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ABSTRACT

A review of literature on state education governance, with a focus on strengthening the role of the state boards of education in policymaking, is presented in this report. Four themes include current recommendations of various groups, the context of governance, governance structures, and key actors in state education policymaking. Policy implications from state legislative research are discussed. A conclusion is that changes in state boards of education entail not only organizational changes, but a paradigm shift. A recommendation is made for increasing state board interaction with the state legislature to influence policy formation. Six tables are included. (26 references) (LMI)

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# POLICY ISSUES

## Recapturing the Policymaking Function of State Boards of Education

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August 1990

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# **POLICY ISSUES**

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by **Gary W. Badarak**  
Riverside Unified School District  
Riverside, California

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY . . . . .	v
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECAPTURING A STATE POLICY MISSION . . . . .	3
THE CONTEXT OF STATE EDUCATION GOVERNANCE . . . . .	6
STATE EDUCATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES . . . . .	9
THE KEY ACTORS IN STATE EDUCATION POLICYMAKING . . . . .	14
POLICY CONTEXT AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF INFLUENCE . . . . .	19
POLICY IMPLICATIONS FROM STATE LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH . . . . .	22
SUMMARY . . . . .	27
REFERENCES . . . . .	30



LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Relationship of Cultural Values and Distribution of Authority Over Education . . . . .	8
2. Governor Appoints Board, Board Appoints Chief . . . . .	10
3. Appointed Board, Elected Chief . . . . .	10
4. Elected Board, Board Appoints Chief . . . . .	11
5. Appointed Board, Appointed Chief . . . . .	11
6. Means of Selecting Chief State School Officers Between 1950 and 1988 . . . . .	12

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The state board of education is recognized in many state constitutions as the education policymaking body for the state. However, in reality, state boards are noted mostly by their recent absence in shaping education policy. If policymaking is the major function of state boards, why are they so noticeably absent from the discussion of school reform? Recent discussions concerning the role of state boards have focused on steps they can take to recapture their mission as determiner of state education policy.

Citing the recommendations of the 1986 Task Force on State Board Leadership formed by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) and a discussion of the roles that NASBE supports as appropriate for state boards, the paper acknowledges that recent suggestions for strengthening state boards will no doubt help them become more effective, efficient, and knowledgeable in what they do. The paper questions, however, whether adopting any or all of the recommendations will transform state boards into the originator of state education policy. The author's view is that state boards of education that are truly at a crossroads need both a shift in thinking and acceptance of the best operational advice that NASBE and others have to offer.

According to Badarak, of all the recommendations made, working with the legislature is the one most clearly absent from the list but most practical in its importance. The real task ahead for state boards is to

recognize that, for the present, the state legislature is where education policy is being shaped. He, therefore, advocates that state boards get more involved with state legislatures. He recommends doing that by aligning the work of the state board with areas of education policy shown to be of interest to state legislative bodies.

To support his recommendation that state boards orient themselves to the ebb and flow of legislatures, Badarak reviews the literature on state education governance. Four themes emerge and are reviewed in the paper. The recommendations of various groups--like those referred to above--constitute one theme. Others discuss the political culture or context of governance, the legal or constitutional framework of governance, and the recognition of the legislature as the current forum for discussing education policy.

#### Context of Governance

Education policy decisions are shaped by the way education is governed in any particular state. At least three factors influence governance structures--the state constitution and accompanying statutes that set the legal basis for public education, the political culture of the state, and the cultural beliefs of the people, which are reflected in their attitudes toward government. The result is that state governance of education is as diverse as the states themselves. Still, some common elements exist. In fact, a small number of governance patterns dominate and prescribe the relationships of the constitutional actors in state education governance--the governor, the Chief State School Officer, the state board, and the legislature.

## Governance Structures and Key Actors

Ten models of education governance are found across the states today, but four of the models predominate; these four models are used by 43 of the 50 states. The models describe the relationships among the governor, the state board, and the Chief State School Officer. In some states, the legislature is also involved. Each model has its own strengths and weaknesses. Each also reflects the patterns of interaction and influence created by the structure.

Beyond the constitutional actors are other groups and individuals involved in education policymaking. These key actors are labeled the core actors, the inner circle, the outer circle, the sometimes players, the often forgotten, and the unseen others. Badarak identifies the members of each group and discusses their role and influence in shaping policy.

## State Boards and Education Policy

Badarak draws from state legislative research to make three recommendations designed to align state board activity with the activities and interests of state legislatures. The recommendations can guide state boards in their efforts to fulfill their mission of shaping education policy.

Legislatures enact education legislation in a limited number of areas. In regular cycles, state boards can review policies in areas that correspond to legislative interest.

Ideas are turned into law in a series of stages. At each stage, different questions are asked and different information is needed on

becomes important. State boards can become familiar with the stages, since some must occur within the legislature for public policy to be enacted.

Legislators need concise and timely information. State boards of education can become proficient at providing valuable information at the appropriate times.

---

Policy making is the major function of state boards of education (NASBE, 1983, p. 37).

Not since the wave of school reforms that followed Sputnik has education been so prominently and persistently featured on state and national policy agendas. Presidential candidates, governors, state legislators, and chief state school officers vie with one another over matters of education policy (Timar & Kirp, 1989, p. 505).

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#### INTRODUCTION

The two quotes above present both the promise and the practice of state boards of education. By describing the role of the state school board as setting education policy for the state, the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) clearly echoes the language of many state constitutions. However, the reality of the situation--recognized by Timar and Kirp--is that state school boards are noted mostly by their absence and have not been major players in the latest wave of school reform. Increasingly, we observe the prominence of governors, Chief State School Officers, blue ribbon commissions, and even the President in articulating reform policies and strategies for public education.

If policymaking is the major function of the state boards of education, why are they so noticeably absent from the discussion of school reform? Has the state board of education floundered in its role of determining state education policy, while the Chief State School Officer (CSSO) competes with powerful newcomers to the education policy



scene? Feeling impotent and confused, the state board of education may react by meddling in the details of the state education agency, by quarreling among its members, or by simply doing nothing. Meanwhile, Chief State School Officers may appear incapable of carrying out their leadership role. What can the state board of education and the Chief State School Officer jointly do to effectively participate in state education policymaking? How can the state board of education and Chief State School Officer strengthen their respective positions and improve their policymaking relationship?

This paper is an analysis of the role of the state board of education and the Chief State School Officer within the context of state governance structures. In reviewing the literature on state governance of education, four research or discussion themes emerge. The first is an explanation of state governance patterns by reference to the concepts of political culture or political context. The second is the legal or constitutional basis of state governance. The third is the recognition of the state legislature as the current forum for discussing education policy. Attempts of various groups to establish or articulate organizational goals for the state school board constitute the fourth theme.

This paper begins with a review of recent prescriptions offered by groups and individuals for enabling state boards of education and Chief State School Officers to recapture their roles in shaping education policy. It moves to a discussion of American cultural context and beliefs supporting political action and to a review of state education

governance structures. The next section introduces the key actors involved in state education policymaking and discusses the role of the state legislative body in enacting state education policy. The paper ends with a discussion of directions the state board and the Chief State School Officer can take to develop a stronger working relationship based on recent research into state governance.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECAPTURING A STATE POLICY MISSION

Recent discussions concerning the role of state boards have focused on ways for this agency of state government to recapture its mission as the determiner of state education policy. Michael Cohen's 1987 Kappan article summarizes the work of the 1986 Task Force on State Board Leadership formed by the National Association of State Boards of Education. The task force was created at a time when new demands were being placed on state boards and clear directions for the future were needed. The task force asked two questions: (1) How can state boards of education best sustain the momentum of education reform? and (2) How can state boards gain influence in the changing environment of state policymaking? In reporting the answers, Cohen discussed three goals proposed by the task force, along with the hurdles he saw in their implementation. The three goals included recommendations that state boards:

- 1) ...engage in strategic planning in order to identify long-range educational goals for the state;
- 2) ...review their regulations for each major domain of state policy on a regular and predictable schedule; and



- 3) ...continually assess the overall quality and condition of education (p. 63).

Cohen identifies three obstacles to successful adoption: (1) the beliefs and orientations of board members, (2) the limited amount of time board members can meet, and (3) their relationship with the Chief State School Officer. Expounding on these, Cohen says board members must be willing to see the future as different from the past and actively seek the possibility for change in policy review. They must delegate much of their routine business to staff, so that they can concentrate on policy. Further, they must work as team players with the Chief State School Officer to become more visible in state education policy. A successful working relationship with the Chief State School Officer also enables state board members to gain access to the information they need, unless, of course, they have a staff of their own.

NASBE (1987) also reviewed state education governance and discussed the roles it thought were appropriate for the state board of education. These called for state boards to:

- 1) advocate public education,
- 2) act as a liaison between those interested in public education,
- 3) serve as a consensus builder, and
- 4) develop long-range goals and develop strategies and procedures to achieve them (p. 2).

The means to creating effective boards, according to NASBE, is to have regular discussions of policy issues, to hire and maintain a high caliber staff of its own, to keep a regular meeting schedule, and to work

within a budget that is sufficient to the task of articulating goals and evaluating their progress. NASBE also suggests that changing the structure of state governance at the constitutional level is another means to achieve these goals.

The recommendations reviewed thus far are prescriptions or goals. They include hiring an independent staff, holding regular meetings, working with an adequate budget, holding strategic planning sessions, conducting periodic and regular reviews of regulations, articulating goals and evaluating progress toward them, shifting from administrative to policy review, delegating routine functions to administrative staff, and developing and maintaining cooperative working relations with the Chief State School Officer.

Most of these suggestions will no doubt help the state board of education become more effective, efficient, and knowledgeable in what it does. Whether adopting any or all of these will transform the state board into the originator of state education policy remains to be seen. State boards of education that are truly at the crossroads need a shift in thinking as well as acceptance of the best of the operational advice NASBE and others have to offer.

But the real task ahead for state boards of education as they regroup and develop is to recognize that, for the present, the state legislature is where policy is being shaped regardless of where it was first articulated. Education policy has not traditionally been a high priority item for legislators. But now that they are involved in education, legislators will probably not be willing to give up this new

arena of policymaking. It would therefore benefit all concerned to learn how to work with the ebb and flow of the legislature as it works to enact education policy legislation. Of the reforms mentioned, working with the legislature is the one most clearly absent. It is, however, the most practical in its importance.

#### THE CONTEXT OF STATE EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

State governance of education is shaped by three factors. The first is the state constitution and accompanying statutes that set the legal basis for public education. The legal basis of governance authorizes procedures within which political actors must conduct their business. The federal system of government in the United States gives states the control over the governance of public education. Virtually all areas of public education at the local level are influenced by state action.

The second factor is the political process of the state. The political process within each state focuses attention on who is important in shaping the policy agenda. States have developed unique patterns of governance as Iannaccone (1975) has noted "...from the confluence of two sets of attitudes, one dealing with educational governance primarily and the other more broadly encompassing government generally" (p. 98). The first set derives from the fact that states delegate much of the authority for education to local school boards yet hold back some for themselves. The second set of attitudes holds that education is specifically a local responsibility. The tension between the belief in local control under the constitutionality of the state is what is meant

by "dual sovereignty" and has led to a noncentralized system of education governance in the states. As McDonnell and McLaughlin (1982) state:

The element of political culture that most affects state policymaking is the strength of local control norms. Both the role SEAs [state departments of education] play in state education policy and their capacity to assist local districts largely depend on the support they receive from general government and whether the political culture sanctions an active presence in local jurisdictions. This finding suggests that state political culture, in effect, preordains SEA roles and that SEAs in states with a strong local control ethos will always play a less active role and have less capacity than their counterparts in states where a strong central government is seen as legitimate (p. 79).

In addition to these conflicting attitudes toward governance in education, cultural beliefs are a third factor shaping education policy decisions in the states. As Elazar (1984) sees it, three different sets of values were brought by immigrants to the United States. Some held to a "moralistic" type of government, where politically neutral nongovernment action is seen as a means for achieving a good community, usually when private action could not be sustained. "Individualistic" state government was seen to favor economic development and was linked to political parties as a means for satisfying individual needs. Government responsive to political elites with little or no partisanship reflects "traditionalistic" values.

Wirt (1977) found that the territorial distribution of authority over education in the states is related to these historical roots. Individualistic states prefer decentralized systems. Traditionalistic states prefer more centralized systems. Moralistic states fall midway between the extreme positions on the issue.

Table 1

Relationship of Cultural Values and Distribution of  
Authority Over Education

<u>Cultural Values</u>	<u>Authority Over Education</u>
Traditionalistic	Centralization
Moralistic	
Individualistic	Decentralization

He found that the South, the West, and the state of Hawaii have a high degree of centralization. Decentralization was found only in New England and the Rocky Mountain states. Throughout the middle band of the country, he found the middle of the extremes between centralized and decentralized systems. Because of these cultural traditions, it is believed that New England's local control is a result of a suspicion of central authority. Likewise, the South is mostly centralized because the Civil War destroyed local governments and forced state governments to take over basic services.

How states have chosen to govern public education is a story as diverse as the individual states. Still, common elements exist among the states. As we shall see, a small set of governance patterns dominate and prescribe the relationships of the key constitutional actors in state education governance today--the governor, the legislature, the Chief State School Officer, and the state board of education.

## STATE EDUCATION GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Governance structure refers to the framework or rules set up by a constitution or by statutes. Governance takes place within this structure, suggesting that political influence is determined by the placement of an individual in the hierarchy of the government.

Ten models of education governance are found across the states today, although only four models predominate. These four models are used by 86 percent (43) of the states. The models describe the relationships among the governor, the state school board, and the Chief State School Officer, although sometimes the legislature is a major player in selecting members of the board and the state superintendent. It is through either election by the public or legislature, appointment by the governor, or some combination of the two that state board positions are filled. Each model has its positive and negative aspects, and a list of those can be found in summary form in the work of Sanchez and Hall (1987).

Tables 2-5 depict the four models and list the states where each is found (Sanchez & Hall, 1987). The mostly frequently occurring pattern of state governance and the 13 states using this model are found in Table 2. In this model, the governor appoints the state board of education, and the board appoints the Chief State School Officer.

The second most frequently occurring pattern is shown in Table 3. Here the governor and Chief State School Officer are elected officials. The governor appoints members of the state board of education.



Table 2

## Governor Appoints Board, Board Appoints Chief

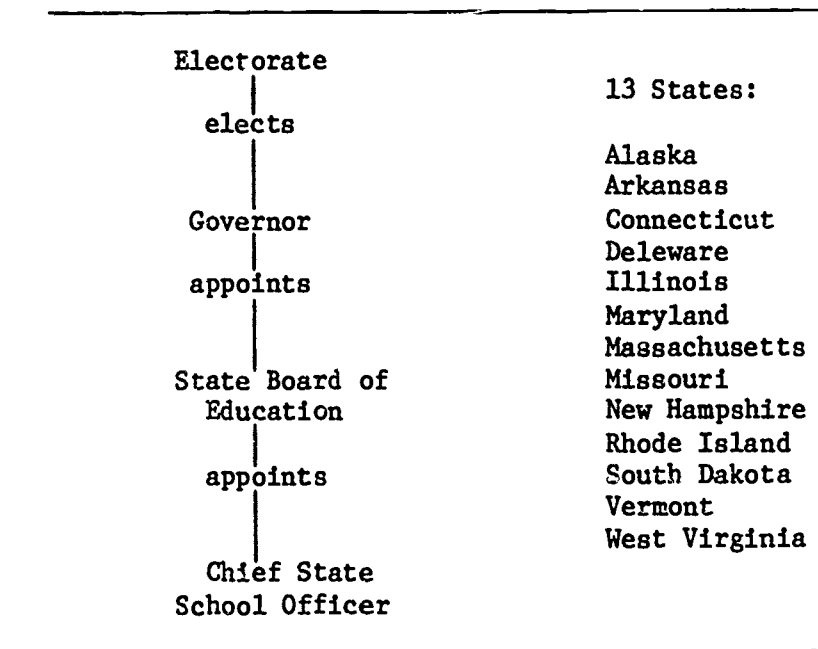
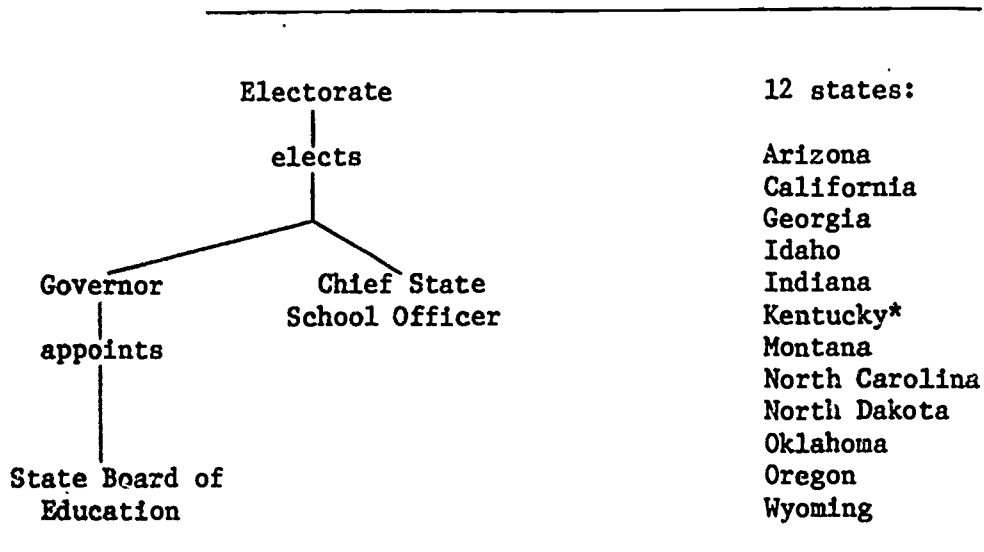


Table 3

## Appointed Board, Elected Chief

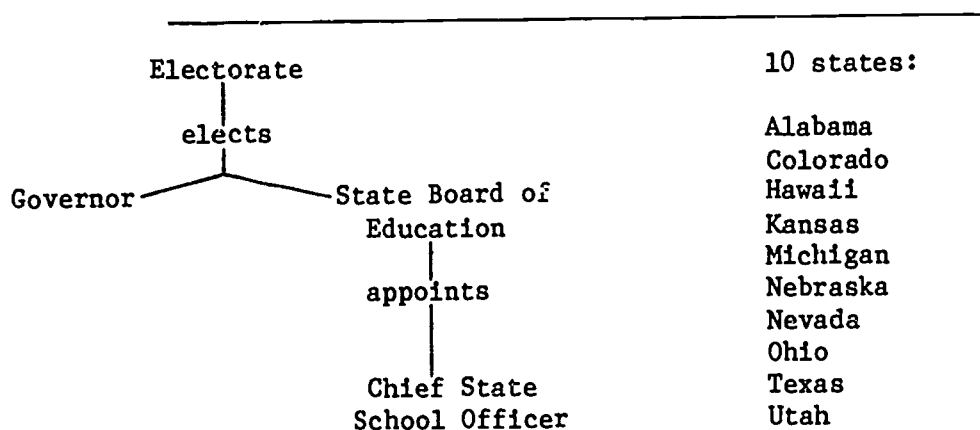


\*The Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 contains provisions that will move Kentucky to the model depicted in Table 2.

In the third model, an elected state school board appoints the Chief State Chief School Officer.

Table 4

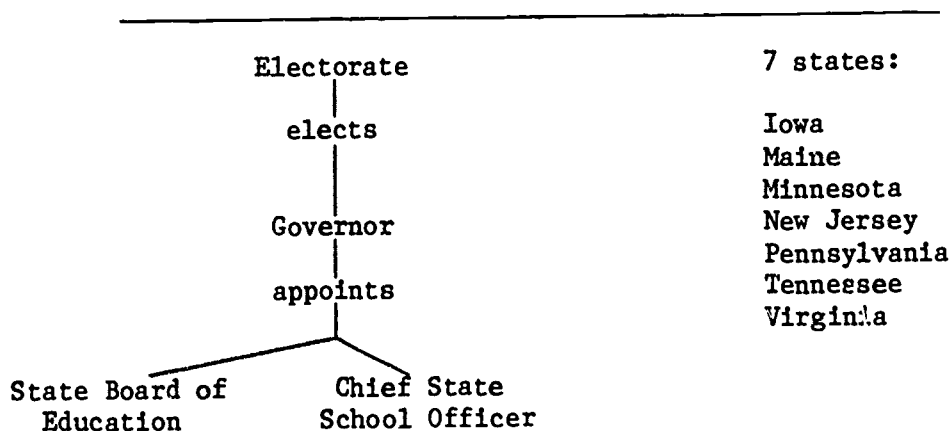
## Elected Board, Board Appoints Chief



The fourth model (Table 5) is characterized by the governor appointing both the state school board and the Chief State School Officer.

Table 5

## Appointed Board, Appointed Chief





The other seven states of the union use six other models of governance. In Model 5, the board is selected by a number of people but it alone appoints the Chief State School Officer (Louisiana, New Mexico, and Mississippi). In New York, the legislature appoints the board, who in turn appoints the Chief State School Officer (Model 6); while in South Carolina, the legislature appoints the board and the Chief State School Officer is elected (Model 7). In Washington, local school boards elect the state school board, and the Chief State School Officer is elected (Model 8). In Florida, the Governor's cabinet, which includes the Chief State School Officer, serves as the state school board; all of these officials are elected (Model 9). Wisconsin (Model 10) is the only state that does not have a state board of education; the state superintendent is elected (NASBE, 1989).

These patterns of state governance have not been static. Over time a slight shift has occurred in the method of selecting the Chief State School Officer--from popular election to appointment by either the state school board or governor.

Table 6

Means of Selecting Chief State School Officers  
Between 1950 and 1988

Means of Selection	1950	1972	1986	1988
Elections	60%	38%	30%	32%
State Board Appointment	27%	52%	56%	54%
Governor Appointment	13%	10%	14%	14%

NOTE: Adapted from Sanchez and Hall (1987) with 1988 figures from NASBE (1989).

Both Cohen (1987) and the National Association of State Boards of Education (1989) note the many important changes that have taken place in the selection of state boards of education. NASBE reports that Mississippi, Texas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Indiana, Tennessee, Iowa, and Minnesota have made constitutional or legislative changes to the state board of education or to the office of Chief State School Officer during the past 10 years. Efforts in the states of Indiana, Kentucky, and Georgia to change the position of Chief State School Officer from an elected to an appointed position were not successful. In 1989, voters in West Virginia rejected an initiative that would have changed state governance from Model 1 (elected state board/state board appointed CSSO) to Model 4 (governor appoints both state board and CSSO).

The motive for change, however, is not clear in all of these cases. Legislatures are taking education governance more seriously; and, as Cohen (1987) argues, state boards have not been as active as they should have been in overseeing recent reforms in education. Legislative and executive branch policymakers have also voiced their dissatisfaction by changing the board-superintendent structures when they could. The general effect of changes in governance structures, as Wirt and Kirst (1989) have noted, has been that: "...elective bodies are designed to be more open to conflict, while appointed bodies respond to their appointers" (p. 287). The same pattern holds true for Chief State School Officers. By changing the structure, one changes the pattern of interaction and influence in education governance.

## THE KEY ACTORS IN STATE EDUCATION POLICYMAKING

Mitchell and his colleagues (1986) identify six groups of key actors involved in state-level education policy. The constitutional actors are not, by any means, the most influential or prominent. The groups identified in this research include: the core actors (individual legislators and the legislature); the inner circle (Chief State School Officer, teacher organizations, and the combined coalition of all education interest groups); the outer circle (governor and staff, legislative staff, and the state school board); the sometimes players (local school boards, administrator organizations, courts, federal policy, and non-educator groups); the often forgotten (citizen groups and research organizations); and the unseen others (popular referenda and producers of educational products).

Core actors include individual legislators and the legislature as a whole. Within the legislature, most of the major work in education is done in the education and finance committees of each house. Key actors in the legislature include the elected leadership such as the speaker, party leaders, and caucus chairmen. Legislators tend to focus on the content of the issues being debated or on the processes being used to make decisions. Content-focused legislators tend to believe in the importance of public values and technical knowledge, while decisionmakers emphasize consensus building and achieving results. Legislative leaders focus on setting the larger agenda for discussion or on managing the decisionmaking process within the chamber.

The inner circle is the second most influential group in state education politics and includes the Chief State School Officer, teacher organizations, and the combined coalition of all education interest groups. Although their influence varies from state to state, CSSOs are important actors because of their constitutional mandate to manage the state department of education, which is typically staffed by professionals with experience and expert knowledge.

The Chief State School Officer, in contrast to the state board of education, has the major constitutional authority to manage schooling in the state, has a larger staff, and indeed is the one who supplies most of the information the state board receives. Elected Chief State School Officers are also in a much stronger position to deal with the legislature.

Although this pattern is not observed in all states, it is clear that many Chief State School Officers have been moving away from implementing policy to articulating policy. It appears that the influence of the Chief State School Officer is directly related to the risk an individual is willing to take. Nationally, Chief State School Officers rank below individual legislators in terms of influence but well above the state boards (Mitchell et al., 1986). It does appear that the resources available to Chief State School Officers, coupled with the receptive posture of state school boards, puts the former at a decided advantage in the game of influence. Ironically, state boards have maintained the conditions that allow individual Chief State School Officers to take individual risk. In most states, the CSSO and the state department staff are the policymaking group.

Teacher organizations also vary by state in their power and influence but are clearly more aggressive than other professional and nonprofessional groups in their abilities to command influence. Professional educators were the first group to become active lobbyists (Iannaccone, 1975; Iannaccone & Cistone, 1974) and are still the most organized.

At the third level of influence are members of the outer circle--the governor and his or her staff, the staff of the legislature, and the state board of education. The governors, individually and as a group, are emerging as prominent actors in the field of education, moving away from their traditional focus on education finance to speak on broader education issues. The meeting of the governors with the President at Charlottesville, Virginia, to discuss educational reform highlights the importance of these individuals in the reform of American education. Individually, Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas and Governor Gaston Caperton of West Virginia have recently taken aggressive measures to address the education problems in their respective states. A typical governor's staff tends to adopt "...a watchdog role--limiting the financial demands of education and trying to insure that programs are ideologically and operationally in keeping with the overall commitments of the administration" (Mitchell, 1981, p. 109).

Staff consultants can be found working within the legislature as aides to education and fiscal committees and to individual members, as well as in the research and budget units of individual chambers. These staff members, through the roles taken and orientations adopted,

participate in the development of education policy within the legislature (Mitchell, 1961). Issue-driven staffs focus on special legislative actions, while agenda-driven staffs tend to provide appropriate and timely assistance as issues arise. Large staff units tend to be issue driven, while the staff assigned to individual legislators tend to be oriented more to his or her legislative agenda.

State boards of education are the third member of the outer circle. Even though state governance structures are products of state political culture, state boards of education are similar in many respects. State boards are generally nonpartisan and have historically been institutionally buffered from the cycles of state politics. Since they typically do not have staffs of their own, state boards have to trust the proposals put before them by others (Cohen, 1987). They are rarely organized to work effectively with the legislature and the governor in policy development (Wirt & Kirst, 1989). The exercise of their authority has been generally confined to legitimating the work of the state department of education and the Chief State School Officer. The lack of staff and their single constituency focus have reinforced the passive attitudes of many state board members. This may explain why Mitchell et al. (1986) found that state school boards are not seen as prominent influentials in education policy development, ranking in the middle of 17 groups.

Wirt and Kirst (1989) see state boards of education as weak policy actors, mainly because of their inability to remove the Chief State School Officer even in states where they appoint the position. Further,



state board elections are rarely major events, a weakness even more exaggerated in states where the Chief State School Officer is elected. In general, state board members are the weakest of the constitutionally empowered players. They appear to be strongest in smaller states and weakest in states with large legislative staffs. A positive correlation exists, however, between influence generated by the state board and the CSSO; the influence of these two groups may be mutually reinforcing. Mitchell et al. found that "...if the Chief ignores the board it leads to a reduction in influence for them both. Similarly, SBEs [state boards of education] that seek to wrest power from the chief and the department may claim a wholly Pyrrhic victory--succeeding only in reducing the total authority available to them both" (1986, p. IX-10). If this holds true, it would appear that the function of the state board has been the same as Iannaccone (1975) observed over a decade ago: "Politically, state boards function more as buffers to protect the SEA [state department of education] and its constituents from the governor than as active influencers of education policy" (p. 120-21).

Included in the sometimes players are local school boards, administrator organizations, federal policy, and noneducator interest groups. Local school boards are the most noticeable in this group, followed by administrator groups. The influence of the judiciary and of federal policy appear to vary by state and to reflect cultural ideology. The acceptance of federal policy is high in states such as Wisconsin, where support is considerable for an active central government; but low in states such as Arizona and West Virginia, where political values are

more conservative and individualistic. Noneducator interest groups also make up the sometimes players.

The often forgotten group includes citizen groups and research organizations. The number of documented interest groups are numerous and include the parent teacher associations, tax organizations, as well as other nontraditional interest groups such as the League of Women Voters, and the American Association of University Women (see Wirt & Kirst, 1989). In the six states they studied most recently, Mitchell et al. (1986) found that research organizations were notably influential within the state of West Virginia.

The last group of key actors is the unseen others and includes popular referenda and lobbying by the publishers of educational materials. This group was found to be rarely significant by Mitchell et al. (1986) when compared to other groups. California respondents, however, ranked popular referenda more influential than lay groups or the state board of education. Publishers were "frequently recognized as important in Arizona" (p. IX-13).

The diverse number of people and groups interested in public education suggests that policymaking is not limited to those within the governmental structure. One must conclude that, although governmental structure may set the stage for state education policymaking, structure is not its sole determiner.

#### POLICY CONTEXT AND THE DISTRIBUTION OF INFLUENCE

Research is silent on the question of whether constitutional change affects the actual content of state education policy or merely redefines



the possibilities of interaction and influence of individuals and groups. Virtually all of the major studies of state governance in education have concentrated on the political factors shaping state policy. Iannaccone (1967) studied interest groups, Campbell and Mazzoni (1976) studied state-level decisionmaking, Kirst (1981) examined interstate networks, Mitchell (1981) and Mitchell et al. (1986) investigated influentials, and Fuhrman (1989) reported on the political context of reform. None of these studies mention, per se, the constitutional placement of individuals or groups as sole determiners of policy outcomes. Rather, they conclude that it is the individuals who hold the office and their goals that determine the influence, the direction, and the content of policy.

As Mitchell et al. (1986) state "...the dynamics of state education policymaking can be better understood if the unique patterns of power and influence distribution in each state are closely examined" (p. IX-1). And although the distribution of influence is not evenly divided among groups and individuals, participants in the research conducted by Mitchell and his colleagues were able to discuss the relative influence of key individuals from many different organizations. From this research comes the following characterizations of influence in six states:

**Arizona:** a weak inner circle (Chief State School Officer, teacher organizations, and education interest group coalition) and strong lay influence (citizen groups and research organizations);

**California:** strong legislative staff, a coalition of educator interest groups, and popular referenda;

**Illinois:** strong teachers, a weak Chief State School Officer and state school board;

Pennsylvania: a strong outer circle (governor and staff, legislative staff, and the state school board);

West Virginia: the prominence of the courts and a strong state agency; and

Wisconsin: a strong inner circle (Chief State School Officer, teacher organizations, and education interest group coalition) that dominates the legislature (IX-14 to IX-28).

Similarly, Fuhrman (1989) argues that "political context"--the setting within which policy is enacted and implemented--can help explain the patterns of state reform efforts. In her analysis of six state efforts, she concludes that "...the politics of reform in each state manifest distinct themes....Whatever similarities existed in factors such as the intellectual origins of reforms and the roles of interest groups, the reform process reveals traditional political configurations in each state" (p. 68). Her research characterized the following state themes:

Arizona: piecemeal, conservative politics;

California: coalition politics;

Florida: the influence of presiding officers;

Georgia: business dominance and consensus politics;

Minnesota: legislative dominance in a low-profile state role; and

Pennsylvania: gubernatorial and legislative delegation to the state board.

It is apparent that major political and professional groups other than constitutionally defined individuals and agencies maintain an interest in the content of education policy and its enactment. According to Fuhrman (1989, p. 63):

The effect of political culture is widespread. It influences the kinds of people who seek and attain leadership roles; the

manner in which people engage in leadership; the extent and nature of participation in politics; the nature of political parties and interest groups; and the distribution of authority and influence between branches, the public and private sector, and the state and localities (Rosenthal and Moakley, 1984). It can also produce policy differences. For example, political variables related to culture, such as state-local centralization, have been shown to influence expenditures on various state functions, independently of state economic factors (Sharkansky, 1967).

#### POLICY IMPLICATIONS FROM STATE LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH

Many of the major reforms in recent years, while responding to national concerns, have been initiated by state legislatures and the governors. Within this context, as we shall see, it would appear that for state boards of education and Chief State School Officers to actualize their constitutional mission, they should orient themselves to their legislatures, since it is there that major reforms are being discussed and enacted. With this in mind, the following recommendations from recent research into state legislatures and education policy formation will serve state boards of education as a guide in their efforts to actualize their mission of shaping education policy:

**Recommendation #1:** Develop policy review cycles that correspond to the seven areas of legislative intent, i. e., the organization and governance of schools, school finance, student assessment and testing, program definition, personnel training and certification, the development and selection of curriculum materials, and the building of schools and educational facilities.

State boards of education and the Chief State School Officer need to recognize the limits of state education policymaking. In a summary of recent research, Mitchell (1988) concludes that state legislatures enact

legislation in a limited number of areas. These seven areas include: the organization and governance of schools; school finance; student assessment and testing; program definition; personnel training and certification; the development and selection of curriculum materials; and the building of schools and educational facilities.

School organization and governance is one of the most powerful means available to control education and is used to allocate powers and responsibilities among various interest groups. Legislative interest in school finance reform has been more successful than popular referenda, but both efforts began because of judicial interest in the financial equity of California's school system (Wirt & Kirst, 1989). Recently, the Kentucky Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the system for education in that state, ruling that the state legislature must overhaul the entire education system.

State interest in student assessment received new attention last fall at the President's summit at Charlottesville, Virginia. Governors who attended heard articulated what some states have already enacted--a call for minimum competency testing for promotion or graduation (Goodgame, 1989). Over half of the states have policies for assessing whether students are achieving up to expectations. What students learn within school programs has always been a popular issue. The familiar 3R's have been supplemented in many ways from technology aided learning to AIDS education. And while considering the selection of curriculum materials, states, notably California, have held publishers to task in a demand to upgrade textbooks and bring them into alignment with the state curriculum guides.

The final two issue areas include personnel and school buildings. Personnel issues are addressed in a number of ways. The most obvious is in the area of licensing and certification. Other means include legislating such inservice programs as mentor teacher programs, staff development related to categorical programs, and requirements that tie salary to increased academic coursework. At Charlottesville, the President also asked states to consider relaxing certification standards, so that the country could take advantage of the talents of professionals who want a mid-career switch and of military retirees.

School buildings and facilities have not been a high focus area for state policymakers except in West Virginia, where "...a federal court decision mandating equalization of facilities for poor and minority children in that state..."(p. 461) may have made this a higher priority item than it was in the other states studied by Mitchell et al. (1986).

**Recommendation #2:** Learn how to work within the six stages through which ideas are turned into public law: articulation, aggregation, allocation, regulation, implementation, and evaluation.

Legislative decisions in the above seven areas are made within a series of stages through which ideas are turned into public law. Six distinct stages make up the "workflow" of policy formation. At each stage, different questions are asked, different types of information are needed or become important, and the decisionmaking styles of key actors may differ. Indeed, the key actors in any piece of legislation may change as it evolves. The six stages are: (1) articulation, (2) aggregation, (3) allocation, (4) regulation, (5) implementation, and (6)



evaluation. The first three stages must occur in the legislature for public policy to be enacted. Activity in the last three stages does not necessarily involve the legislature.

Individual interests and policy proposals must be articulated and must specify a target of action before the legislature can begin its work in framing the legislation and building a coalition of support for it. Imagination and intuitively reasonable ideas are important at the beginning of any piece of legislation. Within the articulation process, who initiates the action and what interests are served are seen as important parts of the issue apart from the substantive content of the proposal itself. "Articulation focuses political energies on an issue and determines whether or not a legislature can deal with important issues successfully. Although many successfully articulated issues never lead to meaningful public policies, no policy can be developed until adequate articulation has taken place" (Mitchell, 1981, p. 25). Successful articulation provides a clear definition of the issues and the stakes involved in support or opposition, lets the legislature know which interests will be affected by their decisions, and provides the basis for achieving consensus.

But to succeed, these ideas must have a broad base of support. In the interest aggregation stage, the legislature sorts initial proposals into bills that are broadly backed and comprehensive in nature. Substantive policy committees do much of the work, and information needs are strongly technical in nature, while problem-solving skills are in high demand. Successful aggregation assures that only carefully worked

out policy proposals reach the floor for vote, contain correct stature language, and embody a consensus on how the problem should be solved.

The last three stages of turning ideas into public law are not, per se, within the purview of the state legislature and may be shared with other state agencies and interested organizations. During the regulation stage, the state policy system works out the details of establishing regulations by providing authority for programs and the budgetary resources to conduct them. This stage is of interest to policy analysts who study the ways in which regulations support or hinder the initiating policy actions. Policy analysts are also interested in the implementation stage, where policy turns into practice. How programs are implemented are major concerns, and analyses such as McLaughlin's (1975) study of Title I and Coleman et al. (1966) study of equity of educational opportunity have both had a major impact on legislation. The final stage of state education policymaking is evaluation, or the extent to which policies have been implemented as intended or have achieved the expected results. "[E]valuation is a distinctive stage of policy decisionmaking; its procedures and outcomes are politically influenced and they have identifiable consequences for the continuation, modification, or demise of a policy action" (Mitchell, 1988, p. 462).

**Recommendation #3: Provide information resources that are timely and in a manner most appropriate for use by legislators.**

In clarifying the relationship between educational research and policymaking, Firestone (1989) has identified the various kinds of knowledge most used by legislators, the discontinuity between the time

needed to generate research and its eventual use, and legislators' preferences for communication formats. The four different kinds of knowledge used by legislators include: (1) information on upcoming trends and comparisons with other states, generally provided by education associations and speciality publications; (2) facts and figures about enrollments, finances, and student comparisons, generally produced by the state department of education and teacher associations; (3) information about the positions and interests of various constituencies, usually provided by those groups; and (4) in-depth studies of specific policy questions or evaluations of ongoing programs. These are more focused than the other information needs and tend to revolve around the interests of researchers. Such studies may be useful only when fully completed.

Obviously, information needs to be received in a timely manner. Legislative timelines are traditionally short and driven by elections and annual budget cycles; information must be provided quickly in short reports or orally to be most effective.

#### SUMMARY

The purpose of this report has been to review the research literature on state education governance, seeking insight to strengthen the role of the state board of education as the policy-setting agency for education. We began by reviewing current prescriptions and recommendations from professional groups and observers of state boards of education. We also reviewed the literature on state legislatures and such policy influences as political attitudes, political culture, and political context. We



concluded that the current locus of control in determining state education policy rests mainly with the legislatures and made three recommendations derived from the research literature. It is important that the state school board and Chief State School Officer partnership become more sophisticated and attuned to current political realities. The operational recommendations made by NASBE (1987) and Cohen (1987) need to be implemented within the context of a broader political (not constitutional) orientation to state policy formation. State education policy is set in seven areas, moves through six stages, involves a multitude of interested parties, and takes place largely in the legislative body of each state.

Strategic planning can help state boards articulate a vision for education. Regulation review will provide policy evaluation. Continual assessment will provide legislators with up-to-date information. Advocating public education will articulate education goals. Acting as a liaison to the legislature will assist in articulation, aggregation, and evaluation of public education. Building a staff capability for the state board of education will give it the opportunity to act as an information resource and to develop its own capacity for independent analysis.

The best suggestions advanced by organizations and others interested in strengthening the state board role can be characterized as prescriptions or goals. Most of these suggestions will no doubt help the state board of education become more effective, efficient, and knowledgeable in what it does. Whether adopting any or all of these will transform the

state board into the originator of state education policy remains to be seen. State boards of education who are truly at the crossroads need a shift in thinking as well as acceptance of the best of the operational advice NASBE and others have to offer. The real task ahead for state boards of education as they regroup and develop is to recognize that, for the present, the state legislature is where current legislation is being shaped. Changing its basic orientation within this context of state policymaking will be the single greatest step a state board of education can take to recapture its constitutional mission.

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