ABSTRACT
                For effective schools, leadership is vital. As the
structure of American education evolved, a model of how a local
school board should function emerged. The model is briefly summarized
and research on educational leadership, challenges of school board
service in New York State, and responsibilities of school boards are
discussed. Key leadership functions of the school board represent
competing forces in the areas of goals, policies, public relations,
and challenges. Six key issues in school board leadership are as
follows: (1) the question of who sets the goals and defines the
limits for public education; (2) the board/administration
relationship and the problem of allocating responsibilities; (3) the
pressure for teacher professionalization and empowerment; (4) the
challenge of governing schools in an atmosphere of legal constraint;
(5) the difficulty of shaping legislated reforms and categorical aid
into effective change; and (6) the imperative of bridging the gap
between schools and community, both to respond to student needs and
to tap local resources. (31 references) (SI)

School Boards in New York State

A Position Paper of the
**New York State
School Boards Association**

2

Essential Leadership:
School Boards in New York State

A Position Paper of the
**New York State
School Boards Association**

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Executive Summary

1. Schooling in the United States began as a local phenomenon, under the local governance of a school board or similar group.
2. The administration of education gradually became more centralized, but local lay control of the public schools continued to be important.
3. As the structure of American education evolved, a model of how a local school board should function emerged.
4. The literature on organizations and leadership reveals, however, that actual school board operations are probably much more complex and difficult than that model implies.
5. Moreover, particularly in New York, school districts are so diverse that one model or ideal is not likely to work for all districts.
6. The reality of school board service is that boards often have difficulty in cor entrating on their main leadership functions:
   - goal setting and policymaking may be pushed aside for a va iety of reasons;
   - community relations are frequently underemphasized; and
   - time and priorities are a continuing problem for the overloaded school board.
7. Nevertheless, the school board's job is leadership, and f effective schools that leadership is vital.
8. Several key issues illustrate the challenges school boards face and the need for leadership:
   - the question of who should set the goals and define the limits for public education;
   - the problem of how responsibilities should be allocated between the school board and the school management team;
   - the issue of how the pressure for teacher professionalization and empowerment should be handled;
   - the challenge of how to govern schools in an atmosphere of legal constraint;
   - the difficulty of how legislated reforms and categorical aid can be shaped into effective change; and
   - the imperative to bridge the gap between schools and the community.
9. In response to these issues, an effective school board collects information, consults relevant groups, aligns resources, sets goals, defines policies, and appraises staff and programs in line with goals.
10. An effective board is aware of the need to assure a flow of information, to build commitment and ownership, to use policy as a tool, to engage in strategic planning, and above all to make sure that local goals drive all programs and budgets.
11. Finally, a board's leadership position becomes real only to the extent that it is exercised. The board uses it, or loses it.
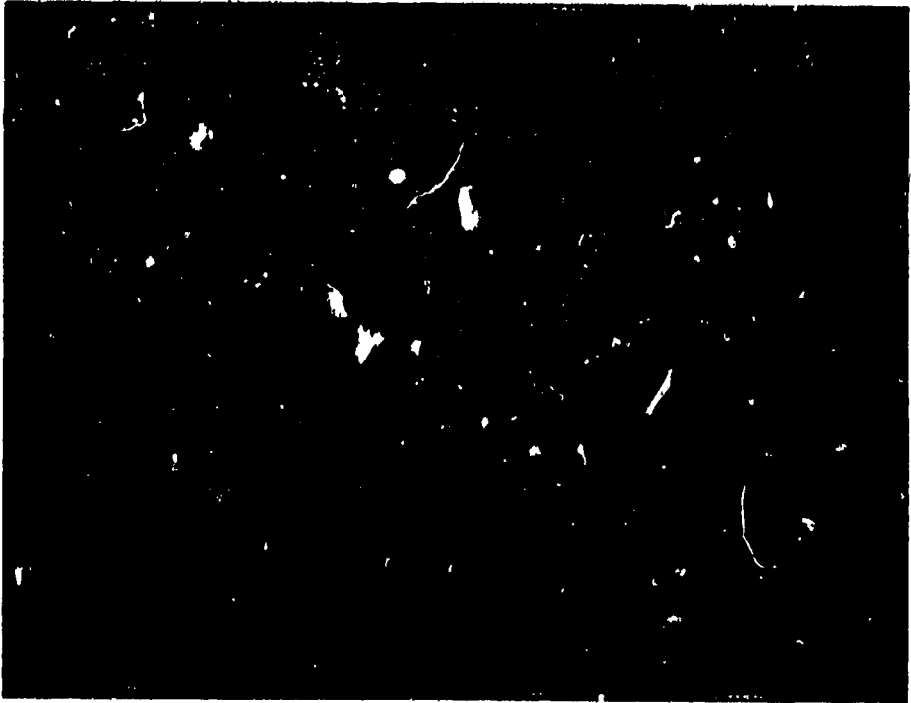
Introduction

Schools express the values of the society that supports them. How schools are built, staffed, and run is a clear reflection of whoever is in charge of them. Because of this, and because they have always seen education as a passkey to a good future, Americans always have supported local schools and local governance.

The Roots of School Governance

The silence of the writers of the United States Constitution was tacit recognition that education was a local matter. The first schools of the colonies—and of the new nation—were locally built, staffed, and governed. The school board often evolved from a committee of trustees appointed by the town meeting or church.

New York passed state laws in the 1790s and early 1800s that established school districts and empowered their citizens to elect school boards to levy school taxes. But, in fact, these laws were just a recognition of what in many localities was already a fait accompli.

Schools took various forms, including town schools, subscription schools formed by groups of families, schools run by "dames" or other

private entrepreneurs, and church-affiliated charity schools. Significantly, however, the demand for education primarily came not from above, but from the general population. The locally established and controlled school reflected that demand. As education historian Carl F. Kaestle put it, "In the minds of most New Yorkers, apparently, republican education did not require state intervention."

In rural areas, the typical school was one financed by tuition, taxes, and state aid, and controlled by a local committee which set the curricula and hired teachers. The pattern of urban schooling was somewhat different because of population differences. Urban children of the middle or upper classes were educated at home or in entrepreneurial schools that charged fees. Charity schools, usually church-affiliated and controlled by philanthropic and reform-minded chur ı members, were developed to serve the urban poor. In New York C ty, these schools were gradually united under the Free School Society (later the Public School Society), whose board of trustees aimed at providing a "perfect system" of common schools.

Throughout New York State, three historical features of educational governance had a bearing on public schools, as we know them today. First, because this state's local government was patterned on the township model, common throughout New England, each township viewed itself as fundamentally independent.

Political historian Alexis de Tocqueville, writing in the 1830s, captured the significance of this local spirit of self-determination: "[Local independence] . . . was the nucleus round which the local interests, passions, rights, and duties collected and clung. It gave scope to the activity of a real political life, thoroughly democratic ɪd republican." Thus each township was a republic unto itself, according to de Tocqueville, and state political authority derived from the willingness of municipal authorities to give up part of their powers. Furthermore, the central importance of education as a matter of overriding civic interest was deeply imbedded in the life of townships.

A second key feature of early educational governance was the absence of local administrative staff. Early common schools were not the complex and sophisticated institutions of today. School boards had no need to delegate responsibilities to an executive authority; nor in the early days after independence was there much enthusiasm for setting up new administrative controls. But as school systems grew more complex and time-consuming to manage, especially in urban settings, superintendencies were established more frequently. Buffalo has the distinction of establishing the first American superintendency in 1837. At first, executives were simply professional assistants to boards. Functional partnerships of board and superintendent built on a concept of shared leadership took well into the 20th century to become the norm.

A third feature of governance, one noted by de Tocqueville, was the degree of central administrative control. Unlike some other states, he noted, New York had discernable features of central administration by the early 1800s. Much of de Tocqueville's impression came from the role of the Regents, however, and it should be noted that throughout the 19th century, the Board of Regents had no statutory authority over common schools, but only over universities, colleges, and academies.

After the federal Constitution was ratified, more than a century elapsed before the state constitution declared that the state would "provide for the maintenance and support of a system of free common schools," and before the Regents were granted authority over the schools. Those 100 years saw a gradual and often contentious shift toward centralization of educational authority.

The Drive for Centralization

Schooling in early America was a grass roots phenomenon. The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution states that "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people." Since education was not mentioned in the Constitution, it was assumed to be one of those "reserved powers."

The relationship between state and local powers in education, however, evolved slowly during the 1800s as an outgrowth of progressive politics and the common school movement. Representatives of these forces pressed for centralized public direction of education to ensure the assimilation of diverse immigrant groups and the stability of society. They feared the fragmenting effects of regionalism and cultural diversity. Liberty must be balanced by order, they argued, and a universal system of education would guarantee both.

Opposing these forces were the more Jeffersonian localists. Equally supportive of republican values, they argued that local control was the way to achieve them. The philosophy of localism was not destined to prevail, however, at least in the Northeast with its Federalist traditions. As historian Carl F. Kaestle has written of the drive for central control of education:

Although the reformers' specific proposals about centralized supervision, tax support, teacher training, and consolidated school districts met considerable resistance, the educational reform cause benefited in general from widespread consensus about the importance of common schooling. Essayists, state superintendents, and local school committees continually coupled their specific reform proposals with a repetition of the unassailable social functions of common schooling. The rhetorical effect was to imply that if one

Events Reflecting the Centralization of Education in New York State

1844	Start of the first state normal (teacher education) school in Albany
1854	Legislative establishment of a state department of public instruction with a superintendent elected by the Legislature
1850s & 60s	Establishment of state supervised high schools and their gradual replacement of local academies
1867	Abolition of rate bills (charges to parents) and a shift to full tax support for public schools
1880s & 90s	Growth of educational administration as an acknowledged profession and struggle for leadership between school boards and superintendents
1904	Unification act placing all education in New York under the Board of Regents, operating through a commissioner and State Education Department

was against centralization, supervision, new schoolhouses, teacher training, or graded schools, one must also be against morality, good order, intelligent citizenship, economic prosperity, fair opportunity, and a common American culture.

Reflecting on the pressure of rapid change on American society in the mid-1800s, Kaestle goes on:

The claim that state intervention was imperative gained further plausibility from the fast-paced urbanization, immigration, and industrialization of the period, with the accompanying stresses on the family, the Protestant churches, and the work place. To many Americans, an expanded educational role for the state seemed justified and urgently needed, simply to accomplish traditional goals of morality and literacy.

During the 1840s and '50s, reformers fueled their fires with criticisms of the worst shortcomings and abuses of local schools. But along with those criticisms came a broader-ranging attack on society in general, particularly urban society and its neglect and abuse of laboring children. Education, the reformers urged, must cure those ills, and only a centralized education system could do so.

Highlights from the history of New York's educational system from 1850 to '920 illustrate well the effects of this drive toward centralization.

The Enduring Power of Local Lay Control

That education in New York did not become completely central-
ized in the 20th century was due to the continued vitality of what
historian Kaestle calls "one of the most enduring and pervasive sources
of conflict in American educational history"—localism. Rather than
a source of conflict, however, localism might more accurately be called
a source of creative tension.

Modern interpretations of the Constitution unquestionably assign
the chief responsibility for education to the state. But, as Bailey and
his colleagues explained in *Schoolmen and Politics*,

> This constitutional doctrine . . . has been in constant tension with a
> widely shared and strongly held view that education was in essence
> a local responsibility, and that educational policy should be locally
> determined The literature of professional education is laden with
> ambiguous and frequently inconsistent statements about the desired
> or real locus of education power and authority. The lay observer is
> led to the conclusion that educators find the ambiguities between
> state and local control at times a highly useful tension.

The fact that local control is alive and well in the 1980s can be
attributed to a number of instances of leadership. These include artic-
ulate advocates at certain turning points in educational history.

One was George William Bruce, founder and editor of the *Ameri-
can School Board Journal*. In the 1890s, his cartoons and editorials
combatted the intense drive toward central administrative control of
public schools. His support of local lay control also helped to defeat
the idea of making superintendents independent of board power to
hire and fire.

Three distinguished educators, by their thoughtful criticism of
school boards, actually contributed to the enduring strength of lay
control. Elwood Cubberly, writing in 1916, argued for smaller school
boards, elected at large and for longer terms. George Counts, in 1927,
criticized boards as not being sufficiently representative. Jesse Newlon,
in 1933, articulated the need to separate the boards' functions from
the administrators', with the board as a legislature representing the
people, and the superintendent as their executive.

All three accepted the importance and legitimacy of the school
board, and proceeded from that point. Their ideas are reflected in
the structure and operation of boards of education of today.

Perhaps more influential, however, was George Strayer, chairman
of the Educational Administration Department at Teachers College,
Columbia University, who, in 1935, drafted a concise, authoritative,
and—at least in retrospect—strongly influential document on school
governance, *The Structure and Administration of Education in Amer-
ican Democracy.*

Sponsored by the National Educa.. .. so. . .d the Ameri-
can Association of School Administra .. .. .ook sa.. extraor-
dinarily positive things about school tr.. .. .. .. ppropriate role
and function in the United States. His .. .. .. w .. .t "if the schools
are to serve . . . democracy, they mu.. .. .. .lose touch with the
people locally."

Accordingly, he wrote: "Whatever the general program that may
be mandated by the state, the schools will fail of their purpose unless
they reflect the interests, the ideals, and the devotion of the commu-
nity which they serve."

How was this supposed to happen? Through school boards, said
Strayer, selected as public representatives unfettered by partisan
politics. The issue of conflict between board and administrative roles
was resolved by Strayer as follows:

Good local administration will always be dependent upon recogni-
tion of the peculiar function of the laymen who sit on the board of
education in relation to the professional service provided by the
administrative staff and by all professional workers in the school
system. The final authority must rest with the lay board. The schools
belong to the people.

The School Board Model

The years of conflict and change in education shaped a model of what a local board of education is and how it should exercise its leadership. The writings of Cubberly, Counts, Strayer, and others helped to solidify that ideal. Briefly summarized, the model held that:

- The board is the ultimate authority within the district.
- The board is divorced from partisan politics and autonomous from local government.
- However, the board communicates and cooperates with appropriate local organizations and agencies in fulfilling its functions.
- Board members are trustees, equally responsible for every child and, therefore, not primarily representatives of certain constituencies or interests.
- However, the board is broadly representative of all groups within its jurisdiction, and responsive to their concerns.
- The board's responsibility is to legislate goals and policies, not to administer those goals and policies or to manage the district.
- The superintendent recommends goals and policies, as well as a budget, and executes those approved by the board.
- The teaching staff decides on the teaching processes appropriate to their work.
- Board members have no individual authority, and do not speak as individuals. They exercise their leadership only as a group.
- The board meets as a committee of the whole, so that balance and consensus are preserved.
- The board consults with administrative staff and, through them, with teaching staff when making decisions affecting their areas of expertise.
- The lines between board, administration, and staff areas of responsibility are sharp and clearly defined.

● The board makes decisions in a rational way, assessing all the avail-
able information and choosing the best alternative for the greatest
number.

Research on Educational Leadership

The writings of the last 40 years on organizations and leadership
have identif ed certain facts that modify the ideal model just described.
This large body of literature cannot be described adequately here,
but a few of its most important insights can be considered.

It is known, for example, that the control of information and of its
flow is a crucial source of power in decision making. Decisions are
not always—or even usually—made on full information. Time is a
factor: decision makers collect as much information as they can, con-
sider a few (but not all) possible alternatives, and make a decision.

Power is no longer seen as merely the ability to control the deci-
sion; it is the ability to control the agenda of decisions to be made and
alternatives to be considered. Decision making is recognized as a highly
political process, in which coalition building, bargaining, competi-
tion, and adaption are common. Compatibility of goals cannot be
assumed, nor is consensus common—or even possible.

Systems and environmental analyses have helped us to see that
organizations—such as school districts—are not static, closed systems;
on the contrary, they are subject to a constant flow of inputs from
their environment, and their boundaries are often permeable and
changing. The theory of organizations pays less attention to struc-
tures, and more to conflict and change.

The concept of strategic planning has emerged, in recognition that change is the only constant in today's world, and that long-range planning may not be flexible enough. There is more recognition today that lines of authority are not always clear, that they shift, that there are "gray areas." Furthermore, the nature of a problem often determines the approach to solving it. In this "contingency theory," there is no longer one best—or most logical—way to handle all problems.

Research also has shown that often there are severe constraints on the freedom to make decisions, solve problems, change structures, etc. Longstanding values, norms, and goals cannot be displaced. Pre-negotiated agreements and understandings, external constraints such as laws and resource limitations, internal constraints such as budgets and standard operating procedures—these and other factors limit the range of choices.

Some organizational theorists urge the importance of team building and collaborative decision making, first as a means to bring more information and expertise to bear on decisions, and second, as a way of building commitment and a sense of ownership. Power grows as it is shared, this school of thought argues, because shared power increases productivity.

Of late, effective schools research has created a vogue for "bottom up" leadership, with its emphasis on the individual school building, the key role of the principal, and the importance of collaborative planning and parent involvement. This research raises many questions about the role and function of school boards, since it seldom discusses them and yet recommends changes that clearly depend on school board leadership.

School Boards in the Light of Research

The ideas from research do not give a unified or coherent picture of how a school board works. They do, however, undermine the idealized model of boards, and they show that the school board's job probably is much more complex, more frustrating and more challenging than the old ideal would lead us to believe.

In a sense, it is necessary to re-examine that ideal model because it is not entirely realistic. The enormous complexities facing school boards today can only be addressed and dealt with in the full light of reality.

History reveals that education in America began as an effort of local communities to provide their children with something they valued highly. The drive to centralize the control of education had an effect, but local leadership of schools proved to be a vital and enduring phenomenon.

"...what is coming toward the educational system is a group of children who will be poorer, more ethnically and linguistically diverse, and who will have more handicaps that will affect their learning."

-Harold L. Hodgkinson

Gradually, a model of the ideal local board evolved, a democratically-elected, nonpartisan trusteeship group dedicated to legislating goals and policy to be executed by administrative and teaching staff. However, as research has helped to show, school boards operate in a real — not ideal — world. Boards today need more realistic and useful models for dealing with the issues and problems confronting them.

The Special Challenges of School Board Service in New York State

The tools of leadership needed by boards of education are dictated by the settings in which they serve. In New York, these vary extraordinarily. New York is a heterogeneous state and its schools reflect that diversity in size, enrollment, wealth, and demographic makeup.

Its 723 school districts cover areas as large as 600 square miles, and as small as a single square mile. While the median district enrollment is less than 1,500 students, enrollments range from a high of 931,000 students in New York City to only 41 on Fishers Island.

There also is a wide variation in wealth among New York's districts. While the state average income wealth for 1987-88 was $55,700 per pupil, 38 districts reported a figure higher than $110,000 per pupil, while 179 districts reported less than $28,000.

The racial and ethnic distribution of students also makes for district variations, with the schools in the five largest cities having a much higher representation of black and Hispanic students than schools elsewhere in the state.

While New York's school districts are diverse, they also are changing. State Education Department enrollment projections through the mid-1990s show a steady increase in grades K to 6 while grade 7 to 12 experience a decline through the end of this decade, followed by an

upswing in 1990 through 1995. Enrollment in special education also is expected to steadily increase during this period.

Racial and ethnic enrollment projections also indicate new challenges school boards will face. By 2000, one in three New Yorkers will be nonwhite. Four in ten children born will be minority members; it is expected these children will have a higher risk of growing up in poverty. Demographer Harold L. Hodgkinson points out that ". . . what is coming toward the educational system is a group of children who will be poorer, more ethnically and linguistically diverse, and who will have more handicaps that will affect their learning."

Another change being carefully watched by educational leaders in New York is the split between educational haves and have-nots. At the same time that a growing percentage of students are going on to higher education, a relatively high percentage are dropping out of high school. In 1985-86, New York State's annual dropout rate was 5.1 percent.

In addition, school boards also are concerned about growing numbers of at-risk students, those who lack home supervision, use tobacco, alcohol, or drugs, are sexually active, involved in illegal activities, depressed or suicidal, or have learning disabilities.

School Board Diversity

Reflecting the variation among school districts, boards of education display a good degree of diversity. They range from three to nine members (15 on a board of cooperative educational services), with terms of three to five years. A little more than half are elected by seat; the remainder at-large. About 50 percent use no ad hoc committees; the other 50 percent have at least some standing committees. Likewise, 55 percent make some use of citizen committees. Most suburban and rural boards supervise districts with 13 grades, but some have elementary schools only and three operate only secondary schools.

The 32 community school boards in New York City supervise grades K to 8 only, while the New York City Board of Education is responsible for secondary and special schools (as well as serving as an appeals board for the community district boards).

Boards also are fiscally diverse. The boards of the five big city districts are fiscally dependent; their budgets must be approved and adopted by the cities' governing bodies. Smaller cities boards adopt their own budgets; a public budget vote is not required. The remaining districts are required to submit their budgets annually for voter approval.

Demographically, school boards are changing somewhat. The days when local businessmen commonly saw board service as a civic duty, as well as an extension of their businesses, have passed. Boards today

are more heterogeneous. Memb… still tend to be white males; more women have joined the ranks— ᴜ percent. Minorities still are seriously underrepresented—less than 5 percent—as are lower income citizens—less than 6 percent. More research is needed on the composition, attitudes and concerns of boards as keys in educational governance.

The Responsibilities of School Boards

The inescapable fact of board of education service in the 1980s is that it is more complex, more time-consuming, and at the same time, more challenging and frustrating. As a result, recruitment, retention, and training of board members have become major concerns. The duties of boards demand a high level of knowledge and experience from their volunteer members.

Those obligations are spelled out in various sections of state law: 1709 for union free and central school boards; 1604, common school boards; Article 51, cities of less than 125,000 pupils; Article 52 those with more than 125,000; and Article 52-A, New York City. A partial list from Section 1709 shows the breadth of boards' legal responsibilities:

- establish rules and regulations concerning the order and discipline of the schools;
- prescribe the course of study;
- prescribe textbooks to be used;
- purchase sites for recreation grounds and school houses;
- insure schoolhouses, their furniture, etc.;
- insure pupils, at the board's discretion;
- establish and maintain budget reserves;
- provide fuel, furniture, apparatus, etc.;
- employ qualified teachers and deliver to each …itten contract;
- raise by tax on the property of the district the money to pay teachers' salaries;
- provide for medical inspection of children, and
- provide transportation, home-teaching, or special classes for physically or mentally handicapped and delinquent children.

These and many more duties are specified for boards; whatever may have been forgotten is summed up by the mandate "To have in all respects the superintendence, management, and control of the educational affairs of the district."

In fact, a board's obligations may be at the same time much more and much less than this—more because the expanding needs of the community often carry the board beyond its statutory duties, and less because state-mandated programs and policies severely curtail the district's "control of educational affairs."
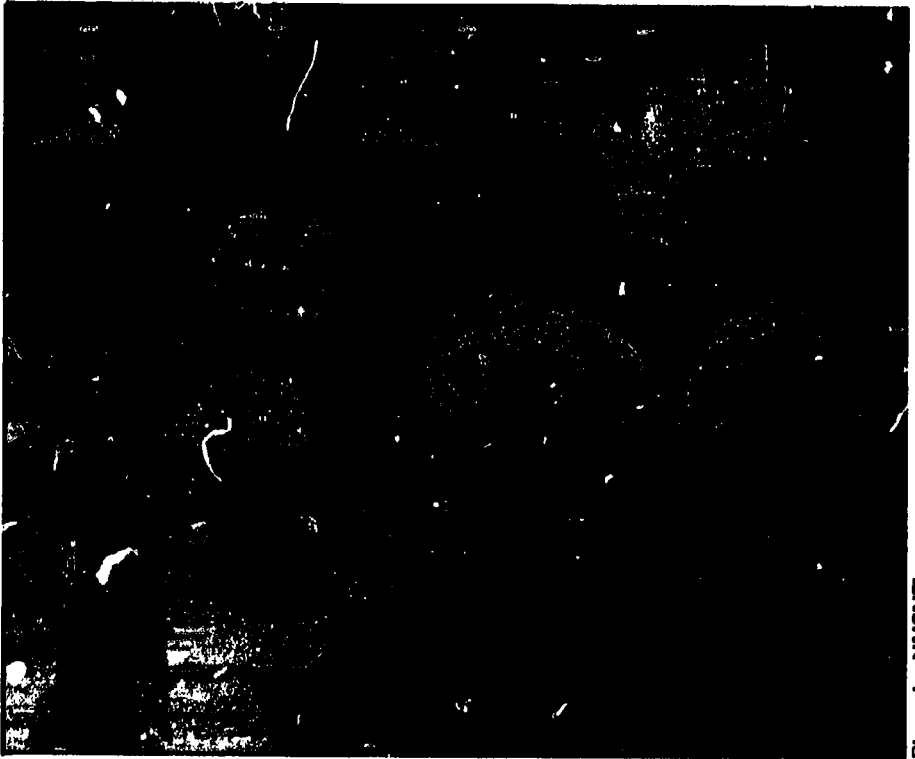
On the one hand, many boards find themselves providing after-school recreational and day care programs, setting up evening instruction for students who are employed or single parents, designing recruitment and incentive plans for staff, and participating in school/business partnerships of various kinds. On the other hand, boards are increasingly occupied as implementers of state and federal mandates.

This is particularly true in New York, where, even before the current reform movement, there was a heavy freight of state mandates. A 1974 survey by the National School Boards Association, for example, showed that of 20 possible topic areas, New York had state mandates in 15, more than any other state except Minnesota, and 50 percent more than half the other states. Since the advent of the Regents Action Plan, new mandates have been established in numerous other areas. A few examples illustrate the range of those demands:

● several new required tests, to measure program effectiveness (social studies and science) or student competence (global studies, science, American history and government);
● an extensive set of revised requirements for occupational students;
● a mandate that districts must provide advanced placement opportunities for eighth graders;

- a new foreign language study requirement;
- a requirement that all school boards adopt written student discipline policies.

In addition to mandates, the state budget contains mor than 50 types of categorical aid, many associated with mandated programs, but all imposing special requirements and limitations. This top-down trend has added to the tensions under which boards of education operate, and raises crucial questions. For example:

- In the face of needs or demands in one portion of the community, are board members trustees of the whole community or advocates for the portion that they feel elected them?
- Where local and state goals and priorities conflict, dues the board have a duty to represent the state to the community or the community to the state?
- Finally, under pressure from above and below, should a board focus its efforts on maintaining a stable status quo while mediating among competing factions and priorities, or should it assert itself by exercising its leadership function?

The Realities of School Board Service

What a board does in theory is described in education law and in literature on "successful school boards." What it *really* does is the result of tradition, power politics, time constraints, budget realities, imposed priorities, board/superintendent relationship, a pinch of patriotism, and a dash of some of the less noble human qualities.

Research on boards' key leadership functions was summarized in a report of the Educational Research Service as follows:

"School Boards serve the public best when they . . .
1. Formulate policies reflecting broad principles that will guide . . . the district;
2. Determine the goals of . . . the school district;
3. Select the superintendent and employ school personnel upon the superintendent's recommendation;
4. Appraise the performance of the executives to whom responsibilities have been delegated;

5. Inform the people of the district about the schools; and
6. Evaluate the activities of the district regarding previously established goals."

In practice, of course, the leadership tasks suggested here often compete with practical, day-to-day matters, "brush fires" that, however mundane, still require board attention. A lawsuit, local pressure group, stalled contract, scandal, local disaster, new state mandate, defeated budget: all make real demands that detour the board from the high road of policy-making and goal setting.

Goals and Policies

Competing priorities are not the only reason that some boards let themselves be drawn away from their key leadership functions. For many board members, the words "policy" and "goal" signify deep waters. Boards are wary of becoming involved in those murky depths, and perhaps with reason. Why?

● Goal setting and policy-making are severely complicated by the demands and restrictions of state legislation, court rulings, and union contracts. A misstep can mean a lawsuit. Realistically, it is sometimes easier to simply "do as you're told."
● Goal setting and policy-making can cause the surfacing of value and goal conflicts among board members, and that can mean lengthy, acrimonious discussions. Almost everything is a priority to someone on the school board.
● Board members may feel, especially in curricular matters, a deference for expert opinion and an insecurity about their own judgments. It is tempting to abdicate the initiative in favor of the superintendent's staff.
● Board turnover (average board tenure in New York is 4.9 years) means that many members spend a significant percentage of their time on the board learning. New members may hesitate to speak on major questions.
● Turnover also can mean the board lacks a "collective memory," a sense of the district's history. If few board members have long-term experience with the district's programs and ways of settling problems, it is more difficult to formulate goals and policies.
● Local constituents seldom demand a long-term view from the board. And if constituents are more concerned about the crisis of the moment than they are about a three-year plan, board members may feel the same way.

With these roadblocks to goal setting and policy-making, it is understandable that some boards tend to concentrate on more concrete, manageable tasks. No wonder new board members sometimes are heard to ask plaintively, "How can I diplomatically encourage my board to set goals?"

The Board and Its Public

Another key leadership function of school boards is communication with the public. In today's complex environment that means more than making sure that the district's monthly newsletter goes out.

It means finding out what people think and what they want to know. It means supporting pro-educational programs and values (such as adequate day care and family counseling) in the community. It means overcoming community alienation by the way the board handles controversy and involves citizens; stimulating public interest and understanding through a constant and consistent program of media relations that emphasizes educational goals and achievements, not just coverage of sports events and crises; and making school personnel aware of their public relations responsibilities. Finally, it means reaching out to state officials, legislators, and business and industry leaders to obtain support for education.

How does this ambitious program square with reality? To the public, unfortunately, the board seldom has such an activist profile. Although citizens tend to be fairly positive about their local schools, especially their own children's schools, the board itself is little known.

A 1975 Gallup poll of public knowledge and attitudes about school boards revealed that only about half of the respondents were aware that boards are responsible for the local schools; only half had a favorable attitude toward the local school board, and even fewer—37 percent—could name any specific action the board had taken. Sixty-nine percent of parents interviewed had spoken or written to a teacher in the preceding two years, but only 19 percent had communicated with a board member. Even non-parents were three times more likely to have had encounters with teachers than with board members.

This does not mean that the public does not like the concept of school boards. On the contrary a later Gallup poll revealed that 75 percent of the public favors maintaining or increasing school boards' current level of power or influence in education; 61 percent supported more state power and only 38 percent were for federal power.

A problem with board/citizen communication is the bland, faceless stereotype that citizens often have of the board. Even well-

informed voters, scanning the ballot on election day, may not be able to personally identify a single board candidate. Jointly, the board is sometimes perceived as a rubber stamp for the superintendent, a legal figurehead, a shock absorber for local controversy, a mere funnel for state policies, a tedious sort of service club—in short, an anachronism.

As many board members reluctantly will admit, there is a grain of truth in each of these stereotypes—but, most will insist that stereotypes have certain positive aspects.

For example, if the board has done a good job of selecting a superintendent, it *should* be able to routinely approve without much discussion many of the superintendent's actions. The board *is* a legal figurehead to some degree; there is a legal need for some corporate body to buy, own, and sell property for the district, to levy taxes when necessary, to establish monetary reserves, to hire an executive, and so on. The district *does* need a shock absorber to protect its employees during local crises so they can do their primary jobs. Finally, the board *is* a service group in the premier sense, that is, a group that has the wherewithal, both in power and knowledge, to make what needs to happen, happen.

The reality is that the superintendent does not have the power, and the state does not have the local knowledge, to effectively lead the educational program. The board is needed to lead education at the local level.

Do board members themselves feel that they are actually fulfilling their mandate for educational leadership? Or are problems with time, processes, and priorities frustrating their efforts to do so?

Time and Priorities

Although boards may not be anachronistic, some of their ways of operating probably are; board members themselves would be the first to say so. Consider just a few of the trends that challenge old assumptions about school board operations:

- the trend toward some board members viewing themselves as advocates of special constituencies, not of all children, and the resulting lack of board cohesiveness;
- the rising rate of superintendent turnover;
- the information explosion in the form of state reform mandates, categorical aid programs, educational research nd test results;
- the pressures of demographic shifts that increa..ngly separate the majority of the revenue producing population from the majority of children most in need.

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Each of these trends implies a demand upon board members to commit more time, to discuss more, to communicate more with the people of the district—and to work harder to establish congruent goals and policies in the midst of the complex educational and political cross currents.

A 1986 study of boards of education by the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) shows they struggle with these demands—but with mixed results. For example, of the topics reportedly used at board development sessions, more than three-fourths dealt with board processes—not with the content of the board's work—implying that simply making board meetings work is an ongoing struggle.

Time is clearly another major concern. The IEL study asked board presidents to say which three of 12 major policy roles were most important, and which received too little time. Every one of the 12 roles was considered most important by at least five percent of the respondents. More revealing, every one of the 12 roles was considered to rec / e too little time by a substantial percentage of the respondents—15 percent or more. Specifically, more than 35 percent of respondents felt that each of the following received too little time in their deliberations:

- appraising curricula in terms of district needs and goals;
- continuous goal setting, policy development, and system appraisal;
- raising community aspirations for education; and
- expanding the constituencies that actively support education.

From the IEL data one may infer that almost every educational topic and area of responsibility is considered to be of at least some importance by boards. Consequently, boards must cope with chronically overloaded agendas.

The Mandate to Lead

The challenge to boards is to manage their time and priorities so that true leadership functions are not swamped by trivia; their meetings do not become a morass of uncompleted discussions, tabled priorities, and unrealized goals.

There is a series of problems facing school boards—each challenges boards to exercise educational leadership. These problems include:

1. The question of who sets goals and defines limits for public education;
2. The relationship with the school management team and the problem of allocation of responsibilities;
3. The pressure for teacher professionalization and empowerment;
4. The challenge of governing schools in an atmosphere of legal constraint;
5. The difficulty of shaping legislated reforms and categorical aid into effective change; and
6. The imperative of bridging the gap between schools and community to respond to student needs and to tap local resources.

Authority can be acquired by election or appointment, but leadership can only be acquired by action. Because a district has a school board does not mean the board leads the district.

A board's level of leadership is determined by the extent to which it exercises leadership functions of goal setting, policy-making, appointment and delegation, communication, and appraisal.

Key Issues in School Board Leadership

1. **The question of who sets the goals and defines the limits for public education.**

Lately it seems that everybody wants to get into the act in education. Governors, state legislators, state boards of education, state and national agencies and associations, and universities all have established commissions and issued reports recommending educational reform. What is more, this wave of rhetoric has been followed by action. Not wishing to see their plans die on paper, reformers have pressed for legislation, funding, and mandated programs. Unfortu-

nately, this has not been a coordinated effort, nor has it been particularly democratic.

The result has been an avalanche of incongruent goals and programs, some funded and some not, issued separately from different sources—descending, from the top down, on local school districts.

As if this were not enough, the reform landslide arrived at the same time that bottom-up societal pressure was growing for a much expanded role for schools. Changes in the community and family, increasing numbers of non-English speaking students, and a tight job market requiring greater technical skills: all put pressure on schools to provide new services. School boards have tried to respond, but with limited resources and unlimited imposed goals, conflict has been inevitable. New York is a case in point.

During the last decade, New York school districts have experienced simultaneous growth in demands and controls. The federal mandate for instruction of children with handicapping conditions, state mandates of the Regents Action Plan, and grass-roots mandates for more attention to at-risk students have converged on the local school board. Many of these demands arrive without guidelines; others arrive without supporting funds.

At this point of challenge, a local board can show its leadership using close personal knowledge of the needs of local students to determine what its schools should and should not attempt to do. As a microcosm of the community, the board must exercise common sense and collective wisdom, interpreting reforms in practical terms—money, time, space, and people. This may mean cautiously and realistically opting for solutions with proven success. It may also mean going beyond the ordinary, getting ahead of mandates to provide needed programs. Two examples illustrate this:

—Certain boards worked over several years with their staffs and communities to establish family life education programs. As a result, when AIDS education was mandated by the state, it could be incorporated into these existing programs with little difficulty or controversy. By proactively establishing a local program to meet local needs, these boards anticipated state mandates and managed them within their own framework of goals.

—In some districts, board partnerships with local businesses have resulted in occupational education programs that have helped to reduce dropouts and have provided students with an educational experience beyond anything that the schools' own resources could have afforded. These boards combined fiscal restraint with a thorough knowledge of their communities' needs and resources. The result: successful programs within realistic limits.

This type of leadership positions boards where they should be—in the forefront of reform. But in order to take this stance, a board must

have a clear sense of direction based on its own goals. Many of the decisions that a board makes may seem trivial or mundane. Others essentially are responses to mandates or pressures. It is only through its own clear sense of direction that a board can shape decisions into coherent reform.

Given a strong sense of mission, the decisions of a local board can have the cumulative effect of creating an educationally effective school environment. Imagine a district in which the board:

—makes staff development a significant element in the budget;
—establishes an extracurricular eligibility policy that encourages students to put a priority on academics;
—supports the recruitment of female and minority students into more challenging courses;
—recognizes the intellectual achievements of teachers and students;
—builds strong school libraries;
—develops channels for effective parent/teacher communications and cooperation;
—identifies qualities desired in hiring teaching staff; and
—designs a discipline policy that helps troubled students to stay in school and to succeed.

In isolation, each one of these decisions could have only limited impact. But in the aggregate, they result in a positive educational climate that says "This board (and therefore, this community) values good education."

Establishing goals for a local educational system is a central function of the school board. When mandates and pressures make that leadership function problematic, an effective board has many options for responding strategically. It can mobilize community support for local goals, build coalitions with other districts and affected groups, collect and communicate the necessary information to make its case, seek variances in state regulations when appropriate, and generally assert its right to help shape the agenda of reform.

But first and last, it is the board's task to set local goals. Without them, the board has no base from which to respond to changing community needs or to interpret externally prescribed or encouraged priorities and goals.

2. The board/administration relationship and the problem of allocating responsibilities.

The historical section earlier in this paper showed how the governance of schools evolved as local trustees began to hire school principals and superintendents, and as those administrators began to professionalize their occupation and assert leadership. At least since

the beginning of this century, the interaction has been a potential source of tension. In theory, the board sets policy and the school management team implements it. In reality, the line is seldom that clear.

A 1984 research study by Joseph T. Hentges, a Minnesota superintendent, revealed that there was no typical arrangement, and that a multitude of internal and external factors determined whether board or executive dominated, and whether the local arrangement created conflict.

It seems natural that local boards and administrators tend to work out mutually their relationships and areas of responsibility. The qualifications and experiences of the individuals involved determine who is consulted about insurance, who drafts a discipline policy, who outlines curriculum goals, and who helps review contractors' bids. But the fact that this gray area of responsibility exists creates potential for conflict as well as a need for negotiation.

In the relationship between the superintendent and the board, the latter, of course, has extended legal authority, and the superintendent is the board's employee. But authority is not always synonymous with power, and the superintendent has several sources of power or control not directly available to the board. These include administrative staff, access to and authority to generate information, communications facilities, data processing capability, time, and an advantageous location. Little wonder that the superintendent sometimes becomes, de facto, the one who initiates policy and sets the board's agenda.

Where strong mutual trust exists, and the board and superintendent see eye to eye on values and goals, this role reversal can work—at least for a time. As Luverne L. Cunningham notes, "There can be settings and conditions where violation of the rule produces not negative but positive results." But sometimes the superintendent too frequently crosses into the board's area of responsibility, or vice versa; the zone of tolerance becomes a combat zone. Either the two parties carry on a running skirmish over roles and responsibilities, or the board provides plenty of rope, and lets the superintendent get hung by the first big policy failure. In either case, the superintendent eventually leaves, with the inevitable disruption and costs to the district. The question often asked then is: Could this marriage have been saved?

Boards typically do take the selection of a superintendent seriously, investing considerable time and effort in searching and interviewing.

What may be equally important, however, is what happens after a board has located an individual it wants. At this point, the process of defining and clarifying who makes what decisions is crucial. Boards that avoid confrontation with the candidate at that point will find themselves in confrontation with him or her later.

A board that is proactive in hiring a superintendent, assertive in defining the superintendent's job, and straightforward in evaluating
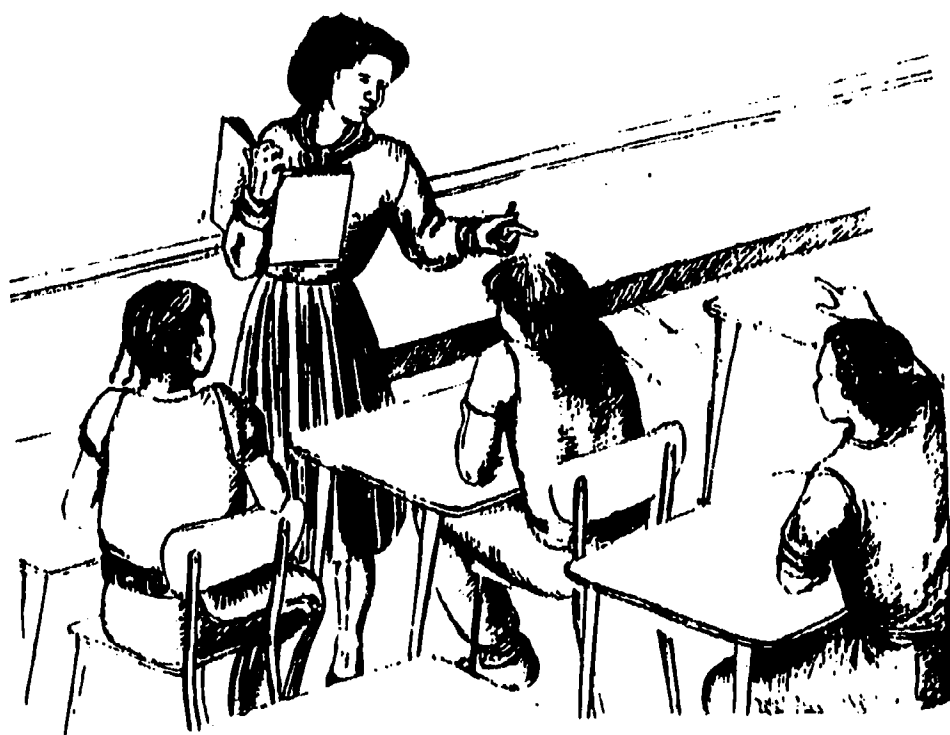
the superintendent is likely to have the leadership skills to build a good relationship with the school management team overall. This means using the tools of power appropriately: defining job responsibilities and staff evaluation criteria, consulting administrative staff in areas of expertise, making consistent demands for necessary information, communicating board decisions and the rationale for them to the school community and community at large. Perhaps most important in managing its employees, the effective board will appraise its own performance from time to time, asking:

— Are we fulfilling our responsibility to lead the district?

— Are we developing as a group the knowledge we must have to be educational leaders?

— Are we devoting the majority of the board's time and energy to the needs of education and children?

— Are we establishing our own agenda as a board, based on those needs?

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3. The pressure for teacher professionalization and empowerment.

After 20 years of unionism, the professionalization movement among teachers does not come as a surprise. The formation of teacher unions was an important and necessary step in improving teachers' occupational status and increasing the job's extrinsic rewards. However, the industrial labor union model, which gave workers the tools of collective bargaining and the strike to combat management—has been an uncomfortable fit for the teaching occupation.

Teaching, as Douglas Mitchell points out, has characteristics of unskilled labor, skilled craft, artistic performance, and professional practice all rolled into one rather nebulous job description. The great variety and sensitivity of teaching is not suited to a rigid labor/management relationship, and some type of professional model, within the legal framework of school governance, may be more appropriate.

Boards, no less than teachers, would welcome a higher level of professionalism for teachers with all that that connotes: more qualified staff, better informed practice, more accountability, more consultation and less confrontation. The problem is that the union model has created and perpetuated some obstacles to professionalism which are not easy to remove.

One barrier is the lock step salary structure that prevents boards from recognizing and rewarding exceptional talent and performance or special skills. Another is the unwillingness of unions to discipline their own members, leading to adversarial relations between teachers and administrators. A third is the reluctance of teachers to accept accountability for results, prompting boards and the public to question their professional expertise. Finally, there is the reliance on collective bargaining for decision making, a method that relies on power rather than consensus and that is not well designed for the development and achievement of common goals.

Teacher decision making is key to the concept of professionalization. It is an area where school boards often are extremely sensitive, but also where boards can make perhaps their greatest contribution to improving education. They can consult teachers—appropriately—without loss of their own prerogatives, and improve teacher performance.

Research shows that teachers want most to be involved in decisions that affect their own work most intimately: decisions about how and what to teach, texts to be used, and the nature of classroom activities. In other words, they are most insistent on being involved in decisions that most directly affect relationships with children. They feel much less urgency about being involved in basically managerial decisions such as hiring and budgeting.

However, teachers feel most deprived of decision making power in borderline areas where student and system meet, areas such as grad-

> *"Teacher decision making is key to the concept of professionalization. It is an area where school boards often are extremely sensitive, but also where boards can make perhaps their greatest contribution to improving education."*

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ing, discipline, student class assignments, and standardized testing. In these areas, increased teacher involvement can have the dual benefit of improving the quality of decisions and improving teacher morale and sense of professionalism. Boards would be well-advised to increase teacher participation in these and similar areas of decision making.

Some board members may fear that consulting staff and delegating decisions to them will erode board power. Research shows just the opposite.

In organizations where subordinates are consulted, both managers and subordinates experience a feeling of increased power. The subordinates feel their views have been consulted, and managers benefit from the first-hand knowledge and expertise contained in those views. Subordinates share a degree of responsibility for decisions, and feel increased commitment. Ultimately, the board can retain and even reinforce its governance position by taking the lead in creating deliberate decentralization when appropriate.

Certain problems with this type of appropriate consultation are inevitable. The collective bargaining model may surface, creating an adversarial atmosphere. Administrators may see increased teacher participation as a threat. Finally, teachers may fail to appreciate that, as the legally responsible party, only the board can make final decisions in many areas, and may sometimes have to overrule plans and ideas for legal or financial reasons.

Here board leadership is most important. An effective board should appeal to the most professional instincts of staff, and not accede to adversarial baiting. It will clarify its own status as the legally-accountable, decision-making body by encouraging staff consultation to aid board deliberations. It will seek out and encourage administrators who favor the use of participative decision making. It will invite and coordinate input on district goals and policies so what emerges is a shared vision.

4. The challenge of governing schools in an atmosphere of legal constraint.

A board of education tends to focus on the good of the largest number. The law, however, exists to protect the rights of individuals, so it inevitably imposes constraints and burdens on school boards in their efforts to provide the most benefit from a limited budget, or to raise standards through policies. Whether it is home instruction for a suspended student, individualized learning plans for special students, release of teachers and students for religious observance, the search of student lockers for contraband, regulations and legal precedents limit the scope of board discretion in ma   ng and enforcing policy.

In many cases, such limits require no more than boards would do normally. In other cases, however, they create costs, concerns, and conflicts. A prime example is Section 3020-a of the Education Law, which deals with hearing procedures and penalties involved in tenured teacher discipline. As the School Board Association's position paper *Toward Better Teaching* no'   this regulation "has turned the ideal of a simple process for rerr _ ng incompetent or otherwise seriously deficient teachers from the classroom, with fairness to all parties concerned, into a nightmarish ordeal."

The reasons for this negative assessment include the long time periods required to resolve many cases (sometimes two to three years), excessive expense to the district (estimated at $40,000 plus), and the divisiveness of the process. Difficulties with the definition of incompetence and subjectivity about what constitutes effective teacher performance also complicate the process.

Sometimes a lack of clear and rigorous standards for teacher selection, evaluation, and tenure contribute to the difficulty of meeting the legal requirements for teacher dismissal. Teachers themselves, by a large margin, favor the removal of incompetent teachers (according to a 1984 Harris poll); yet boards, confronted with evidence of incompetence, dread the financial and psychic costs of the removal process.

School boards are attempting to address the problem on two fronts: in the state Legislature and at home. At the state level, the state Association has called repeatedly for reforms in the 3020-a hearing process.

Locally, boards are becoming much more aware of the need for well developed policies on teacher recruitment, selection, evaluation. and tenure. They are having superintendents and principals develop performance standards for teachers, and establishing procedures for dealing with problem employees in ways that encourage improvement, but prepare for discipline proceedings, if necessary.

An effective board can use its policy-making powers to work within legal constraints. By establishing policies within the existing legal framework, the board helps to assure that it is prepared for contro-

versy, it has the necessary information, the management team proceeded properly, and, thus, it is ready to do what is best for the district, without infringement of personal rights. The effective board views legal constraints not an excuse for inaction, but as an incentive to clarify and establish policy.

5. The difficulty of shaping legislated reforms and categorical aid into effective change.

Given the weight and power of state education regulations, it creates the impression that the state holds the purse strings. In New York, of course, this is less than half true. More than 50 percent of educational costs are paid from the local tax levy. However, the realities of education finance are such that school boards have much less than 50 percent autonomy in determining the school budget. And state regulations are only one of the constrictive factors.

Because state legislators and state education departments have become proactive in education, state mandates and aid in the form of earmarked (categorical) funds have become common. Such programs allow legislators to assure their constituents that they are actively trying to reform the schools in specific ways. The fact that such programs usurp the board of education's appropriate role often is ignored because boards are compelled to accept categorical funds and cooperate with the programs. These forces include:

- the publicity frequently accorded to state-funded programs;
- pressure from local constituents who may not be aware of the strings attached to state aid;
- pressure from interest groups that stand to benefit from the aid;
- the realization, in large city districts, that non-categorical aid may result in a lowering of education's share of the city budget, while categorical aid will not; and
- in many cases, many of the goals of such programs coincide with local goals.

The ultimate effect of many state mandates and categorical grants, however, is to force boards to abdicate at least part of their goal setting responsibility. Furthermore, the hidden costs of paperwork and reporting and the loss of budgetary flexibility take an additional toll.

Two noteworthy difficulties with legislated reforms and categorical aid erode local school board leadership. One is that they are sometimes politically motivated and place the goals of an interest group above the goals of the general community. Another is that they often ignore the diversity of local districts and attempt to apply inappropriate solutions to the wrong problems.

Boards are charged with trusteeship for the whole community and with determining the needs of that particular community. When an aid program or piece of legislation appears that is obviously out of synch with those needs, it often upsets carefully built plans and relationships and subverts local initiative.

The Excellence in Teaching aid program inadvertently had such negative effects in some districts. The legislation was intended to:

- raise salaries of first, second, and third year teachers, especially where those salaries were below state or regional medians;
- improve teachers' salaries generally; and
- promote "excellence in teaching."

The legislation specifically precluded the requirement of additional work performance in exchange for the increased salary. However, it became apparent that the program had precipitated the following:

- higher salaries for first, second, and third year teachers in many districts, and
- some improvement of salaries of staff represented by the teacher bargaining unit in most districts;
  but also:
- considerable alienation of administrators and categories of staff excluded from the aid;
- anger on the part of school board members and administrators who felt that the purpose should have been to improve teacher performance;
- embittered relations between board and staff because of prolonged negotiations;
- alienation of taxpayers who were required, under the legislation, to pay additional fringe benefits; and
- large hidden costs to districts for negotiating and reporting requirements.

In a few cases (about a dozen out of 700 plus), usually where the amount of money was small, boards negotiated improving teaching. These plans generally involved attendance incentives or merit awards. In one case the funds were used for an experimental career ladder; in another to pay for the expenses of a professional staff development plan.

It is clear from the small number achieving this type of plan that it was difficult for boards to put any local shape on this program. In the cases where boards did succeed, they seem to have done so by planning the local incentive program collaboratively with staff, and giving staff a major role in determining the distribution of funds.

Legislated reforms only can be shaped into effective change by a board which has its own idea of effective education and its own plan

on how to achieve it. Such districts already are exploring a broad range of possibilities for reform, including teacher incentives. They have the initiative, and, thus, are in a better position to absorb and respond to any additional mandated programs.

6. The imperative to bridge the gap between schools and community, both to respond to student needs and to tap local resources.

Relations with the community are a top priority issue for school boards because the community is not only the chief source of support for the schools, but also the schools' chief client. The board must know what the community thinks of the schools, what it wants, and what it can contribute. The issue is of paramount importance because:

- insufficient information contributes to negativism;
- rapid changes in the community—in demographics, business climate, and technologies—constantly are challenging the goals of education; and
- the community has enormous resources for education, frequently unknown to the school district and unvalued by their owners.

The school board effectively is positioned to address these imperatives. Its members have numerous community contacts. It has the clout to address concerns and make agreements. It has access to media.

Often a single effort at community outreach can address all imperatives mentioned above. For example, a board welcome to a new business can yield information on potential jobs for vocational students, a financial contributor for sponsored events, and a positive initial impression that may have lasting benefits.

Business and industry often are eager to assist the schools, but need to know how they can help. They also expect a return: positive publicity for their contribution, and an attentive ear to their concerns. The same holds true for any sector of the community: service and civic organizations; unions; farm, professional, and business organizations; colleges; ethnic and fraternal associations.

This is the era of educational partnerships. Many examples show impressive community contributions to schools, including internships for teachers and students, in-kind contributions, small grants and scholarships, special training and expertise, and educational programs and tours. Some of these programs provide hope for conquering the stubborn problems of dropouts and unemployed youth.

Still, boards should remember the community has more to offer than resources. It also may play a role in shaping the goals and vision of the educational system. If a board is receptive to concerns of community groups and creative in combining the recommendations to produce a unified direction for the district, it probably is an effective board.

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Conclusion

The initiative for education in America began in local communities. It still finds its greatest strength there, both financially and in the commitment of local students, citizens, staff, and boards of education.

As the structure of leadership in education has evolved, the concept of local lay control of the public schools has retained vitality. School boards continue to be the crucial link between local aspirations and government planning. Only through the school board leadership can each inform and activate the other.

The foregoing issues reveal the difficulties of school board leadership, but they also show the areas in which leadership is imperative. Why imperative? Because as legislators, governors, academics, teacher leaders, state officials, and school board members themselves have begun to realize, effective change cannot occur without local leadership.

If reforms are legislated without local input or commitment, the reform effort will remain on paper only, largely symbolic and lifeless. It will be like an incomplete electrical circuit; if one crucial piece is missing, no power can flow.

The piece that completes the circuit is the school board. This is what Larry Cuban of Stanford University refers to as "the pivotal role that school boards and superintendents play in mobilizing limited resources, giving legitimacy to a reform effort, and [providing] the crucial interplay between central office and school site that can spell the difference between implementation success and failure."

The growing pressures and restrictions on school boards have so burdened and constrained their operations that functioning as the district's educational leader has become more and more difficult. It will not be enough for state officials and reformers to acknowledge the board's key role. They also will have to begin providing the flexibility needed for local leadership, recognizing the diversity of local needs and goals. They will have to acknowledge that boards, as the group legally accountable for local education, must have a meaningful opportunity to influence every planned reform; without board commitment, such reforms can never be effectively carried out.

Boards, themselves, will have to strengthen their leadership by exercising it. This means consulting appropriate people and collecting appropriate information to assess local needs, debating and establishing educational goals and policies, and communicating them to local constituents and state officials. And it will mean an active and ongoing program of district and staff appraisal to chart ongoing progress toward district goals and to reshape plans strategically.

Americans tend to have enormous faith in education. They see it not merely as an instrument for the young to fit into society, or as a source of training for the workplace, but as the means to realize their highest aspirations for children. They see it, potentially, as the one institution in the United States that levels all, and lifts all. The local school board, in all its humbler and higher tasks, is entrusted with the leadership essential to make that dream realized.
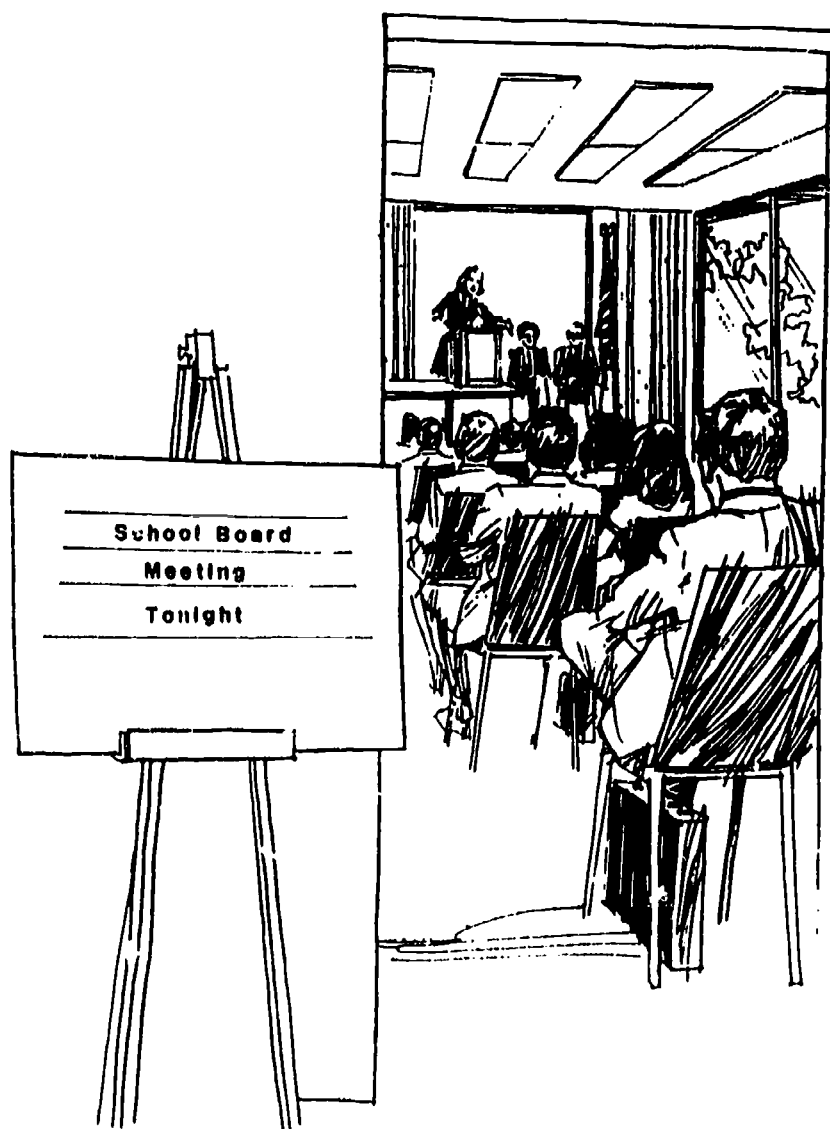
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