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ABSTRACT

This bulletin explores the roles that various stakeholders have in systemic reform and offers some recommendations for action. Data were derived from a review of research on systemic education reform and interviews with four Oregon administrators. Chapter 1 provides a sampling of the diverse groups that are calling for reform and offers some of the reasons why systemic reform is considered essential. The chapter also reviews reform efforts of the 1980s and examines ways in which this wave of reform fell short of fundamentally reshaping education. Chapter 2 refines the meaning of systemic reform, teasing out various components crucial to reform and offering a glimpse of how change might manifest itself at local and state levels. The third chapter focuses on systemic reform in Oregon. After briefly discussing the impact of the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century in shaping the direction of change in Oregon schools, this chapter features three Oregon districts that are involved in significant reform efforts. Chapter 4 highlights three groups that are key to successful systemic reform--superintendents, school boards, and principals. (LMI)

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OREGON SCHOOL STUDY COUNCIL

1787 Agate Street
University of Oregon
Eugene, Oregon 97403
(503) 346-5044
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Preface

After more than a decade of frustration over myriad, largely ineffective education reform efforts, many education stakeholders have begun to realize that substantial improvement in America's schools requires wholesale changes in the education system. Consequently, systemic education reform is being embraced at all levels of governance from the White House to the schoolhouse.

In this Bulletin, author James P. Thompson attempts to define *systemic education reform* and offer some guidance to school board members, superintendents, and principals on how to implement fundamental change in their schools. Through a review of current research on systemic education reform, Thompson identifies the essential elements of systemic reform most often cited by leading researchers. In addition, Thompson uses interviews with administrators in several Oregon school districts and schools to see how the principles of systemic education reform are being applied in the field.

The combination of knowledge from the research literature on systemic education reform and insights from those who are practically applying this knowledge makes this Bulletin useful to any educator, administrator, or local education policymaker. Under the guidance of federal and state systemic reform efforts, educators at the local level will find in this Bulletin many ideas and guidelines for making fundamental change in the classroom a reality.

Thompson, a resident of Eugene, is a document analyst with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management and a master's student in the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication. Upon graduation, he plans on returning to daily newspapers where he spent four years as a journalist before entering graduate school.

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Introduction

After more than a decade of wave after wave of reform, diverse groups of people concerned about the nation's education system are recognizing that reforming or demanding more from our schools is not enough—the system itself must be fundamentally changed. This realization comes in the wake of failed attempts to engage students and teachers and help children develop into thinking, responsible, and productive adults while maintaining an educational structure that was established a century ago.

Many supporters of systemic reform believe that the failure to improve education does not stem from a lack of commitment, but from retaining outdated and ineffectual purposes and methods (Clune 1991, Conley 1993, Cuban 1988, David 1991, Finn 1990, Fuhrman and Massell 1992, Lieberman and Miller 1990, O'Day and Smith 1993, Schlechty 1990). Critics of the present education system assert that no amount of tinkering or infusion of add-on programs will meet the demands of business, parents, communities, and students for fundamental change and significant improvement in schools.

An article in *Education Week* stated, "If there is one overriding lesson to be learned from a decade of reform effort, it is that a massive and systemic overhaul of public education is required—root and branch—at every level of the enterprise. A cultural change is needed in the ways that we think about schools, not just in how they operate" (February 19, 1993).

However, a stumbling block of systemic change is how individuals perceive themselves in organizations (Grady McGonagill 1992). People often mistake their view of a system as truly representative rather than just a piece of the whole. Individuals also tend to see their actions in organizations as affecting other individuals rather than affecting and being affected by systems. The aim of systemic education reform is to overcome that tendency. As McGonagill states, "Systemic change acknowledges reality—everything *is* connected to everything else!"

In the maelstrom of systemic change, some groups are concerned that they will be overlooked. In most models for systemic change, however, the

role of superintendents, school boards, and principals is not only considered important, but essential. This Bulletin explores the roles these stakeholders have in systemic reform and offers some recommendations for action.

Chapter 1 provides a sampling of the diverse groups that are calling for reform and offers some of the reasons why systemic reform is considered essential. The chapter also reviews reform efforts of the 1980s and examines ways in which this wave of reform fell short of fundamentally reshaping education. Chapter 2 refines the meaning of *systemic reform*, teasing out various components crucial to reform and offering a glimpse of how change might manifest itself at local and state levels.

In chapter 3, the focus is on systemic reform in Oregon. After briefly discussing the impact of the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century in shaping the direction of change in Oregon schools, this chapter features three Oregon districts that are involved in significant reform efforts. Chapter 4 highlights three groups that are key to successful systemic reform. Featured actors are superintendents, school boards, and principals.

Chapter 1

The Many Calls for Systemic Reform

Again and again, different forces and groups in education are coming to the same conclusion: Systemic reform is necessary. In 1989, the National Governors' Association stated that fundamental change in education is needed; the association also noted that states have a key role in bringing about change. The findings of the governors' task force (National Governors' Association 1990) illustrate that systemic education reform is essential to achieving the National Education Goals. The report calls for creating a new education system, one that emphasizes lifelong learning, prevention, outcomes, flexibility, accountability, professional development, and meaningful choices for all education stakeholders.

Similarly, when members of the American Association of School Administrators gathered to assess President George Bush's America 2000 plan, many of the proposals put forth by school leaders could be characterized as systemic changes. While AASA diverged from the president's plan on some points, including school readiness and larger societal and economic influences on students, its recommendations nonetheless required the fundamental rethinking of the nation's schools (American Association of School Administrators 1991).

When the Education Commission of the States and the National School Boards Association joined together to determine how to improve education, they, too, concluded that systemic reform was needed (Education Commission of the States 1991). The significant changes in society and schools require nothing less than "totally rethinking the very structure of the education system," the two groups noted. They stressed that the individual education needs of all children and the communities in which they live must be met. Also, students must be able to apply what they learn in education and

in life, and measurable improvement must be made in student achievement. It is not sufficient to merely increase time students spend in class.

Although systemic reform has been addressed directly or indirectly in several education improvement efforts, the issue of what or how students should learn cannot be reduced to a formula. Rather, systemic education reform calls for a reexamination of the purpose of education that takes into account significant changes in society and the workplace. It is the breadth and ambiguity of systemic reform that make it so hard to define and put into action. However, essential characteristics of systemic reform are beginning to emerge from the many calls for its implementation.

In Oregon, most systemic reform is being driven by the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century. Passed by the 1991 Legislature, the law establishes a plan for the state's public schools that encompasses many aspects of systemic reform such as outcome-based education, alternative learning environments, site councils, nongraded primary education, and an extended school year. The act "really dominates the scene, simply because it's so far reaching," said Tony Palermini, superintendent of Portland's David Douglas School District.

While setting the general direction for public education in the state, the Oregon Educational Act allows schools ample freedom in their pursuit of state goals. The opportunity for innovation at the district and school level under the broad guidance of a statewide plan is a recognized tenet of systemic reform.

Changes Providing Impetus for Systemic Reform

The reasons and impetus for systemic education reform in Oregon are similar to those cited elsewhere in the country. Although students in some schools are closer to meeting traditional educational goals after a decade of school reform, they are not much better prepared to enter the workplace or college or adulthood. Thus, the very goals of education are being questioned and reshaped.

Much of the push for systemic education reform comes from a recognition of changes in the nation's economic and social structure. For the first time in the country's history, economic forces and educational equity issues have combined to heighten demands for improved education for all students (Murphy 1991a). Similarly, Schlechty (1990) sees these recent societal changes as placing education in the position of being "essential to livelihood."

The shortcomings of the American education system emanate from the fact that it operates largely under its original and now outdated purpose

(Schlechty). When public schools were established, their primary purpose was to promote republican-Protestant morality and civic literacy. This purpose served the needs of an agricultural, rural, Anglo-Saxon society fairly well.

However, as society became more culturally and religiously heterogeneous and its work requirements changed, the original purpose of schools no longer fully met societal needs. Education's purpose then shifted from promoting a common culture to sorting individuals for placement in the elite or working class. To a large degree, that educational mission persists. "I think we've educated kids for an economic system that existed years ago," said Willamette High School Principal Jim Jamieson. "But is that system going to exist much longer? Probably not." As the country enters the twenty-first century and the economy depends more heavily on service- and information-based industries, education must change its purpose yet again.

The failure of education to meet industry needs has led in some areas to shortages of skilled workers. Growing high-tech industries require employees who can learn on the job and who have greater self-supervision and communication skills. Also, the job market is more volatile and workers must be able to move from one job to another through retraining. The nation's education system must provide workers who are able to adapt and to learn new complex tasks (Lewis 1989).

Other forces placing new demands on education are changes in traditional family structure, increased child poverty, the inadequacy of social-welfare and social-service programs, and a decreased sense of civic responsibility. Education is increasingly called on to help coordinate efforts to meet the unfulfilled needs of students and, in some cases, to meet the needs directly. All these factors contribute to the push for systemic change in education (Conley 1993).

In addition to social factors, technological changes have influenced the need for fundamental change in education. Information is more accessible to more students and can more easily be retrieved, thus lessening the importance of memorization and the traditional role of the teacher as information gatekeeper. Schools, textbooks, and many other common curriculum tools are technologically outdated as well, yet still are called on to serve as the basis for education. Even schools that employ new technology often do so on a limited basis and are unable to keep up with frequent changes and advances (Conley).

In the 1980s—Inadequate Reform

To fully understand how the demands on education have changed and

why systemic reform is needed, it is necessary to briefly review the reform efforts of the past decade and examine how they have fallen short of fundamentally reshaping education. Major education reforms of the 1980s were dominated by state-led legislative measures that were designed to provide comprehensive solutions. While these reforms were often viewed and promoted as coordinated packages, most efforts were disjointed and sometimes contradictory pieces of legislation that lacked cohesiveness (O'Neil 1993).

According to Susan Fuhrman, director of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), the lack of a unifying vision and clear goals for schools left many local educators floundering and frustrated. "There's a lot of frustration at the school level about having to deal with conflicting demands," said Fuhrman. "While many entrepreneurial schools managed to ignore the chaos and do what they wanted, they generally were not able to sustain their efforts over time. They just got tired of bucking the system" (O'Neil).

While improvements were made in some schools and among some student groups in states that initiated major reform efforts, the gains were often spotty and unreliable. Despite these efforts, student test scores generally have remained stable. Also, research has found that many educational changes, such as modest increases in teacher salaries and small decreases in class size, are not likely to increase student achievement (Clune 1991).

In an examination of the paradigm shift education is experiencing, Chester Finn, Jr. (1990) contends that these occasional successes do not constitute sufficient return on the huge investments made in education during the past two decades. "The old view of education, besides leading to immense and not very productive outlays of money, has been unable to solve our gravest educational problems and has given us little leverage to help meet our larger societal needs," states Finn. The paradigm shift Finn speaks of, which defines education in terms of ends rather than means, is the essence of fundamental change inherent in systemic education reform.

Chapter 2

Systemic Reform's Essential Elements

Essential to any systemic education reform effort is identifying the basic elements of education most affected by the approach. As noted earlier, unlike education reforms of the past, systemic change in education is so all-encompassing that almost every aspect of schooling is affected. "The number one element of systemic reform is rethinking schooling," said Bruce Harter, superintendent of the Corvallis (Oregon) School District. It requires that schooling be reconceptualized from the ground up, beginning with the nature of learning, the nature of teaching, educational relationships, and school-community relationships. As a result of discussions between and among practitioners and researchers, some basic concepts of systemic education reform are beginning to emerge.

Conley provides a definition of educational restructuring that dovetails with the goals of systemic reform. *Restructuring*, he states, changes "fundamental assumptions, practices, and relationships . . . in ways that lead to improved and varied student learning outcomes for essentially all students."

There are twelve dimensions of incremental and discontinuous change in Conley's view of restructuring. These twelve dimensions are divided into three subsets—central, enabling, and supporting variables. Learner outcomes, curriculum, instruction, and assessment or evaluation are the four central variables. Enabling variables are learning environment, technology, school-community relations, and time. The third subset, supporting variables, includes governance, teacher leadership, personnel structures, and working relationships.

Similarly, Barkley and Castle (1993) combined a review of five established systemic reform writers with their own research of nine school districts involved in the National Education Association's Learning Laborato-

ries Initiative. From their extensive interviews and other literature on systemic reform, they derived thirteen principles of systemic change:

- Purpose must be clearly articulated and widely understood and accepted.
- Purpose must be based upon a consciously developed philosophy rooted in shared theory.
- Need for change must be understood and accepted.
- The upper levels of education hierarchy must demonstrate the change.
- Significant new investment must be made in educating and training change participants.
- Participation must be voluntary and active.
- Power sources and relationships must be visibly altered.
- Partner-customer-supplier relationships must be developed.
- Individual affirmation must be balanced with collaboration.
- Processes must be emphasized over results.
- Communication barriers must be removed.
- Data-based decision-making must be required and enabled.
- Efforts to learn and improve must be total, dynamic, and generative.

These principles are not unique to schools, but can be employed in all organizations. Barkley and Castle tried to determine the extent to which the school districts examined practiced these principles.

Change at the School Level

Although Conley's and other definitions of systemic reform include change in many areas and on many levels, that which takes place at the school site often is recognized as the most important. School-level systemic change can either be controlled and directed exclusively by the individual school or can involve several other levels of school governance. However, regardless of the balance of control over the change, its impact is felt primarily in the classroom.

Among Conley's twelve dimensions of school restructuring, school-level changes are the central variables. He notes that since these changes influence what and how subjects are taught as well as how progress is measured and evaluated, they are the most difficult to achieve (Conley). These variables constitute the core of teaching and are therefore often the most difficult for educators to accept.

In O'Day and Smith's examination of systemic education reform and educational opportunity, a common thread of school-level change runs through each of their three aspects of change: curriculum frameworks, properly aligned state education policies, and a restructured governance system. Their model attempts to "marry the vision and guidance provided by coherent, integrated, centralized education policies common in many nations with the high degree of local responsibility and control demanded by U.S. tradition" (O'Day and Smith).

One exercise that is overlooked by many schools and districts is determining the purpose of schooling. Two commonly expressed purposes are to increase human capacity and to create maximum lifetime options for students. But regardless of the final definition arrived at, the process of reaching that definition and identifying indicators is the beginning of systemic change (Barkley and Castle).

The American tradition of local control in most school governance matters has led to hundreds of individual schools nationwide initiating systemic change (O'Neil). While many schools and districts are changing as part of national or regional networks such as the Coalition for Essential Schools or the Alliance for Restructuring Education, many of them are doing it alone. Often individual schools or districts build their systemic change efforts around a principle such as outcome-based education or total quality management.

The federal government is beginning to see that it has a role to play in encouraging systemic change in the nation's 15,000 school districts and 80,000 schools. A recent GAO report acknowledges that federal and state leadership could facilitate systemic reform through voluntary standards (U.S. General Accounting Office 1993).

Federal policy should ensure that districts have the necessary technical assistance and professional-development opportunities. A balance must be sought between local control and the potential inefficiencies of thousands of independently developed standards and assessments. Finally, the federal government should recognize that its traditional focus on ensuring services for specific groups of students does little to encourage school-based innovation and may not strengthen the education system as a whole.

Transferring decision-making and control from the higher levels of power to the school site can have peripheral benefits. In addition to granting those closest to the learning process more say in how learning takes place, school-based decision-making gives management a new role. Rather than controlling people and exerting power, school-based management empowers people and fosters creativity (Barrett 1991). School-based decision-making also encourages more socially sophisticated and productive relationships among the adults in a school system than a traditional governance structure (Tewel 1991).

In part, the emphasis on school-based decision-making as a part of systemic education reform can be seen as a backlash against the state-led failures of the 1980s (Joseph Murphy 1991a). This state-centered, top-down model has been criticized as being philosophically misguided and conceptually limited. The bureaucracy that accompanied this approach also was credited with squelching initiative, creativity, and professional judgment in schools. Many parents and community members believed the model's rigidity impeded local control and school improvement.

The State Role in Unifying Goals and Curricula

The state-centered reform efforts of the 1980s soured many educators' attitudes toward state involvement in systemic reform. However, some of the most frequently cited current models of systemic reform include significant roles for state government in setting outcomes and establishing curriculum frameworks.

States carry the statutory responsibility to provide their citizens with an education system. And state involvement in schools traditionally has been tied to the level of funding provided to school districts (Conley). State control over schools has been exercised largely through accreditation procedures. School accreditation usually depends on fulfilling detailed input requirements, and, in the past, states have had little interest in setting outcomes or educational goals.

The nature and level of state involvement is drastically different in models of systemic reform. Evidence of this new direction can be seen in the Education Commission of the States' report *Exploring Policy Options to Restructuring Efforts* (1991). The ECS recommends six areas of policy-making in which the state would have an increased role: leadership, learning, inclusion, organization, finance, and renewal. Several states have already moved in this direction with programs to encourage local systemic change. Oregon's "2020" school reform program is an example (Conley).

Fuhrman and Massell envision a role for the state in systemic education reform when change is centered on one critical policy mechanism. They cite South Carolina as a state that has utilized curriculum frameworks as its central strategy for systemic change. Other states believe assessments are a powerful tool for instructional change in the classroom. "Authentic assessments" are being created to encourage schools to stress higher-order-thinking skills, more demanding content, and nontraditional teaching strategies that involve more writing and student projects (Fuhrman and Massell).

Proposing their own plan for educational equality through systemic reform, O'Day and Smith (1993) criticize the fragmentation and lack of

support of current educational policy. In large part, they attribute these shortcomings to the lack of a unifying vision and force in schools that the state can provide. They would like to see "a common vision and set of curriculum frameworks establish the basis in systemic curriculum reform for aligning all parts of a state instructional system . . . to support the goal of delivering a high-quality curriculum to all children."

Demanding, comprehensive curriculum frameworks lead to more coherence in the system because they focus on students' entire educational experience (Clune). By coordinating curriculum standards, student assessment, and professional development, the state can send a clear, consistent message to schools about their educational mission.

Making the System Equal for All

Perhaps the greatest promise of systemic education reform is its potential to overcome educational and, to a lesser degree, societal inequalities. O'Day and Smith outline their plan for content-driven systemic reform using curriculum frameworks, state education policy, and restructured governance.

These authors contend that a systemic state approach coupled with greater local-professional responsibility could provide the structure necessary to improve education for all children. This structure could raise all students to a higher level of achievement and help reduce educational inequalities. In addition, O'Day and Smith are concerned that without systemic reform, the small gains minority and low-income students have made in narrowing the knowledge gap in schools may be lost.

At the center of content-based systemic reform is the principle that *all* students should have access to challenging content and should be held to high performance standards (O'Day and Smith). Two key assumptions are fundamental to this approach. First, a thorough understanding of academic content, complex thinking, and problem solving is necessary for students to become responsible citizens. Second, all students are capable of learning challenging content and complex problem-solving skills (O'Day and Smith).

If systemic reform fulfills its promise to combat inequalities in the schools, benefits will also accrue to society as a whole (Lewis 1989). The social stratification between the skilled and unskilled, poor and wealthy, powerful and powerless, can be lessened by better preparing students to learn, think, and adapt, regardless of their jobs. In a technologically advanced society, education is the key to individual success, and equal education is an essential part of eradicating societal inequalities.

Chapter 3

Systemic Reform in Oregon

As many educators and community members know, the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century guides much of the systemic change occurring in the state. The act requires significant change and encourages innovation on a local level.

School-site councils are one example of how local communities are being pushed to work with their school districts to improve schools. The site council creates a systematic process at the building level to carry out change. The councils consist of many stakeholders from the educational community, but teachers constitute a majority of the council membership. As guiding forces for the schools, councils are responsible for improving instructional programs, establishing staff-development programs, and handling other change efforts at the school site.

The act also mandates the development of Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) and Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM) programs. The CIM covers learning and skills addressed in kindergarten through approximately grade 10. The CAM recognizes the student's demonstration of high levels of performance in an outcome-based curriculum. The CAM utilizes teaching tools outside the traditional classroom and is designed to ensure students are prepared for entry into the workplace and continuing education.

Under the guidance of the Oregon Educational Act, several districts are fundamentally rethinking education and employing many of the elements of systemic reform. The South Lane School District, Corvallis School District, and David Douglas School District are reviewed here. The changes made at these sites are recognized statewide, and in some cases nationally, as innovative and fundamental. These examples also illustrate that there is a place in systemic reform for those who occupy positions that fall somewhere between the classroom and the state capitol.

Leadership and Vision in Cottage Grove

For Steve Swisher, superintendent of the South Lane School District, stabilizing and improving employee relations within the district was the first order of business when he came to Cottage Grove in 1990. "How employee relations go within a school district . . . often has a very critical impact on your readiness and ability to do other projects," Swisher said. That is why he began collaborative bargaining with teachers and later extended that process to classified employees. The process made employees of the district more secure in their positions and ready to concentrate on improving schooling, Swisher said. "It has carried over into other areas of the district," he said. Swisher added that he also had the opportunity to fill a few key administrative positions with individuals he knew would understand and support fundamental change.

Swisher also cited a shift in his role as superintendent as a key to changes that have occurred in his district. Applying the principles of total quality management gave him and all the staff in the district a framework for change. By implementing TQM principles when he first came to the district in 1990, Swisher paved the way for the changes that came later, from site councils to a school-to-work transition program for students at all levels. "In order to do all these things we had to have a framework," Swisher said, "a theory of leadership in how we interact with each other and how we manage our system to improve it so these pieces could plug in. If you're talking about systemic change, you have to have some direction, some view."

A theory of leadership is one of three elements Swisher believes are integral to fundamental change in school districts. The second element is a theory of instruction. For South Lane, that theory includes outcome-based education. Third, these tools must be grounded in a theory of inclusion, the belief that all children can achieve on a high level of learning. These are some of the reasons for the successes in Swisher's district. For example, Cottage Grove High School was one of six schools in the state to be awarded a 21st Century grant. The Certificate of Initial Mastery program is being implemented. And the district's schools are being recognized for their nongraded teaching programs; the career program "Project Footsteps"; and Primary Connection, a district service center for parents and students.

Systemic Change in Corvallis

For Superintendent Bruce Harter, the accomplishments of schools in his district are due in part to the high level of involvement among community members in Corvallis. "With anything that happens in the community,"

Harter said, "any type of innovation, any change, the whole community will get involved in it."

This community involvement in education, coupled with a rethinking of the basic elements of teaching and learning, have led to a new approach to helping students grow, Harter said. "In this community, systemic change in education is becoming a part of the emerging reform for the whole network of social services for children from zero to eighteen," he said. A continuum-of-care model in the school system and community is a fundamentally different way to support young people so they will become healthy, educated, well-adjusted adults.

Community members and the school board in Corvallis also have developed extensive outcomes and performance standards for students. The standards are designed to outline what students should know and be able to do, and what values and attitudes they should be able to demonstrate upon graduation. Students must be knowledgeable in several areas, including reading, writing, mathematics, world geography and affairs, social sciences, natural sciences, the arts, and human development and health. They must also be capable thinkers and decision-makers, communicators, responsible citizens, self-directed learners, collaborative workers, and quality producers.

Over the next twelve years, the district will be developing and implementing these standards of outcomes. Assessments will be done every three years, and by 2005 all students graduating from high school must fulfill performance outcomes.

Guided Change in David Douglas

Fundamental change in a school district does not require a new superintendent swooping in and wiping the slate clean for a fresh start. The David Douglas School District, where Tony Palermini has worked for thirty-four years, the last twelve as superintendent, has made significant changes without importing a new superintendent. "I've become the institutional memory around here," Palermini said.

Systemic change in David Douglas has been guided primarily by the Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century. The district was selected by the Oregon Business Council, an organization of the forty-eight largest employers in the state, to be the model district for implementing the key components of the act. The Oregon Business Council/David Douglas Model District Partnership is using a highly participatory, systemic-change plan to research, implement, and monitor school reforms on an aggressive timeline. Staff members, parents, community members, and representatives of the Oregon Business Council have formed nine action teams to plan the change

effort. Specific outcomes have been set for each component. The full process will be documented and shared with other school districts interested in developing school reforms in partnership with the business and local communities.

The Oregon Business Council selected David Douglas because it represented an average Oregon district, but also because of Palermini's leadership and the progress that had already occurred toward implementation of the Oregon Educational Act. Mimi Bushman, project manager for the Oregon Business Council, commented, "We feel that David Douglas has all the pieces in place to make the kind of changes needed to better prepare Oregon students for the future."

As an example, the district's one high school is using state Workforce 2000 grants to restructure its curriculum under a program called "Project STARS." Through the program, students choose one of six career paths or "constellations." "This reorganization is like a college major," Palermini said. Beginning in the eighth grade, students meet with counselors and their parents to choose a general career area. "As they move into their junior and senior years, they become more immersed in that constellation," Palermini said. The program is focused on meeting the requirements of the Certificate of Initial Mastery and Certificate of Advanced Mastery outlined in the act.

Chapter 4

Responsibilities and Roles of Key Actors

In discussions of systemic school reform, superintendents, school boards, and principals are often slighted. If the leadership potential of these groups is not adequately recognized, valuable resources for school improvement remain untapped. This chapter looks at the pivotal role each of these groups plays in influencing the nature of educational change and the success of reform efforts.

The Superintendent

Perhaps one of the most neglected areas in research about systemic school reform is the role of the superintendent. However, some authors (DeYoung 1986, Joseph Murphy 1991b, Jerome Murphy 1991, Paulu 1989) recognize the superintendent as an essential player in true change and improvement in schools.

Jerome Murphy argues that for superintendents to be leaders in fundamental education reform, three steps must be taken. First, school administrator preparation programs must be revitalized. "At the very time that strong preparation programs for administrators are needed most, the programs themselves are in disarray," Murphy said. Second, the working conditions of superintendents must be improved and the superintendent-school board relationship clarified. Third, according to Murphy, "We need to reexamine the level of trust we place in superintendents and to rethink our images of bold leadership and the people who exercise it."

Joseph Murphy (1991b) also criticizes education reform of the 1980s for viewing the superintendent as a "Maytag Man," someone relegated to the sidelines and never called on to help fix schools. To continue shunning

superintendents would be wrong, Murphy said. "To argue [that] superintendents should abandon the engine's controls and allow the reform train to head off on its own is wrongheaded." Superintendents must become more vocal about the critical issues facing schools and concentrate more heavily on those affecting the classroom than on those related to governance.

Bruce Harter, superintendent of the Corvallis School District, said the superintendent and district office can provide individual schools with leadership that is not available at the state level. "States have not typically done that very well," Harter said, "and the way they've tried is to regulate, regulate, regulate down to the very specifics." With the Oregon Department of Education moving away from strict regulation of schools, the superintendent's task of providing leadership is becoming more important than ever.

The combined forces of decentralization and assessment for outcomes at the building level are moving superintendents into new roles (Conley). Superintendents are faced with two challenges in regard to how their positions must change under systemic reform: (1) The superintendent's role must be redefined within the context of a new school organization based on broader access to decision-making, and (2) superintendents must develop the necessary skills to thrive in this new atmosphere (Conley).

Some of the new duties superintendents face under systemic change include helping to establish organizational vision and mission, planning and coordination, facilitating change, spanning institutional gaps, communicating, resolving conflicts, and improving organizational efficiency (Conley). Even with systemic change, superintendents remain the leaders in school districts and must be courageous and able to lead the educational community.

School Boards and Systemic Reform

One factor all three superintendents who were interviewed for this Bulletin recognize as important in systemic reform is the role of school boards. Like the superintendency, however, school boards often have been overlooked in research and writing on education reform.

One reason school boards may have been excluded from much of the dialogue and planning for fundamental change is the lack of organization among the 15,000 sovereign and separate political bodies (Bacharach 1990). In addition, several myths about school boards have contributed to their exclusion. They are seen as nonpolitical, accurately representative of the communities they serve, and wielding broad policy-making discretion.

A 1986 survey of school board members by the Institute for Educational Leadership confirmed the near total exclusion of school boards from state-level policy-making; it also found references to school boards absent in national reports and studies on education reform. The report stressed that

school boards have an essential role in educational change: "Because school boards are charged by states and localities to make policy and govern local public education, their willingness and capacity to lead, in large measure, will determine the long-range success or failure of school improvement efforts" (Institute for Educational Leadership 1986).

Superintendent Steve Swisher said the South Lane Board of Education has reached an effective balance between being policy-based and detail-oriented. School boards must know when to get involved and when to set goals and then leave it up to schools to determine how to meet them. "The school board needs to be visibly involved in things, but hopefully not visibly managing things," Swisher said.

The changing role of school boards in education is a factor that can benefit systemic change. Conley notes that while many school boards are becoming increasingly mired in politics and micromanagement, others are backing off and functioning much like a "board of directors." This means school boards pay more attention to the strategic direction of the school, student performance, and the development and periodic review of student performance standards. A part of this tactic is meeting less often, such as biannually or quarterly rather than monthly. This permits superintendents to operate districts with more consistency, and school boards are forced to take a longer-term view of education. Management duties not taken up by the central administration could be handled by citizen committees.

Another key element in systemic change is the need for board members to be knowledgeable and up-to-date on education issues, which is why training and workshops are important, Swisher said. This willingness to be educated about education is an important part of change, confirms Palermini. He said David Douglas board members enjoy discussing student curriculum and programs. "Their overriding interest in getting on the board is not for dealing with everyday matters," Palermini said. "They like to discuss what we are doing in the educational or instructional arena."

Bacharach notes that the success of a school board in promoting change depends to some degree on its stability, unity, and knowledge base. Boards that are constantly in flux, disunited, unsure of issues, or indecisive not only will be hampered in forming workable agreements for improvement, but will not follow through with implementation or appraisal.

The Institute for Educational Leadership's report identifies several characteristics of effective school boards. They concern themselves primarily with education and educational outcomes rather than managerial responsibilities. Effective boards also use strategic planning, ensure adequate resources at their schools, deal openly with controversy, lead the community in education matters, and maintain a clearly defined relationship with the superintendent. In addition, they establish procedures for superintendent selection,

collaborate with other school boards, thrive on diversity and public involvement, and understand the importance of the media and its influence on public perceptions.

The Principal

Unlike superintendents and school board members, many of whom must resist being left out of systemic education reform, principals find themselves in the opposite position: Many of them are faced with increased responsibility and shifting roles among teachers, students, and administrators. Being on the front lines, principals are more aware of the complex relationships in schools; they also have the ability to work with all members of the school. "The real agent for change is the building principal," Superintendent Palermini said. "Those are the folks that make change happen."

Principal Jim Jamieson denied that his role in systemic change is necessarily more important than the role of teachers, superintendents, or other stakeholders in education. What is important, he said, is leadership by all. According to Jamieson, "For any type of change to be successful, various people in leadership positions have to say this change is going to happen."

Jamieson sees his role at Willamette High School more as akin to an architect than a captain. He coordinates the collective effort of planning and establishing goals for the school. The principal must then be able to communicate that vision and "give people a picture in their minds of what the school will look like," Jamieson said.

According to Tewel (1993), principals must help others in the school to clearly understand their role in systemic change. Teachers and others must be helped to broaden their perception of their positions and their influence. Communication among teachers must be encouraged and isolation must be broken down. In addition, all school members should assume responsibility for change and should refrain from blaming others for the intransigence of the school system.

Several of Barkley and Castle's principles for systemic change affect principals directly. The basic requirement that individuals in the upper levels of an organization demonstrate support for and understanding of the need for change is one such example. Schools that choose to engage in systemic reform must have the support and understanding of their principals. The realization of the desirability of change need not come from principals, but it must gain their support to be successful.

Altering power relationships within schools is another area in which principals must play a central role. Principals must be willing to let go of some of their decision-making power to allow others to contribute their knowledge and viewpoints. An example of how significant changes in power

relationships can foster change comes from Barkley and Castle's study of school districts participating in the Learning Laboratories Initiative. For financial reasons, a small elementary school was forced to operate as a committee of the whole without a principal. Although the structure functioned well, faculty soon wanted a principal again. The knowledge and insight they gained by serving as "principal" for a time helped them create a more effective definition of the position and select an appropriate person to fill it.

Although many principals may be outwardly in favor of systemic change, its drastic nature often keeps them from giving it their full support. A survey that solicited principals' perceptions of fundamental education reform (Hallinger and others 1992) found that although in theory principals may favor systemic reform, many of their beliefs and practices hinder it. For example, respondents supported the idea of shared decision-making, but were concerned about the time and level of commitment it would require of teachers. They also had some reservations about extensive parent involvement. In addition, principals saw restructuring as eroding their power and greatly affecting the motivation, self-esteem, and participation of teachers.

Conclusion

Proponents of systemic education reform recognize that the public and even some educators are not convinced of the need for fundamental educational change. Countless reform movements have risen to prominence in the past, all claiming to be the panacea for public education's ills. It is difficult to claim again, that this time is different, but it is. Systemic education reform is not so much a detailed prescription for improving education as a philosophy advocating reflecting, rethinking, and restructuring.

But systemic education reform must not be the guise under which schools engage in change for its own sake. In the more than one hundred years of public education in this country, educators have figured out how to do many things well. What works in education must be preserved, not swept away in an indiscriminate crusade for change. As Superintendent Swisher noted, "There are a lot of really positive things going on in our schools."

Superintendents, boards of education, and principals, those who have the greatest impact on a community's perception of and support for its schools, must reassure the public that systemic education reform will benefit all students. "The key to any systemic reform is to not threaten those parents and students who have been successful," Harter said. It must be made clear that even those students who are successful in the present education system will be served better as a result of systemic reform.

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