGED OR AT-RISK CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

The public schools of California (Brown and Haycock 1984) and the Nation (Levin 1986) are becoming increasingly characterized by students who are considered to be educationally at-risk or disadvantaged. The educationally at-risk population consists of students who lack the home and community resources to fully benefit from conventional schooling practices. Such students are especially concentrated among minority groups, immigrants, non-English-speaking families and economically-disadvantaged populations. Because of poverty, cultural differences, or linguistic differences they tend to have low academic achievement and to experience high secondary school dropout rates. And, these educational deficiencies translate into poor life chances with respect to employment and income as well as political and social participation in American society.

The challenge of educationally at-risk students has become especially prominent because of the rapid growth of these populations. High birth rates and rates of immigration (both legal and undocumented) among these groups have increased substantially the numbers and proportions of disadvantaged students in U.S. schools. Recent estimates suggest that on a national basis, about 30 percent of students in primary and

secondary schools are disadvantaged and that this proportion will continue to rise sharply in the future (Levin 1986). In many of the major cities of the U.S. the proportion of disadvantaged students exceeds 80 percent. Even these figures understate the magnitude of the problem because about half of the disadvantaged student group fails to complete high school.

Schools in the State of California are particularly impacted by at-risk or disadvantaged students. Almost half of the elementary-secondary students are drawn from minority backgrounds, and about one-fifth of children of school age are in poverty families. A high proportion of students are also characterized by limited-English proficiency. Achievement scores and dropout rates for the State suggest that students from these backgrounds do very poorly in school. They are typically two or more years behind their grade level in standardized achievement when they reach high school, and their rates of dropping out of high school are high. This paper addresses some issues of school structure and management for meeting the educational needs of this large and increasing group of students.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PRESENT APPROACH

Although the states have initiated a wave of widespread educational reforms, they have not really addressed the specific needs of the educationally disadvantaged. The reforms stress raising standards at the secondary level, without providing additional resources or new strategies to assist the disadvantaged in meeting these higher standards (Brown and Haycock 1984;

National Coalition of Advocates for Students 1985). Thus, it is not surprising that the status of the disadvantaged has not been found to have improved under the latest reforms. Any strategy for improving the educational plight of the disadvantaged must begin at the elementary level and must be dedicated to preparing children for doing high quality work in secondary school. Simply raising standards at the secondary level without making it possible for the disadvantaged to meet the new standards, is more likely to increase their dropping out (McDill, Natriello, and Pallas 1985).

The present approach to assisting the educationally disadvantaged is to provide them with remedial or compensatory services to improve their educational achievement. Levin (1987 a & b) argues that such a strategy will ensure that such students never catch up to the mainstream because it: (1) reduces expectations for the students and their teachers by institutionalizing them into categories of slow learners; (2) slows down the pace of instruction so that they get farther and farther behind their non-disadvantaged peers; (3) emphasizes the mechanics of basic skills without providing substance that will keep the student interested and motivated; (4) provides no mechanism or incentives for closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students; and (5) does not provide adequate involvement of teachers and parents in formulating the strategies that they must implement in schools and the home to improve the learning of their students and children.

ACCELERATED SCHOOLS AS A SOLUTION

A number of researchers at Stanford and other institutions have been doing research and development for the past several years on alternatives to present practice (e.g. Educational Leadership March 1987). The Accelerated Schools concept provides an umbrella for linking this work into a school-wide framework. The goal of the Accelerated Schools Program is to accelerate the learning of the disadvantaged so that they are able to perform at grade level by the end of elementary school. Such schools must be characterized by high expectations on the part of teachers, parents, and students; deadlines by which students will be expected to meet particular educational requirements; stimulating instructional programs, planning by the educational staff who will offer the programs, and the use of all available resources in the community including parents, senior citizens, and social agencies.

The Accelerated School is a transitional elementary school that is designed to bring disadvantaged students up to grade level by the completion of the sixth grade (Levin 1987 a). The goal of the school is to enable disadvantaged students to take advantage of mainstream secondary school instruction in seventh grade by effectively closing the achievement gap in elementary school. The approach is also expected to reduce dropouts, drug use, and teenage pregnancies by creating a strong sense of self-worth and educational accomplishment for students who would normally feel rejected by schools and frustrated in terms of their own abilities.

The school is based upon an accelerated curriculum that is designed to bring all children up to grade level. The entire organization of the school will focus on this goal. The approach is based upon the construction of an assessment system that evaluates the performance of each child at school entry and sets a trajectory for meeting the overall school goal for that child. Periodic evaluations on wide-spectrum, standardized achievement tests as well as tailored assessments created by school staff for each strand of the curriculum will enable the school to see if the child is on the anticipated trajectory.

Major curriculum aspects include a heavily language-based approach, even in mathematics. Language use will be emphasized across the curriculum, with an early introduction to writing and reading for meaning. A stress will also be placed upon interesting applications of new tools to everyday problems and events to stress the usefulness of what is being taught and learned and to introduce a problem-solving orientation.

Parents will be deeply involved in two ways. First, they will be asked to participate in a written agreement which clarifies the obligations of parents, school staff, and students. The agreement will be explained to parents and translated, if necessary. Second, the parents will be given opportunities to interact with the school program and to receive training in order to provide active learning assistance and support for their children. Parents will be asked to set high educational expectations for

their children and to support their success as well as to encourage reading.

Other features include the implementation of an extended-day program in which rest periods, physical activities, the arts, and a time period for independent assignments or homework will be provided. During this period, college students and senior citizen volunteers will work with individual students to provide learning assistance. Since many of the students are "latch-key" children, the extension of the school day is likely to be attractive to parents. Instructional strategies will also include peer tutoring and cooperative learning. Both have been shown to be especially effective with disadvantaged students (Slavin and Madden 1987).

These broad features of the accelerated school are designed to make it a total institution for accelerating the educational progress of the disadvantaged, rather than just grafting on compensatory or remedial classes to elementary schools with a conventional agenda. Central to the strategy is the placement of curriculum and instructional decisions in the hands of the instructional staff of the school. Those charged with responsibility for providing the instruction and making the school succeed will also be responsible for decision-making.

Each school will have an overall steering committee and task forces that will be composed of teachers and other instructional personnel. The principal will serve a central function as instructional leader in coordinating and guiding this activity and

in addressing the logistical needs to translate decisions into reality. School staff will set out a program that is consonant with student needs and the strengths of the district and school staff. Information, technical assistance, and training will be provided by district personnel. In this way, the reform will be a "bottom-up" approach in which those who are providing the instruction will make the decisions which they will implement and evaluate.

We believe that this approach has a high probability of ultimate success because of its emphasis on the instrumental goal of bringing students up to grade level by the completion of sixth grade; its stress on acceleration of learning and high expectations; its reliance on a professional model of school governance which is attractive to educators; its capacity to benefit from instructional strategies that have shown good results for the disadvantaged within existing models of compensatory education; and its ability to draw upon all of the resources available to the community including parents and senior citizens.

The Stanford Accelerated School Project is now assisting two elementary schools to establish accelerated school programs. These two schools are in San Francisco and Redwood City, California. Both schools have very high concentrations of disadvantaged students. The Redwood City school enrollments are comprised predominantly of hispanic students, while those in our San Francisco school consist of a racial mixture (31 percent black, 27 percent hispanic, 17 percent Chinese, and so on).

The purpose of these pilot programs is to begin to implement the process in two schools while simultaneously providing a basis for building our knowledge on how to implement the changes. Ultimately, we expect to be able to train groups on a regional basis to assist school districts to create accelerated schools in their jurisdictions. In addition, we expect to create an Accelerated Schools clearing-house at Stanford that will do research, disseminate information, and provide training for a national movement to address boldly the needs of disadvantaged youngsters.

The stress is on the elementary school as a whole rather than on a particular grade, curriculum, approach to teacher training, or other more limited strategy. Underlying the organizational approach are three major assumptions: First, the strategy must enlist a unity of purpose among all of the participants. Second, it must "empower" all of the major participants and raise their feelings of efficacy and responsibility for the outcomes of the school. Third, it must build on the considerable strengths of the participants rather than decrying their weaknesses.

Unity of purpose refers to agreement among parents, teachers, and students on a common set of goals for the school that will be the focal point of everyone's efforts. Clearly, these should focus on bringing children into the educational mainstream so that they can fully benefit from their further schooling experiences and adult opportunities.

Empowerment refers to the ability of the key participants to make important decisions at the school level and in the home to improve the education of students. It is based upon breaking the present stalemate among administrators, teachers, parents, and students in which the participants tend to blame each other as well as other factors "beyond their control" for the poor educational outcomes of disadvantaged students. Unless all of the major actors can be empowered to seek a common set of goals and influence the educational and social process that can achieve those goals, it is unlikely that the desired improvements will take place or be sustained.

An accelerated school must build upon an expanded role for all groups to participate in and take responsibility for the educational process and educational results. Such an approach requires a shift to a school-based decision approach with heavy involvement of teachers and parents and new administrative roles.

Building on strengths refers to utilizing all of the learning resources that students, parents, school staff, and communities can bring to the educational endeavor. In the quest to place blame for the lack of efficacy of schools in improving the education of the disadvantaged, it is easy to exaggerate weaknesses of the various participants and ignore strengths. Parents have considerable strengths in serving as positive influences for the education of their children, not the least of which a deep love for their children and a desire for their children to succeed. Teachers are capable of insights, intuition,

and teaching and organizational acumen that are lost in schools that fail to draw upon these strengths by excluding teachers from participating in the decisions that they must implement. Both parents and teachers are largely underutilized sources of talent in the schools.

The strengths of disadvantaged students are often overlooked because they lack the learning behaviors associated with middle-class students rather than seeing that disadvantaged students carry their own unusual assets which can be used to accelerate their learning. These often include an interest and curiosity in oral and artistic expression, abilities to learn through the manipulation of appropriate learning materials, a capability for engrossment in intrinsically interesting tasks, and the ability to learn to write before attaining competence in decoding skills which are prerequisite to reading. In addition, such students can serve as enthusiastic and effective learning resources for other students through peer tutoring and cooperative learning approaches.

School-based administrators are also underutilized by being placed in "command" roles to meet the directives and standard-operating-procedures of districts rather than to work creatively with parents, staff, and students. And, communities have considerable resources including youth organizations, senior citizens, businesses, and religious groups that should be viewed as major assets for the schools and the children of the community.

The strengths of these participants can be viewed as a major set of resources for creating accelerated schools.

Within the context of a unity of purpose, empowerment and building-on-strengths, the Accelerated School utilizes an accelerated curriculum and accelerated instructional strategies to bring all children up to grade level and into the educational mainstream. A major focus is to ensure that all students see themselves in a very positive light as productive learners with many future possibilities.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN ACCELERATED SCHOOLS

The three principles of unity of purpose, empowerment, and building on strengths can be illustrated in the case of family involvement. With respect to unity of purpose, it is important to get parents committed to many of the same educational goals as the school (Epstein 1987). Most families are willing to buy into accelerated education for their own children, so the main challenge is to explain to them what the goals and activities of accelerated schools and to link their efforts to those of the schools and other institutions. Parental empowerment refers to the creation of effective roles on their part where they can contribute to the accelerated education of their children. Finally, building on strengths refers to the recognition of the strengths that parents have and how these might be used as a basis for program development. It is useful to comment on each of these.

(1) Unity of Purpose-- In recent articles, both Coleman (1987) and Heath and McLaughlin (1987) have decried the lack of institutional networks, norms, and resources that can be allied with schools to provide the "social capital" for success, especially among educationally at-risk students. Certainly, this concern applies to the school-family nexus as well as the lack of coherent linkages among families, schools, and community agencies. For example, most schools treat parents of educationally disadvantaged students as obstacles rather than allies. It is common to hear that the parents lack resources and are not supportive of their childrens' schools or education. The result is that schools view parental concerns as being contrary to those of the school. The fact of the matter is that most parents of such children want their children to succeed in school, but they don't know how to be supportive within the resource limits that constrain their lives. Accordingly, it is necessary to communicate with parents on the potential of accelerated programs for their children and the need for parental support. The parents must be viewed as allies rather than problems, and they must be told that accelerated education cannot succeed without their participation.

(2) Empowerment-- In order for parents to participate in educational decisions affecting their children, they need the opportunities to do so. These opportunities will depend upon providing parents with feasible activities that they can pursue in behalf of their children; establishing communications between school and parents that keep them informed; and offering training

and educational activities for parents that will enhance their capacity to contribute to their childrens' education.

With respect to feasible activities, we will discuss those below under the category of "building on strengths." Communications refer to the practice of keeping parents informed on all school matters that are pertinent to their child or parental participation. Parents need information on school programs, expectations, and the participation, progress, and behavior of their child. They also need information on parental activities, meetings, and roles. Although much of this information must be communicated in writing, it is important to seek other vehicles such as community meetings, telephone calls, parent conferences, and scheduled home visits.

The style of communication should be one which maximizes the effective dissemination of information from school to parent and parent to school. This means that schools should hire parent coordinators who can undertake this function rather than relying only on traditional newsletters or PTA organizations. Such coordinators should reach out to homes and community organizations rather than limiting activities to the school site. Availability of school personnel should extend to weekends and evenings, if necessary, in order to accommodate parent schedules.

Educational and training activities are especially important for parents to assist them in meeting the educational needs of their children. These activities can extend from parental counseling to a single training session to multiple sessions. For example,

counselors can assist parents to address specific concerns that the parents or teachers may have. Single sessions can be given on helping children with homework, developing good study habits, and productive parent-teacher conferences. Multiple sessions can address specific subjects on which parents need to learn or brush-up in order to assist their children. These activities can be combined with social activities such as coffees, or musical and theatrical performances at the school. Many of the training sessions can include both parents and students as is done in Family Math, a successful program for parents to assist their children in mathematics. Finally, schools should set out a special place for parents with comfortable furniture, coffee, and reading materials on the school and on children. The parent lounge can be used for parent meetings, discussions with other parents or with teachers, and for a bulletin board with coming events.

(3) Building on Strengths

The program must build on the many strengths of parents in caring for and wishing to assist their children. All parents love their children and want them to do well in life. There are many simple actions that parents can take to reinforce the activities of the school. We have tried to build many of these into the approach that we have been developing for parents in the Accelerated School.

For example, all parents or guardians will be asked to affirm an agreement that clarifies the goals of the Accelerated School and

the obligations of parents, students, and school staff. The agreement will be explained to parents and translated, if necessary. Parental obligations will include such supportive roles as ensuring that their children go to bed at a reasonable hour and attend school regularly and punctually. They will be asked to set high educational expectations for their children, to talk to them regularly about the importance of school, and to take an interest in their children's activities and the materials that the children bring home.

They will be asked to encourage their children to read on a daily basis and to ensure that independent assignments are addressed. They will also be expected to respond to queries from the school. The purpose is to emphasize the importance of the parental role through the dignity of a written agreement that is affirmed by all parties. Students and school staff will also have appropriate obligations regarding their roles, with the understanding that the Accelerated School will only succeed if all three parties work together.

Parents will be given opportunities to interact with the school program and to receive training for providing active assistance to their children. Such training will include not only the skills for working with a child, but also many of the academic skills necessary to understand what the child is doing. In this respect, it may be necessary to work closely with agencies offering adult basic education to provide the parental foundation. The parental dimension can improve the capacity and effort of the child as well

as increase the time devoted to academic learning and provide additional instructional resources in the home.

It is important to emphasize that parent participation is not a solution in itself. If the school does not provide a strong commitment to the needs of educationally disadvantaged children; if teachers are beleaguered by daily demands on them in schools that lack a unity of purpose and good leadership; and if all instructional strategies are traditional remedial approaches; there is little that a parent involvement program can do. In fact, under those conditions, the school will be so lackluster that there will be little to attract the participation of parents.

Parent involvement must be a part of a well-orchestrated, overall strategy to bring educationally-disadvantaged students into the educational mainstream. With a dynamic school program, parents will feel energized and welcome. Under those conditions they will be part of the "solution", not part of the "problem".

SCHOOL-BASED DECISIONS

At the heart of the Accelerated School is a school-based decision approach. In this section I will argue that such an approach is needed for all schools, not just those designed to accelerate the education of at-risk students. Two major arguments can be posited for shifting district decision-making and activities more fully to individual schools. The first is that districts might save money by doing so because the activities can be done more efficiently at the school level. The second is that even if little or no money can be saved, educational outcomes can

be improved significantly. That is, resource allocation can become more efficient by placing decisions closer to the students and educators who are affected. We will address only the second of these issues.

Will Educational Effectiveness Rise?

A basic claim motivating school-based decision approaches is that educational effectiveness will rise by placing decisions closer to those who must implement them. Under this plan the school district would relegate certain types of decisions to the individual schools themselves and provide support to those schools to facilitate decision-making, to obtain information on alternatives, and to obtain the resource needs associated with decisions. To understand why such changes should increase educational effectiveness of schools, one needs to explore the present distribution of decision-making in school districts and its consequences.

Every work organization must address and articulate three aspects of work activity: planning and design, implementation, and evaluation (Blauner 1964). Planning and design refers to the organization of work, how it will be performed, who will perform it, and what equipment and other resources will be used. Implementation refers to the execution of the work plans, and evaluation refers to the assessment of the work process and outcomes.

In the case of schools, almost all of the planning and design is set out by the district administration and state guidelines.

Within the guidelines set by the states and by local schcol boards, the district administration plans the curriculum, resource allocation, personnel selection, school organization.

There are a number of negative consequences of this distribution of roles. The first is that district policies are typically made in a uniform fashion that ignores the enormous variety of student needs and characteristics that are actually found in the different schools of the district. Those who make the policies and decisions lack regular contact with students and teaching, reinforcing at an abstract level the utility of "teacher-proof" curriculum and instructional strategies. Although teachers sometimes resist this standardization and attempt to make their own appropriate modifications, they are constrained by district adoptions of textbooks, curriculum, and evaluation criteria which limit severely the scope of discretion. Educational effectiveness is likely to benefit from educational decisions that respond to unique student needs and characteristics rather than district-wide approaches. This change would require a shift in decision-making to the educators at the school level who are in closest touch with the students.

A second obstacle to effectiveness is that by placing both decisions and evaluation in a locus that is external to those who must implement the decisions, teachers and school-based educators can not take responsibility for educational outcomes. Under these circumstances it is easy to view educational outcomes are resulting from factors beyond the control of classroom teachers,

since such teachers have little power to affect the planning, design, and evaluation of educational activities. Thus, the work day of teachers is often a litany of mechanical activities that are prescribed by the policies, practices, procedures, curriculum, and materials that are determined by school authorities at the central level. Such an arrangement reinforces teacher insensitivity to actual student needs as teachers learn to follow standard procedures and lack a sense of efficacy to change things. One could even argue that the present arrangement inures teachers to the particular needs of their schools and students, since they can do little about altering conditions to satisfy those needs.

A shift of school decision-making and responsibility from the district level to individual schools could reverse this trend by increasing the authority of teachers to make decisions and the accountability of schools to take major responsibility for their students' performance. Commitment to a work activity at a complex and professional level is best obtained when the persons implementing those activities participate in their design and in the evaluation of their outcomes. In this way, teachers can take more responsibility for meeting the educational needs of their students as well as sharing a greater emotional commitment to their activities through their "ownership" of them.

A third aspect of the present arrangement is the underutilization of talent in the schools. The persistent concerns about improving the quality of the teaching force in American education ignore the fact that there is probably far more

talent among existing classroom teachers than the schools are presently taking advantage of. Since there are few opportunities for teachers qua teachers to affect the organization, curriculum, or the broad educational strategies that are imposed upon their schools, classroom teachers learn to ignore the obvious and to repress their ideas and suggestions. A productive school would do precisely the opposite by encouraging teachers to develop solutions to educational challenges and to present them in the overall decision forum as well as adapting them to their own classroom situations. Many educators who have worked with teachers find an unusual wealth of productive ideas among them, but the present mode of school organization stifles such initiative and underutilizes the talent of the school-based teaching force.

Both existing studies on worker participation generally (Levin 1987 c) and their potential application to schools suggest that a school-based decision approach could improve educational efficiency considerably. In the next section we will suggest some ways of thinking about new organizational arrangements.

CRITERIA FOR A SCHOOL-BASED ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL

The literature on improving organizational functioning and productivity through decentralization and worker participation in decision-making suggests that a number of criteria must be met for an effective approach (Levin 1987 c; Susman 1976). These include: (1) accountability; (2) wide scope of discretion; (3) group and individual incentives; and (4) appropriate information.

(1) Accountability. The first requirement is that schools have a clear picture of their goals and are held accountable for them. This means that the school district and individual schools should agree on the priorities for each school as well as a system of measuring progress towards meeting these objectives. Such objectives may include not only student achievement, but also student attendance and participation in school activities, parental participation, reductions in student vandalism, and other appropriate goals. Each of these should be associated with an approach to measurement that is appropriate and feasible, and annual assessments of these dimensions should be made tc evaluate school performance.

(2) Wide Scope of Discretion. In order to address these goals, the school will need a wide scope of discretion in making decisions. Clearly, there may be some limits to that discretion established by district policies and collective bargaining agreements, but these should still allow a substantial range for decision-making at the school level. To a very large extent the staff of the school must have the discretionary power to make decisions over major aspects of school organization such as student grouping policies, instructional strategies, specific approaches to curriculum, and instructional materials. The power to use the talent and commitment of school staff to addressing the goals of the school will require the ability to make major decisions that will determine outcomes.

(3) Incentives. The school and its personnel must be provided with incentives for reaching goals. These incentives can be symbolic in the form of public awards and praise, financial in the form of bonuses for personnel or additional resources for the school program, and intrinsic in the form of a high level of professional comraderie. All three types of incentives should be considered. There is some reason to believe that intrinsic satisfactions of school staff will rise in relation to the degree to which they have the power and supportive conditions to make important decisions about their own activities. Other incentives can be constructed to meet the special needs of individual schools and their particular goals.

(4) Information. Good decisions can only be made when decision-makers possess useful information on alternatives, their consequences, and requirements for implementation. Thus, a provision must be made to provide such information to schools in order to enhance their decision-making capacity. To a large degree, this type of service will become the responsibility of the school district, since such information capabilities benefit from a large measure of centralization and economies of scale.

A PLAN

Based upon the work that my group has been doing in establishing Accelerated Schools for the disadvantaged, one feasible model for school-based decisions would work in the following way.

Steering Committee

Teachers (and possibly teaching aides too) would elect a steering committee for each school year, and the principal would be an ex officio member. It is also desirable to include at least one parent representative. The size of the steering committee would depend upon the size of the school, and the composition would be based upon balance between levels and areas of the school. For example, at the elementary level the steering committee might consist of two aides, six teachers, and a parent, where half of the representatives were drawn from the lower grades and half from the upper grades. In secondary schools the representation might be based upon subject areas. The steering committee would meet weekly with the principal to establish priorities, review progress towards goals, identify areas that need attention, and provide a regular forum for school issues.

The steering committee would also have the responsibility for establishing task forces and committees to address specific school issues. Each would be composed of 3-5 members including both teachers and other personnel. Committees would be charged with addressing areas of continuing attention such as subject areas or personnel selection and evaluation. Task forces would be characterized as problem solving groups asked to address specific areas of concern that arose. They would be disbanded, once their duties were discharged. Both would report regularly to the steering committee on their activities, resource needs, and recommendations for action.

The steering committee could approve any matter that did not have school-wide implications, such as the establishment of a new course. In contrast, school-wide decisions would have to be approved on the basis of a vote of the entire school staff. Once a month and on an as-needed basis, the entire staff of the school would convene to vote on the recommendations of the steering committee. Meetings of all entities would require the public display of agendas at least 24 hours in advance and minutes of meetings within 48 hours following.

The Principal

The principal in such a school would have unusual leadership responsibilities. First, the principal would be a major agent for identifying problem areas and calling them to the attention of the steering committee. Second, the principal would be responsible for facilitating decision-making by the various groups, assisting in group dynamics and in obtaining pertinent information. Third, the principal would be responsible for establishing task forces and committees to address specific obtaining and allocating resources from the school district to implement decisions. These activities would provide for the principal a much fuller leadership role than under the present system.

School Districts

School districts would play a greater service role for individual schools than they presently do. Particularly important would be the provision of information on alternatives for addressing specific problems that are identified by the school.

At the behest of the steering committee, the principal would request information and assistance for task forces and school committees that wished to explore alternatives. A formal request would be made for such assistance. Other areas for providing technical services would be in the areas of curriculum and staff development. District staff would serve in these roles as "consultants" to individual schools with a strong client identification.

A major portion of the individual schools' budget would be allocated at the discretion of the individual school. Beyond the normal staff requirements which would be funded at the district level, additional staff could be funded from the budget of the individual school. The school would also be able to hire its own consultants and purchase instructional materials and other supplies. Budgetary allocations for staff development would also be under the control of the individual school.

Transitional Training Requirements

In addition to the formal organizational changes that would need to be established, this approach has substantial implications for both in-service and pre-service training. Existing and prospective teachers would need to learn how to work in groups, solve problems, construct better systems for classroom assessment, and use information effectively. Interpersonal dynamics and decision-making skills would also be important. Our own experiences with two pilot schools suggest that when existing teachers are given the opportunities to work together to make

decisions, they are able to develop many of these skills through "learning-by-doing."

Summary

A substantial shift from district-based educational decisions to school-based ones should have important positive consequences for education, particularly in large urban school districts. However, such a change in institutional functions should not be expected, in itself, to provide educational savings. If there is waste in central district offices at the present time as has been suggested for many of the largest cities, that waste should be addressed even in the absence of shifts to individual schools. Of course, to the degree that the change in the locus of decisions provides a strategy for reform, the shifts could be used to reduce waste where it might be protected in the absence of reform.

Under the new arrangement, school districts would perform service functions for individual schools to a far greater extent. This means that substantial numbers of personnel would continue to be needed for in-service training and curriculum development, but they would function as consultants to individual schools and would have to be responsive to school needs. Many of the other functions of school districts would be retained such as central personnel functions, insurance, reporting, district-wide educational services (certain types of special education, music, and arts) and other activities that can be produced more efficiently at a central level rather than being duplicated from school-to-school.

Even many of these functions would change under a school-based decision approach in that the district administration would need to be much more responsive to the requirements of individual schools than they presently are. It would be healthy for individual schools to periodically evaluate these services as a method of providing the school district and school board with information on the effectiveness of such services. Such evaluations could also be used to guide personnel decisions regarding personnel in the central district office. Under certain conditions the schools ought to be able to contract out such services if they cannot be satisfied within the district.

A school-based decision approach would go far to increase professionalization of teachers and other school-based educators and to place responsibility for student outcomes in the hands of those responsible for delivering instruction. Such an approach would more fully draw upon the talent of teachers and insure their commitment to the educational programs that they are charged with implementing. It would also create ways in which parents and students could have more influence on school programs and educational outcomes, empowering those communities in ways that would be supportive to obtaining good educational results.

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