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ABSTRACT

This document examines recent state school reform efforts from two perspectives: the strategies states adopt to improve educational excellence and the influence those strategies have on the functional dimensions of education policy. The paper reports the research findings of a study that examined state reform strategies nationally. The study identified three distinct strategies: (1) rational planning; (2) free market; and (3) political interaction. These strategies are represented by Texas, California, and South Carolina, respectively. School reform in Texas shows that rational planning and regulation are inappropriate policy instruments for achieving educational excellence. California illustrates the impotence of a permissive, decentralized strategy. School reform in South Carolina, in contrast, aims at improving the organizational competence of schools. (Author/SI)

POLICY ISSUES

Educational Reform: The Need to Redefine State-Local Governance of Schools

by Thomas B. Timar
Harvard Graduate School of Education

March 1989

Prepared by:
POLICY AND PLANNING CENTER
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Many ideas explored in this paper will be discussed in a similar article scheduled to appear in the March 1989 *Phi Delta Kappan*.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The level and intensity of state-level education policy activity that began with the school reform movement in the 1980s is unprecedented in the nation's history. There are now more rules and regulations about educational practice than ever before. Nationally, there are few aspects of life in schools that remain untouched by state reform efforts.

For many educators, the new level of state activism signals a troubling trend: the accelerating loss of local control over education policy and practice. The important question for policymakers is what this effect has had on schools. Are schools actually better off as a result of increased state prescription of education policy and practice? Or, are schools simply becoming more bureaucratized and overburdened with regulations and mandates? Does school reform merely add to the baggage that the public has heaped on schools over the past 80 years?

This paper examines recent state school reform efforts from two perspectives: the strategies states adopt to improve educational excellence and the influence those strategies have on the functional dimensions of education policy. This paper reports the research findings of a study that examined state reform strategies nationally. The study identified three distinct strategies--rational planning, free market, and political interaction. These strategies are represented by Texas, California, and South Carolina. School reform in Texas shows how rational planning and regulation are inappropriate policy instruments

for achieving educational excellence. Schools in Texas are enmeshed in rules and regulations. Many schools are more concerned with complying with the myriad state mandates than improving instruction. California illustrates the impotence of a permissive, decentralized strategy. School reform in South Carolina, in contrast to the other two, aims at improving the organizational competence of schools.

The traditional view of education governance that sees control over schools as a zero-sum game between the state and local levels is inadequate to explain the dynamics of the education reform process. Achieving educational excellence requires a redefinition of traditional governance relationships. State policymakers must recognize that they have a limited repertoire of reforms from which to draw. They can control macro policy: teacher certification, compulsory attendance, revenue generation, resource allocation, and the like. However, state policymakers have little control over daily events in the schools.

The focus of state policy must shift, then, to improving the organizational competence of schools. For this reason, South Carolina's reform strategy shows the most promise. Rather than miring schools in a swamp of regulations or simply throwing money at them in hopes that something good will happen, reformers in South Carolina attempted to change the way that schools do business. Improving organizational competence is not simply a "state" or "local" issue. It is the responsibility of state-level policymakers, professional educational organizations, schools of education, civic organizations, and local parents, teachers, and administrators.

Hence, the state must frame the context in terms of responsibility and accountability for the school system. Schools must also be given the resources to realize state expectations. Within the state context, local teachers, administrators, and parents must have the flexibility to adjust curriculum and pedagogy to suit local needs. They must also have the ability to allocate resources. In addition, improving organizational competence necessitates acquisition of new skills for teachers and administrators. Assessment, planning, and evaluation are important components of school improvement. However, schools of education do not often teach those skills. Similarly, professional education organizations must take a more active role in socializing teachers and administrators to assume greater responsibility for what goes on in schools, as well as for the products of schooling.

SCHOOL REFORM: THE ACTORS

Not since the wave of post-Sputnik reforms has education been so prominent and persistent on state and national policy agendas. Presidential candidates, governors, state legislators, and chief state school officers are vying with one another over education policy.

National Interest

The Council of State Governments, the National Governors' Association, and the National Council of State Legislatures have all given education high priority on their respective agendas. The National Governors' Association, in fact, created several task forces in 1985 to hold hearings on state policy options for education reform. The association intends to monitor state actions on the groups' recommendations for several years to come. Foundations, like Carnegie, are highly active and visible in promoting their own reform agendas. Business groups, like the Committee for Economic Development and the California Business Roundtable, as well as business leaders like Xerox Corporation's David Kearns[1], are committed to shaping educational policy. And teachers' unions, too, have broadened their focus from teacher welfare to institutional welfare.

State Response

The participation of new actors in education policymaking broadened the roster of individuals concerned about education. In California,

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[1] David Kearns and Dennis Doyle, "An Educational Recovery Plan for America" (Phi Delta Kappan. April 1988), pp. 565-570.

for example, the participation of powerful business-industry coalitions in the process of education reform was particularly influential in diluting the power traditionally wielded by teachers' unions. In Texas particularly, but also in other states, education reform became a test of political strength between newly formed business coalitions, on the one hand, and entrenched education coalitions, on the other. The result is that education policy is no longer the satrapy of educators.

As politicians poached on territory that had traditionally belonged to educators, educators moved into politics. This is not news in states like California, but it is novel in Texas, where education reforms prompted athletic coaches and administrators to form political action committees. The groups state that they generally support the state's role on reform but are concerned about "the inflexible requirements in the law as related to discipline and the career ladder."[2]

The visibility of the education reform effort is manifested in the intensity of state policy activity. Since 1983, more rules and regulations about all aspects of education have been generated by states than in the previous 20 years. More than 700 statutes affecting some aspect of the teaching profession alone were enacted nationally between 1984 and 1986. The school reform movement created a whole new body of rules governing the behavior of students, teachers, and administrators. For students, there are rules about participation in sports and other

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[2] Education Week (January 8, 1986).

extracurricular activities, about how much and what kind of homework must be done, and about how many times students may miss school before they fail their courses. Other rules dictate what kinds of courses students must take, how much time should be devoted to each subject each day, and what topics must be covered in each class. For teachers, there are rules about placement on career ladders and eligibility for merit pay. For prospective teachers, new rules govern credentialing, competency testing, and academic preparation. For schools, some states prescribe how many times daily announcements may be made over the school intercom system. Some states are taking over poorly performing schools. Probably very few schools and teachers around the country have not been touched in some way by the school reform effort. And there is no evidence that school reform efforts and the debates they generate will abate in the foreseeable future.

State regulation of schooling is, of course, not a recent phenomenon. Schools have long been subject to a variety of state controls, such as those specifying teacher tenure and certification, collective bargaining, basic curriculum, and number of days taught. But historically such regulations tended to leave a great deal of discretion regarding the governance of schools to local officials. In Texas, for example, the term "independent" in the name of school districts traditionally meant just that. Consequently, school reform in Texas signaled a major shift in state education policy. For other states, like California, state involvement in education policymaking is common

practice. California's school reform measure was preceded, however, by years of intense state policy activity.

Local Concerns

In many states, the new level of activism in education changed traditional patterns of state and local control. According to one school board member in Texas, "The legislature has taken over and tried to control everything in God Almighty's world."[3] In their assessment of the school reform movement, Dennis Doyle and Terry Hartle suggest that "the process of implementing the new laws seems likely to shift the balance of power even further from local education agencies to state governments."[4]

SCHOOL REFORM: THE DIMENSIONS

School reform is manifest on three dimensions. They are (1) the conversation, (2) the authorized movement, and (3) the regional or localist movement. Understanding the dynamics of the three dimensions and how they relate to one another is critical to policy outcomes.

The Conversation

Conversation is best regarded as the "Zeitgeist" of reform. It is synonymous with the change in the rhetoric of schooling and thus the

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[3] Education Week (May 8, 1985).

[4] Dennis P. Doyle and Terry W. Hartle, Excellence in Education: The States Take Charge (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1985).

attitudes of those who speak. For instance, "coaching" and "clinical supervision" have become ubiquitous terms in education circles. At the national level, this aspect of the reform effort was powerfully affected by the purple rhetoric ("a rising tide of mediocrity," "unilateral disarmament", and "a nation at risk") of the National Commission on Excellence in Education.

On the local level, the conversation is what teachers talk about in the teachers' room in the wake of A Nation at Risk[5] or of the Carnegie report on teaching.[6] How do teachers and administrators talk about reform, and what do they think about state initiatives to improve educational quality? What do teachers think about career ladder programs or teacher competency testing? The conversation is influenced by various factors: the professional organizations to which teachers and administrators belong, the professional norms teachers develop in schools of education, and how teachers think about themselves and their roles as teachers. How teachers talk about school improvement colors what they do in the classroom. That, in turn, powerfully influences the success or failure of efforts to realize educational excellence. The conversation and those who direct it have had an enormous impact on the educational excellence movement.

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[5] The National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, April 1983).

[6] Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, A Nation Prepared: Teachers from the 21st Century (New York: Author, 1986).

The Authorized Movement

The authorized movement is the world of state mandates, legislation, and the highly visible political activity surrounding formal structures and directives--the official version of reform. It comprises state efforts to "manage" educational excellence. Controlling teacher training and evaluation, allocating resources, testing performance, and specifying curriculum content are some ways that states attempt to manage the process and substance of schooling. The authorized movement is the most visible response to A Nation at Risk and has received the greatest amount of public attention.

The authorized dimension defines state interest and expectations and allocates resources to realize them. Policy manifestations of state interest can be highly centralized or decentralized. The degree of centralization is at the heart of strategic debates about policy approaches. Although it has received little systematic attention, the issues involved are fundamental to the outcome of reform efforts. The centralized approach to reform has been criticized for ignoring local needs and priorities, for demanding uniformity at the expense of innovation and diversity, and for creating difficulties of implementation given the unstable nature of policy systems and the ultimate power of street-level bureaucrats.[7] Conversely, bottom-up strategies have been

[7] See Robert Gerstein, "The Practice of Fidelity to the Law," in Compliance and the Law: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach, ed. Samuel Krislov et al. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1972). See also Richard Weatherly and Michael Lipsky, "Street-Level Bureaucrats and Institutional Innovation: Implementing Special Education Reform," Harvard Education Review 47 (May 1977).

criticized as ineffective because they permit local officials too much discretion and, thus, dilute state policy goals.

Local schools regard with concern the centralization that has accompanied many state reforms. The Committee for Economic Development argues that local control is central to the reform effort itself:

> Our recommendations are grounded in the belief that reform is most needed where learning takes place--in the individual schools, in the classroom, and in the interaction between teacher and student. As businessmen worldwide have learned, problems can best be solved at the lowest level of operation. While structures are needed, bureaucracies tend to focus on rules and regulations rather than result, thus stifling initiative. Therefore, we believe that school governance should be retained at the local level, and not be supplanted by statewide boards of education or national dictates. However, states should set standards and provide the guidance and support to local schools that are necessary for meeting these standards.[8]

The Regional or Localist Movement

The regional or localist movement comprises the blizzard of local and regional activities. It represents local interpretations and responses to the official version of reform. The localist dimension defines implementation and practice. The latter can stimulate change--or resistance to it. Local opposition to state-mandated reform in Texas illustrates the inability of state action to override local practice. California, on the other hand, illustrates the effects of a state strategy that relies on local initiative without defining a state role. Local responses to state intent become opportunistic.

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[8] Committee for Economic Development, "Investing in our Children." Quoted in Education Week (September 11, 1985).

Like the authorized movement, the localist movement is structural and regulatory, but its various changes are masked by their dispersion. It is in this morass that projects like the Bay Area Writing Project in California, Theodore Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools, and Miami's school-based management experiments are rooted. Understanding the dimensions of this set of initiatives and the directions in which they are moving on a local, much less national, level is extremely difficult. That does not mean that localism is unimportant. Indeed, it may be far more important than the authorized version. This is the principal, though not sole, arena that state reforms aim to manage. It is also at this level that the sabotage, fudging, or redirecting of the centrally proposed and authorized measures takes place.

Diverse political and social cultures make local responses to the call for school improvement highly varied. State mandates are transformed by school district practice, local pressures for change, and local capacity to act. They are shaped at the local level to conform--with varying degrees of fidelity--to the intentions of centralized policymakers. Competing demands on the system are factors that color this movement. This level of reform is influenced by school district budgets and political agendas. For example, district implementation of Utah's Career Ladder Program illustrates the complexity and importance of the localist dimension in the policy process.[9] In California, the most visible manifestation of this movement is State Superintendent of Public

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[9] Thomas B. Timar. "Local Implementation of Utah's Career Ladder Program: A Theoretical Framework" (Presented at the American Education Association, New Orleans. April 1988).

Instruction Bill Honig's mobilization of an informal and unofficial network of schools engaged in educational improvement. The success of California's reform effort is more closely tied to Honig's ability to mobilize local efforts than it is to the specific provisions of state reform legislation.

A good deal of policy research focuses on developing a better understanding of local responses to centrally initiated reforms. However, the local reform movement comprises more than idiosyncratic responses to state mandates. Locally initiated reform efforts add a critical element to school improvement.

Local and regional innovation and experimentation with curricula, programs, and organizational structures are nothing new. Mastery learning and teaching, alternative schools, and time-on-task are fixed features in many schools and became so through local initiative. The Bay Area Writing Project and computer use in the schools are just two examples of grassroots initiatives that moved through the system to influence state policy. This dimension can be mobilized, as Bill Honig demonstrates, and as the Carnegie and the Essential Schools movements have attempted to do--but it cannot be coerced. Regulations and mandates will not compel innovation. Accomplishing that necessitates an entirely different set of state strategies.

SCHOOL REFORM: THE GOAL OF EXCELLENCE

Although the education policies of the 1960s and 1970s were at least nominally concerned with education, their goal was social justice.

Schools were instrumental in creating a more just society in which economic wealth and political power were fairly distributed. The education reform movement of the 1980s shifted the focus to excellence. However, there is scant experience to guide policymakers in their efforts to achieve excellence in the schools. While researchers have recognized the tangle of political, cultural, individual, and organizational factors that influence policy outcomes, few researchers have attempted to establish a casual connection between policy choices and their effects.[10]

State Intentions

In the absence of an abundance of practical experience or research to guide their decisions, state-level education reformers regularly favor policies that can be quantified--and, hence, enforced. Regulations concerning various aspects of the education process--teacher evaluation and retention, administrative leadership, longer student seat time,

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[10] See Richard Elmore "Organizational Models for Social Program Implementation," Public Policy 26 (1978); "Backward Mapping: Implementation Research and Policy Implementation," Political Science Quarterly, 94 (1979-80). Also Larry Cuban, "Transforming the Frog into a Prince: Effective Schools Research, Policy, and Practice at the District Level," Harvard Education Review 54 (1984); Guy Benveniste, "Implementation and Intervention Strategies," in School Days, Rule Days, David L. Kirp and Donald Jensen, eds. (London: Falmer, 1986); Paul Berman, "From Compliance to Learning: Implementing Legally Induced Reforms," in School Days, Rule Days, David L. Kirp and Donald Jensen, eds. (London: Falmer, 1986); Paul Berman and Milbrey W. McLaughlin, Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change: Vol. VII (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corp., 1978); Eugene Bardach, The Implementation Game (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977). Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky, Implementation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Aaron Wildavsky, Speaking Truth to Power: The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979).

standardization of the curriculum--become rough proxies for excellence. This may be useful for establishing a basis on which to build further reforms. The danger is that it becomes easy to confuse excellence with its approximation: rigor with basics, standards for hours spent in the classroom, learning with test scores.

The critical question is whether state reform policies yield outcomes that are consistent with standards of excellence, or whether reforms lead only to more rules, formalistic compliance, evasion, paperwork, and legal proceedings. The avowed purpose of state reform efforts is to enhance the organizational effectiveness of schools. If schools lack the capacity to translate reforms into action, are overwhelmed with regulations, and if mandates themselves become the focus of reform efforts, the intended effect of reform policies will be lost.

State-level education reformers, whether their intended goal is improved quality or greater equity, have a limited range of policy options for affecting school performance. Their challenge is to create rules for governing bureaucratic behavior without those rules becoming ends in themselves. If improved education quality is not wholly amenable to implementation by regulation, state policymakers must rely on promoting styles of institutional decisionmaking that encourage professional judgment and the exercise of discretion, but in a manner consistent with policy goals.

Traditional Strategies

The traditional view of school governance divides education reformers into two camps. One camp contains the technocrats who believe

that schools are infinitely manipulable. The other contains the decentralists who believe that schools will flourish if they are left alone. The technocrats' strategy for fixing schools is to create new policies, programs, and procedures. They favor mandates and regulations. The decentralists, on the other hand, believe that school reform lies in deregulation and local control.

The lesson from the states' recent experience with education reform is that neither the technocratic nor the decentralist strategy is likely to lead to serious improvement in the quality of schooling in America. Texas thought that it could regulate school reform by changing the state's administrative structure and promulgating painstakingly prescriptive regulations. But reformers found it difficult to fit even one program, the teacher career ladder, for example, to the needs of teachers in over 1000 school districts. California policymakers believed that, with the proper fiscal incentives and minimum of regulations, a hundred flowers would bloom in the gardens of school reform. But in California, as elsewhere, schools have been more responsive to local needs and pressures than to the desires of state policymakers.

There is no doubt that technocrats and decentralists can demonstrate some signs of success. Schools can be cajoled, pressured, and intimidated to improve. And certainly, schools can show improvements in test scores. They can increase instructional time and force more students into college preparatory programs. But most of that improvement is likely to be only on paper.

According to David Seeley, former U.S. Commissioner of Education, "too many people make the assumption that educational power is a zero-sum game; if somebody wins, then somebody has to lose."[11] The ascendance of educational excellence on state policy agendas necessitates reformulation of this traditionally held view of state-local governance. The traditional formulation of school governance in which the power to direct and influence schools is finitely distributed between the state and local level is inappropriate. On the contrary, Seeley suggests considerable power exists that neither the state nor local officials have exercised.

Control is not monolithic. State policy may affect local decision-making in several ways--fiscally, programmatically, and procedurally. It may constrain local discretion in some areas and expand it in others. For example, the expenditure of nearly $500 million in California for a longer school day and year had only slight effects either on what schools did or how they went about doing it. The fiscal impact, on the other hand, was significant. The real issue should not focus on a debate over state versus local control of schools, but on finding the proper balance between state and local responsibility.

The Process of Fragmentation

Responsibility is absent in schools as they are presently organized. Teachers blame parents, a lax home environment, and mass media for the suffocating mediocrity of schools. School personnel also

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[11] Education Week (May 8, 1985).

like to blame politicians and the public for lack of adequate funding. Politicians, in turn, like to blame teachers and administrators who, they claim, pursue narrow, selfish interests at the expense of students. Embedded in this latter criticism is the notion that teachers, administrators, and school district trustees have selfishly allowed education to deteriorate behind the backs of politicians.

Such positions are easy to take when education is a fragmented process. But just as no one group can be legitimately singled out for blame, no one group can be targeted for reform. State policies that are piecemeal responses to an already fragmented system only exacerbate the problem. For even if the attribution of failure is correct--student test scores are low or some teachers are incompetent in the mastery of even the most basic academic skills--that does not mean that the positive side of the equation necessarily leads to substantive reform. In the calculus of excellence, simply improving test scores, eliminating incompetent teachers from the classroom, and the like may resolve a particular problem but will not promote the goal of educational excellence.

Educational excellence is not likely to be cultivated by disparate policies that aim at various pieces of the educational process. Merit pay for teachers, for example, can be effective, but only within the broader context of the school and community. A study of the effects of merit pay for teachers[12] shows that merit increases bear scant

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12 Mary Amsler, Douglas Mitchell, Linda Nelson and Thomas Timar. "Policy Evaluation of Utah's Career Ladder Program" (San Francisco: Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development. February 1988). David K. Cohen and Richard Murnane, "The Merits of Merit Pay," Public Interest 80 (Summer 1985).

relationship to their presumed effects--as an incentive to better teaching. Merit pay can be a positive inducement to teachers but only in relationship to the whole--as a measure of professional competence. Requiring students to take more academic classes means little if the substance of those classes is thin and lacking in rigor. Similarly there is no benefit to keeping students in classes longer if little learning takes place in those classes.

If policies fragment schools, it becomes harder, not easier, for them to do their work. If reforms further complicate life in the schools, they remain disconnected from improved educational quality. If a statewide effort at reform becomes just another program to implement at the district level, just another source of anxiety and frustration, it is hardly the motivating tool for teachers that policymakers had hoped it would be.

Enacting new rules for schools to follow may just add to the baggage that already overburdens the system. Such reform policies may result in producing a crop of new teachers who are better prepared to teach their subjects. But what will prepare them for the indifference, monotony, incoherence, and rampant directionlessness of the institution itself, the jealousy of colleagues, the blandness of the architecture, and the spiritual sterility of the environment?

State policymakers have found that they can only manage what they can control. States may control macro-policy--funding, curricular frameworks, teacher certification, textbook selection and the like--but have limited direct control over the daily operation of schools. The

dilemma for state policymakers is that the most critical juncture of policy ends and means, the interaction between student and teacher, is most difficult to regulate. The fact that the most significant educational interaction may actually take place in the interstices of institutional life is a fundamental problem of education reform.

For example, studies have found that local implementation of federally funded Title I (now Chapter 1) programs for the disadvantaged was affected by so many factors as to be idiosyncratic.[13] Other studies assessing the durability of education reforms found that few changes were sustained in the schools. The exceptions were structural changes. Programmatic innovations tended to dissipate over time, while structural changes, the length of the school year, for example, tended to last.[14]

Instead of continuing the debate over whether state policymakers should secure compliance or encourage local initiative, the policy question of educational excellence must shift the strategic focus from state regulation and local compliance to incentives from the state and mobilization of institutional capacity. Consequently, state program mandates are replaced by local strategies for institutional development, and state policies designed to pressure unimaginativ , recalcitrant and incompetent local educators are replaced by strategies to empower and

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[13] See Berman and McLaughlin (Note 9).

[14] John W. Meyer, W. Richard Scott, David Strang, and Andrew Creighton, "Bureaucratization without Centralization: Changes in the Organizational System of American Public Education, 1940-1980." (Stanford: Institute for Research on Educational Finance and Governance, August 1985).

legitimate effective local educational practices. Reforms must create a sense of coherence and direction for schools as institutions. Schools must set a certain tone--which is as real as the classrooms themselves--that will greet the students. That tone, or organizational ethos, determines the character of the school. It sets the expectation for excellence or failure. But it is created by individuals working in schools, not by bureaucratic mandates that emanate from distant places.

THREE STATES' REFORM STRATEGIES AND THEIR OUTCOMES

The strategies that states select to manage both the substance and process of education reform are central to the outcomes of eform efforts. The past five years of state school reform activity have yielded important lessons for policymakers. Those lessons are illustrated in the reform strategies of three states--Texas, California, and South Carolina.

Reform in Three States

Each strategy represents a distinct implementation approach; together they represent the universe of comprehensive reform strategies.[15]

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[15] In developing our typology for state reform strategies, we examined reform efforts in all states that had enacted comprehensive reforms (reform measures in at least four of the following areas: the teaching profession; school organization and environment; curriculum and academic standards; administration and leadership; and funding). That led to the three distinct implementation strategies that we discuss in this paper. For a more thorough discussion of state reform strategies and case studies, see Thomas B. Timar and David L. Kirp, Managing Educational Excellence (NY: Falmer Press; Stanford Series on Education and Public Policy, 1988).

Rational planning--the Texas model. Rational planners define educational excellence as a series of discrete problems to be solved. This style of policymaking is preoccupied with searching for the "right" answers to specific problems. This approach assumes that there are single, best policy solutions to social policy problems that are simply waiting to be discovered.[16] As a means to reform, this strategy relies on top-down mandates, centralized authority and decisionmaking, and standardization and uniformity in both substance and process. An animating principle of this strategy is a strong mistrust of both local authority and the exercise of local discretion.

School reform in Texas is characteristic of a top-down approach, with policies generally expressed as regulations and mandates. Texas shows a strong faith in the efficacy of specific policies and considerable skepticism in the efficacy of consensual processes.

Market incentive--the California model. A market incentive strategy relies on creation of artificial markets in which implementation of specific policy provisions is bargained. This approach to policy concentrates policy development at the state level, but lets implementation be bargained over locally. Although rules and regulations are in place, adherence is a matter of local choice. That choice, in turn, is colored by bargaining relations between local school officials and teacher unions.

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[16] This view is consistent with scientific philosophy that is premised on the idea that truth exists in the universe and waits to be discovered. The contrasting view is best expressed by St. Exupery's aphorism that "great truths are created, not discovered."

California is characteristic of this laissez-faire implementation strategy. Policy formulation is highly centralized but implementation is encouraged through fiscal incentives, and programmatic compliance is subject to local discretion. California's reform measure, Senate Bill 813, did create some new programs and provided additional funds to pay for them. But it is difficult to point to changes in the structure and organization of schooling that will substantially improve the quality of the state's educational system.

Political interaction--the South Carolina model. In contrast to rational planning implementation strategies, political interaction shifts the policy perspective from reliance on formal control and regulation by a central authority to informal devices of authority that rely on delegation, discretion, and dispersal of authority. Its distinguishing characteristic is articulation of broad state policy goals, but with discretionary authority and flexibility in local implementation. This approach to policy implementation aims to integrate state policy goals with local conditions and practices. The interactive model of decisionmaking establishes a process for problem solving instead of proposing single, best solutions to a problem. This model is exemplified by South Carolina. For examp', the state required schools to provide remedial instruction to students functioning below grade level, but left it to the schools to decide how to best organize those programs. Similarly, schools were required to develop plans to deal with various problems such as truancy, absenteeism, dropouts, and the like.

Reform That Works

The dilemma of state control versus local autonomy reveals fundamentally different strategies of reform implementation and a different allocation of authority and responsibility within the state policy system. The manifestations of that dilemma are illustrated by our three-state typology. School reform in Texas shows how rational planning and regulation are crude policy instruments for effecting change. They are insensitive to the complexities of schools as social and political organizations. Rules are regarded as the glue that binds state reforms to the organizational life of schools.

California illustrates the impotence of a permissive decentralized strategy. Educational reform in California, as in Texas, is measured by a patchwork of programs that aim in the general direction of excellence but fall short of the mark. As in Texas, organizationally competent schools in California may take advantage of the reforms, but the organizationally incoherent schools have no idea how to integrate them into their own programs. The reform effort in South Carolina, on the other hand, treads between the highly centralized policies of Texas and the decentralized policies of California.

South Carolina's approach to school reform is instructive for state policymakers for two reasons. It demonstrates the need for balance between state accountability and local autonomy. It exemplifies the clear delineation of authority and responsibility among those who shape the institutional character of schools. State-level policymakers, local school officials, teachers, administrators, and professional

organizations figure significantly in creating and maintaining an uneasy tension between state, local, and professional interests. Those tensions are requisite elements for creating an organizational culture that promotes educational excellence.

Through a statewide process of consensus-building, South Carolina developed a policy that established standards. That policy requires an annual plan that is evaluated by the state department of education, which created a division of accountability to oversee the implementation of reform. The state policy also left a large degree of flexibility to the local schools. Reform implementation starts at the local school level.

South Carolina's reform strategy shows that reform can succeed if disparate, and often competing, interests can be combined to foster schools that are organizationally purposive and have the flexibility and competence to allocate and use resources congruently with their defined mission.

South Carolina also shows that authority and responsibility have to be distributed across the entire system of education. State-level policymakers have the responsibility to establish clear expectations and a general educational framework. For example, states can specify what body of knowledge students should master by the time they graduate from high school. States provide the resources and create the context in which schools take shape. It is not enough to simply give schools more autonomy; encouragement and support must come from the larger context of the state. South Carolina requires schools to plan, specifies what areas must be addressed in their plans, and holds them accountable for their

results. Taking this policy view, however, requires that schools have time to develop and mature organizationally. State policymakers like to see instant results for which they can take credit or assign blame; they regularly pull schools up by their roots to see how they are doing.

Achieving meaningful school reform is an artful process. Few state policymakers have mastered it. The lack of mastery is largely attributable to the fact that centralized policymakers have limited control over daily events in schools. The strength of South Carolina's approach is that it strives to change the way schools do business. It does so by fostering--through state action--institutional competence, not by miring schools in a regulatory swamp or by throwing money at them.

REAL REFORM: CHANGING THE INSTITUTIONAL NATURE OF SCHOOLS

Education reform policies are no better than the schools that implement them. Therefore, the object of state policy must be the school. And within schools, the focus must be on the kinds of organizational arrangements that maximize organizational competence. If states are serious about improving educational quality and striving for excellence, they must create the appropriate context in which that can take place. That effort will require fundamental redefinition of various organizational roles. If institutional change becomes the focus of reform, the dichotomized view of local versus state control becomes inappropriate and anachronistic. The distribution between state and local authority is no longer a zero-sum game over specific policy decisions but a cooperative effort aimed at enhancing organizational

competence. The effort has to be centered on enhancing institutional effectiveness.

The Role of the State

Thus, it does not matter how well-crafted state initiated education policies may be or how much popular support they may enjoy, if schools are incapable of turning those policies into successful programs. Real reform can only be achieved by changing the institutional nature of schools.

Policymakers must focus attention on making schools better places in which to work and generally more satisfying places for those who are associated with them. While there is no formula for achieving this, there is a theoretical basis for improving the organizational competence of schools.

A theory of institutional support suggests that state policymakers must agree that schools as institutions--not teachers or students or curricula--are the principal targets of reform. Tightening curriculum standards and ratcheting up teacher certification requirements, for example, may mean nothing if schools lack the competence to make use of improved curriculum and better-qualified teachers. Quality education comes from sound public institutions, not disparate programs. Packaging more and more programs in response to specific educational problems, the strategy of the past 20 years, is a failed strategy. A lesson from the past that present reformers should heed is that institutional culture cannot be circumvented. High-quality educational programs cannot exist in unhealthy institutions.

Policymakers and practitioners should focus on what excellent schools do and how they go about it, for it is not merely the resources that schools have but how they use them that makes schools excellent. Just having highly qualified teachers is not enough. How those teachers fit into the organizational life of schools is what matters. The important question is not how effective schools look, but what they do that makes them different from other schools. While much attention has been paid to the absence of a theory of instructional technology, surprisingly little attention has focused on efforts to create a theory of institutional support and development.

Education policymakers might look to other organizational models for guidance in building a theory of institutional support. Hospitals are one model. Physicians know that the quality of a patient's hospital care is not limited to the quality of the immediate relationship between physician and patient. It is influenced as well by the organizational coherence of the hospital; nurses, dietitians, X-ray and medical technicians, pharmacists, administrators, and maintenance workers play mutually supporting roles in defining the quality of hospital care. The same could happen in schools.

To nurse schools back to health, states can help them forge a sense of organizational coherence and purpose. Achieving that requires major rethinking. For example, maybe a school district structure could be replaced by smaller, organizationally more coherent structures, where a single organization includes a high school, and feeder middle and elementary schools. In this environment, building and sustaining an

organizational culture certainly would make new and different demands of teachers' and administrators' time. Planning and evaluation would take on greater significance and would command more attention than the three or four days a year most schools now devote to it. In the end, the reshaped school culture will determine if reform efforts have any impact.

The Role of the Local School

Local responses to reform must occur within the framework of the state design. Authority at the local level needs to be centered at the school site. The theory of institutional support is anchored in the conviction that everyone in schools is responsible for planning, budgeting, and program evaluation. Budgets are tied to assessment and diagnosis: targeting money where it is most needed. Responsibility is not segmented and parceled out among a host of players in the educational process. For schools to take responsibility for their efficacy means that schools must behave like organizations rather than a conglomeration of related activity centers or a shopping mall. To rebuild their institutional coherence, schools must also exercise authority by affirming the fundamental worth of education in everything they do. Hence, teachers, not students, should determine what a school's course offering should be. The authority of schools must also be predicated on the belief that there is a body of knowledge that is worth teaching. That belief must form the organizational and intellectual base on which schools are structured.

An important way in which effective schools behave differently is by integrating the elements that comprise good schools. Instead of teachers

thinking of themselves as responsible for a certain number of students in a classroom, teachers begin to assume responsibility for the entire school, and for long-range planning. Participatory decisionmaking, planning, goal setting, and problem solving builds an organizational culture. Professional norms and teacher attitudes are shaped by the workplace, professional organizations, and teacher training programs. Before teachers can be expected to take on broader responsibilities, they must be socialized to assume those responsibilities and must be taught the skills to carry them out. Schools of education and professional organizations are the obvious agents to promote this dimension of education reform.

STATE POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There must be a clear delineation of authority and responsibility among those who shape the institutional character of schools. State-level policymakers, local school officials, teachers, administrators, and professional organizations figure significantly in creating and maintaining an uneasy tension among the conversational, the authorized, and the localist dimensions of reform. The three dimensions, in turn, are the requisite elements for creating an organizational culture that promotes educational excellence. Reform can succeed if the three elements combine to foster schools that are purposive and have the flexibility and competence to allocate and use resources to the best advantage.

In this context, state policymakers can focus their attention on three major areas of concern.

Creating The Framework

State policymakers have the responsibility to establish clear expectations and a general educational framework. Education policy in most states is a hodgepodge of requirements and regulations. Much of it is shaped anecdotally and incrementally, in response to some success or horror story, or to please a favored interest group. Authority and responsibility have to be distributed and differentiated across the entire system of education.

Providing Institutional Support

State policymakers need to support and nurture organizational characteristics that foster excellence, and "articulate principles of institutional design and institutional diagnosis."[17] An appropriate state management strategy would be to create a harmonious fit between state control agencies and schools--the right blend of cognitive, organizational, and political resources schools require for the realization of their purpose.

Establishing Professional Standards and Expectations

The role of the state is to regulate the teaching profession without intruding into the process of teaching, just as they regulate the medical, legal, and other professions without presuming to tell lawyers how many cases they need to win, or doctors what medication to prescribe to patients.

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17 Philippe Nonet and Phillip Selznick, Law and Society in Transition: Toward Responsive Law (NY: Harper and Row, 1978), page 111.