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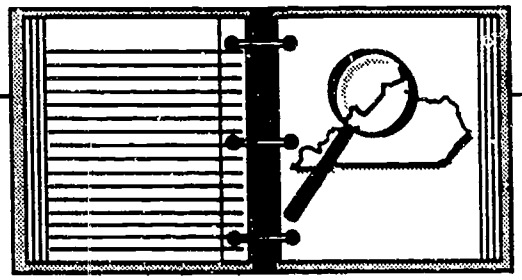
ABSTRACT

This document consists of the two issues in the third volume (covering 1993) of "Notes from the Field," a serial documenting a 5-year study of the implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990 in four rural Kentucky school districts. The first issue addresses implementation of an ungraded primary program in eight elementary schools. KERA mandates that grades K-3 be replaced with an ungraded primary program through which students progress at their own rates without the stigma of school failure. Critical attributes required for full implementation are: (1) developmentally appropriate practices; (2) multi-age, multi-ability classrooms; (3) continuous progress; (4) authentic assessment; (5) qualitative reporting methods; (6) professional teamwork; and (7) positive parent involvement. Observations reveal that six attributes are being implemented to some degree in most primary classrooms. Implementation of "continuous progress" appears most problematic. The second issue updates the progress of school-based decision making in the four school districts. Only one of seven school councils studied practices balanced decision making, where all members (principal, teachers, and parents) participate as equals in discussions and decisions, as KERA envisages. In three councils, teachers and principals dominate decision making. The remaining three councils serve as advisory groups to the principal and do not appear to be moving toward broader participation. (KS)



NOTES FROM THE FIELD:
Education Reform in Rural Kentucky

Volume 3, Number 1 May 1993

AEL

Kentucky's Primary Program

This issue of "Notes from the Field" reports our observations of the implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) primary program in four rural Kentucky school districts.

Major Findings

1. Seven **critical attributes** (listed below) have been identified by the state as essential to successful implementation of the primary program. Our observations reveal that six of the attributes are being implemented to some degree in most primary classrooms. The same observations suggest that implementing the most complex attribute—continuous progress—is more problematic.
   - **Developmentally appropriate instructional practices** are more extensively and enthusiastically implemented by teachers than any of the other critical attributes. In nearly every primary classroom we visited, students are engaging in hands-on activities, writing, interactive whole-group instruction, and small group activities. Teachers, students, and parents report less textbook work, drill, seatwork, and rote memorization than in the past.
   - **Multiage, multiability classrooms** can be found in all schools, in a wide variety of arrangements. The time allocated to such groupings ranges from fulltime to one hour per week. However, most teachers continue to categorize students by grade level, and in only a few classrooms do teachers flexibly regroup students.
   - **Authentic assessment**, although time-consuming, is being incorporated to some degree. Teachers observe and write anecdotal records of student progress, keep logs, compile student portfolios, collect work samples and journals, and hold conferences with parents. However, many question whether these strategies give them adequate information about student skill levels.
   - **Qualitative reporting methods** have generally replaced traditional report cards. Teachers send progress reports to parents in the form of checklists and/or narrative reports at least four times a year. Traditional grades (A-F) are no longer used.
   - **Professional teamwork** is increasing. Primary teachers report more communication, joint planning, and collaboration among themselves and with special education teachers than in the past.
   - **Parent involvement** in the primary program is found at some, but not all, schools we visited. Teachers and parents both say they communicate more frequently than before.
   - **Continuous progress** appears to be the attribute least successfully implemented. This is the most complex attribute, and many educators appear to be unaware of its relationship to the others.
2. Primary teachers are under great stress. They need more assistance with and time for professional development, materials' preparation, student assessment, planning, and collaboration with other teachers.
3. The principal is critical to a successful program. Principals often determine how much training and preparation teachers have, whether or not teachers have common planning periods, how actively parents are involved, and the overall level of support within the school for the primary program.

This synthesis of findings is part of a qualitative study of education reform in rural Kentucky being conducted by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) to provide feedback to educators and policymakers on the implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990. Four researchers are documenting reform efforts in four rural Kentucky districts that have been assigned the pseudonyms of Lamont County, Newtown Independent, Orange County, and Vanderbilt County. For more information about this project, contact either Pam Coe (800/624-9120) or Patty Kannapel (502/581-0324), State Policy program, AEL, P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325.

Methodology

During the 1992-93 school year, AEL researchers studied primary program implementation in eight elementary schools in four rural school districts. At each school, researchers analyzed the primary action plan and identified for observation two teachers from two different primary teams, if applicable. Each teacher was observed for at least half a day both in the fall and again after Christmas. We interviewed teachers, principals, and parents. Student input was gathered either through interviews or written work assigned by the teacher at the researchers' request. If time permitted, we gathered similar data from other schools in the district. In total, across the four districts this school year, we

- reviewed primary action plans from 12 schools;
- observed 37 teachers in 10 schools;
- interviewed 18 parents, 41 primary students, 34 primary teachers, 2 special-area teachers, and 8 principals;
- collected writing assignments from 44 primary students;
- observed 13 school-, district-, regional-, or state-level training sessions related to the primary program;
- observed 6 primary teacher planning meetings;
- observed 1 primary support group meeting;
- observed 6 primary orientation programs for parents;
- observed 8 school council meetings in elementary schools; and
- observed 5 elementary faculty meetings.

In addition, the researchers interviewed the deputy commissioner and associate commissioner in charge of the primary program for the Kentucky Department of Education and consulted the department's director of the Division of Performance Testing.

Our observations are not intended to provide a complete picture of the classrooms we observed: they should be viewed as snapshots in time. Also, these findings are based on observations in only four Kentucky school districts. This was the first year of primary program implementation in each of the districts.

Overview of the Law

KERA mandates that grades K-3 be replaced with an ungraded primary program through which students progress at their own rates without the stigma of early school failure. Implementation of the program began in 1992-93, and the program must be fully implemented in all elementary schools by the beginning of the 1993-94 school year.

According to Kentucky Department of Education officials, full implementation of the primary program means that seven critical attributes must be addressed to some degree in every primary classroom in the state: (1) **developmentally appropriate practices**; (2) **multiage, multiability classrooms**; (3) **continuous progress**; (4) **authentic assessment**; (5) **qualitative reporting methods**; (6) **professional teamwork**; and (7) **positive parent involvement**. Each attribute is defined and discussed below.

The seven critical attributes were designed to enable primary students to achieve six broad learning goals specified in the reform law. These goals have been further defined by 75 learner outcomes, or descriptions of what students should be able to do. A state-level committee of primary teachers studied the six broad goals and 75 learner outcomes, and devised a set of 18 skills that capture the essence of each learning goal and support the best practices of the state's primary program. State regulation identifies these 18 skills as the focus for determining if students have successfully completed the primary program (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993).

Recognizing that teachers are still learning how to implement the program and that no children have yet had a full four years in the new primary block, Kentucky Department of Education staff have developed an interim process for determining successful completion of the primary program. It assumes that most children will move on to fourth grade at the normal time. If a child needs more time to develop the 18 skills, the department recommends that teachers and parents make that decision together. Districts or schools may follow the department-defined interim process or devise their own method for verifying successful completion.

Eventually, an instrument called the Kentucky Education and Learning Profile (KELP) will be used to track student progress in the primary program. The profile was piloted during the 1992-93 school year and will be field tested during 1993-94.

Discussion of Major Findings

We concentrate our discussion on the seven critical attributes. We also address the major barriers and facilitators to primary program implementation: time and the role of the principal.

Critical Attributes

As we visited primary classrooms in the four study districts, we were impressed that most primary teachers addressed, to some degree, the seven critical attributes. We were especially impressed at how much instructional change has occurred. By contrast, our interviews and observations reveal that one attribute—continuous progress —is being only marginally addressed.

Developmentally Appropriate Instructional Practices

> ...instructional practices that address the physical, aesthetic, cognitive, emotional, and social

domains of children and that permit them to progress through an integrated curriculum according to their unique learning needs...." (Kentucky Department of Education 1993, p. 15)

Our observations and interviews reveal that teachers are most successful in implementing this critical attribute. In nearly every primary classroom we visited, students engaged in hands-on activities, writing, interactive whole-group instruction, and small-group activities. We saw little paperwork, drill, rote memorization, and textbook work. Students in all but two of the classrooms sat at tables or clusters of desks where they could interact and work together. In most classrooms, students were free to move around the room at least some of the time.

Most of the primary teachers we observed used a variety of approaches to teach basic skills. For example, most teachers taught language arts through a combination of the "Success" or "Sing, Spell, Read, Write" program (both whole-language approaches), authentic literature, and writing activities—supplemented by basal readers. Similarly, most teachers supplemented the math textbook with commercial programs that involved the use of manipulatives and active child involvement (such as "Box It/Bag It"). Some teachers reinforced skills through the use of learning centers. Manipulatives were available in nearly every classroom, and we observed numerous activities using manipulatives. Teachers in one district (which invested substantial dollars in computers) reinforced math and reading skills through daily use of computers. We observed several instances of cooperative group or partner activities, such as partner reading, students playing educational games in small groups, or groups completing and turning in a single product.

Nearly every teacher we observed attempted to integrate the curriculum through theme activities. During our observations, about half of these teachers used themes at times throughout the instructional day to teach concepts and skills in all subject areas. The remaining teachers used a block of time daily to teach thematic units that integrated science, social studies, language arts, math, music, or art activities.

Thus, our observations suggest that instruction at the primary level has changed substantially in almost every classroom. In many classrooms, the change has been dramatic. In addition, many teachers report that they enjoy teaching more and that students enjoy school more. One teacher remarked:

> I've never worked harder than I have this year, but I've never enjoyed a year as much as I have this year.... Sometimes we'll be busy working and before I even realize it, it's time for lunch. The days just go by so quickly, and it's really hard to get all of the things crammed into the day that you'd like to do.

Teachers have received extensive training in various new instructional approaches that are compatible with the primary program. In addition, most teachers seem to agree with the philosophy that active, hands-on instructional approaches are more developmentally appropriate at the primary level than the textbook- and paperwork-centered approaches of the past.

Multiage, Multiability Classrooms

> ... flexible grouping and regrouping of children of different age, sex, and ability who may be assigned to the same teacher(s) for more than one year.... (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993, p. 15)

The schools we visited were implementing multiage, multiability classrooms in various ways. Strategies for grouping students differed so much from one school to the next that it is difficult to identify any central tendency, except to say that every school we visited placed students in groups containing children of different ages, abilities, and sexes for at least part of the time. One of the most common arrangements was to place students in multiage, multiability groups for 45 to 60 minutes, three to five days a week, for thematic instruction. Another was to place them in dual-age groups (e.g., 5- and 6-year-olds, 6- and 7-year-olds, or 7- and 8-year-olds) for all or part of the day.

While teachers employed a variety of grouping strategies, they did not seem to use a great deal of flexibility or regrouping once these groups were formed. The most extensive and flexible regrouping we saw was in an open classroom. In this classroom, four teachers mixed 5- through 8-year-olds for almost two hours a day. For the balance of the day, three of these teachers, assisted by the special education teacher, taught the 6- through 8-year-olds, grouping and regrouping about every half hour for various skill activities. Groupings were sometimes based on interest but most of the time based on skill levels. Students also moved up and down between skill levels frequently during the year. The kindergarten teacher did not participate in this flexible grouping and regrouping. Although teachers at other sites moved students to some degree between skill groups, none did so as frequently or as flexibly as those in this open-classroom team.

Some teachers said they preferred not to have 5-year-olds included in the program. They believed that entry-level students need to spend the first year working on basic self-help, socialization, and readiness skills. In districts with a half-day kindergarten program, many kindergarten teachers were reluctant to spare any time out of the relatively short instructional day for multiage grouping. Teachers in districts with full-day kindergarten said the longer day made it easier to incorporate 5-year-olds into the primary program.

One teacher team said that mixed-age grouping was initially so stressful for some 5-year-olds (who cried excessively) that they limited the time 5-year-olds were mixed with older students. Other teachers reported that initial difficulties were soon overcome. One of these teachers said:

> Personally, I have enjoyed being able to integrate with the older kids. I can see that the older kids are more willing to work with younger ones. They're more tolerant. I think they're learning a lot. I think the younger ones are learning so much from being around the older ones. One of my little ones today closed his eyes and spelled February. I have to stop to spell February. But they've been working on that during calendar time.

We observed two models for incorporating 5-year-olds. One appeared to be more in line with continuous progress than the other. Some schools mixed 5- and 6-year-olds, 5- through 7-year-olds, or 5- through 8-year-olds for an hour or more per day. During this time, activities (such as work at centers, large-group calendar math activites, or work on themed units) were designed so that students could participate at their own levels. Some schools employed more than one such strategy.

The other model mixed 5-year-old students with upper-primary students (7- to 8-year-olds) for 90 minutes weekly (typically 30 minutes, three times per week). During this time, the older students acted as tutors to the younger ones, working on various readiness skills. While such activities undoubtedly benefit all students and should not necessarily be discontinued, this model does not facilitate continuous progress as well as the first.

Authentic Assessment

> ... assessment that occurs continually in the context of the learning environment and reflects actual learning experiences that can be documented through observation, anecdotal records, journals, logs, actual work samples, conferences and other methods....(Kentucky Department of Education, 1993, p. 15)

Teachers say they find authentic assessment techniques time-consuming, but most see their value and are struggling to incorporate them into their daily routines. Many say authentic assessment provides concrete evidence of student progress, which they use to complete progress reports and to explain student progress to parents.

The three most common authentic assessment methods we observed were observation, anecdotal records, and student work samples. Teachers frequently circulated around the room, observing—and occasionally recording—progress, and offering assistance as needed. Most spent out-of-class time to supplement their observations with anecdotal records and student work samples, sometimes keeping portfolios of student work. Some teachers have incorporated anecdotal records systematically into their daily routines, while others gave up the practice after finding it too time-consuming and cumbersome. One teacher commented:

> If I try another method of anecdotal records this year, I'm going to scream, because none of them are working, and I can't take time to write them. I don't know the answer to that. I tried three different things, and I'm not happy with any of them.

In spite of their efforts to practice authentic assessment, many teachers reported a lack of confidence in the new practices as evaluation measures. These teachers said they could no longer be sure that students had acquired specific skills, because they were no longer following a strict skills sequence set forth in a textbook series. One primary teacher summarized:

> I love it [the primary program], I do. And the kids love it. We're having so much fun. I don't know if they're learning anything, though. It worries me—really worries me.

In April, however, the same teacher said:

> In the past six weeks, I'm getting to where I can do more authentic assessment. I've been growing. I'm able to look around and see what [the students are] doing.

Qualitative Reporting Methods

> ... communication of progress through a variety of home-school communiqués, which address the growth and development of the whole child as s/he progresses through the primary program.... (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993, p. 15)

In all four districts, a redesigned primary progress report (or report card) is used to communicate student progress to parents in qualitative ways. The reports enable teachers to report student progress in terms of progression along a developmental continuum of skills and concepts. Some incorporate space for narrative reports on student achievement. Primary progress reports differ from one district to the next, but all list individual skills rather than subject areas, and none use traditional A-F letter grades. Parents in all four districts receive skill checklists and/or narrative reports at least four times a year.

In addition to progress reports, almost all primary plans call for two parent-teacher conferences this year, during which teachers are to share qualitative data. Also, some teachers communicate via weekly notes to parents, and some teachers send interim progress reports to supplement the quarterly reports.

Professional Teamwork

> ... all professional staff in the primary school program communicate and plan on a regular basis and use a variety of instructional delivery systems such as team

> teaching and collaborative teaching.... (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993, p. 15)

We found collaborative planning occurring among primary teachers at some schools. At a minimum, such planning centered around thematic units, and some teachers also planned for grouping and regrouping of students. Team teaching (two or more teachers working together to teach units of instruction) was occurring at only two schools, but some degree of collaborative or team teaching between regular and special education teachers was occurring in every school we visited. Even in schools where teachers did not plan together often, teachers said they were communicating with one another informally more than in the past. One teacher commented:

> I think the greatest thing that this [the primary program] has done for us as teachers is to get us to share with each other and to lean on each other more. Because before, we were just in our own little room, and we did our own little thing, and, "Nobody else better do what I did".... And now, it's, "How did you do that?" or, "Have you got a good idea for this?" And I think, really, that's the best thing it has done for us. We've really been a team, and we've done so many things this year together as a team; it has really been great.

Although professional teamwork was occurring in most of the schools we visited, teachers were severely limited by time and scheduling. Only about half the schools scheduled time into the school day for common planning among teams of teachers who shared the same students, and this generally occurred while students were in special area classes, such as art or physical education. At a few schools, teachers planned together after school, while some teachers did not plan together at all. Special-area teachers (art, music, physical education, and library) were not involved in team planning at any school we visited (although some primary teachers reported that art and music teachers linked some of their instruction to classroom themes).

Positive Parent Involvement

> ... the establishment of productive relationships between the school and the home, individuals, or groups that enhance communication, promote understanding, and increase opportunities for children to experience success in the primary program.... (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993, pp. 15-16)

Most of the schools we visited were seeking to increase communications with parents. Almost all schools provided some type of parent orientation to the primary program early in the year. Teachers in all schools were making an effort to send frequent progress reports to parents. Some supplemented these with narrative reports. A few teachers were also sending weekly or monthly class newsletters. Teachers in most schools made an effort to hold conferences with parents about twice a year. Students were included in these conferences in at least one school.

Most of the schools had some form of parent-teacher organization in place pre-KERA. Some teachers were giving homework assignments that required parental participation. A parent commented on this:

> They've started sending homework sheets home with them, and you help them with that, and I like that, because the parent is involved ... and I do know more what they're doing.

In addition to increasing home-school communication, some schools were making an effort to actively involve parents. Three had well-organized parent volunteer programs (one pre-KERA). These programs usually included a parent lounge at the school and a staff member to coordinate the program. Some schools without such programs asked parents to assist teachers in the classrooms and to make materials for teachers.

The principal at a school where we saw parents observing remarked that parents who observed their children's activities liked what they saw. She said that these parents were interpreting the program positively to parents who had not observed the program. In this school, the general understanding was that parents were welcome to observe any activity. We observed teachers not only welcoming parents but including them in class discussions.

In another district, we interviewed parents from two schools that represented the opposite ends of the parent involvement spectrum. Parents at a school that encouraged and received lots of parental involvement were positive about the primary program and expressed confidence in teachers' ability to implement it; parents at a school that discouraged parents from visiting were suspicious and distrustful of both the school and the primary program.

Continuous Progress

> ... a student's unique progression through the primary school program at his/her own rate without comparison to the rate of others or consideration of the number of years in school. Retention and promotion with[in] the primary school program are not compatible with continuous progress.... (Kentucky Department of Education, 1993, p. 15)

While many teachers were leading activities that allowed for continuous progress, most had not fully incorporated a continuous progress model into their thinking, practices, and vocabulary. This was evident in the labeling of students. Students in nearly every room we visited retained their designation as kindergartners, or first-, second-, or third-graders. In a few cases, students were referred to as P1s, P2s, P3s, and P4s ("P" for "primary").

Nearly all students we interviewed identified themselves by grade level. Students in multiage classrooms were clearly aware of who was in which grade. Teachers in these rooms often differentiated among the grade groups.

The problem is not merely one of terminology. In many cases, students were tracked in ability groups or grade groups for most of the school day. In almost all instances, students were grouped by grade or skill level for language arts and mathematics instruction. In several instances, teachers had two age groups in the same classroom but continued to teach them separately, giving different instruction and different assignments to the groups. For example, one teacher we observed, who had both 5- and 6-year-olds, labeled them "tulips" and "roses." She gave them the same worksheet and told the tulips to write sentences and the roses to write letters. (In a continuous progress model, students would write letters, words, and/or sentences according to their capabilities, rather than ages or grades.) In addition, we observed a classroom of 5- through 7-year-olds in which only the 5-year-olds were allowed to utilize centers, only the 6-year-olds were asked to copy certain exercises from the board each day, and only the 6- and 7-year-olds were allowed to use the computer. Many multiage classrooms were operating like traditional split classes rather than continuous progress classes.

Admittedly, continuous progress is a difficult concept to put into practice, because it essentially requires teachers to individualize instruction for a group of 20-25 students, often without the benefit of extra classroom assistants or extra planning time. In addition, much of the training primary teachers have received has focused on instructional practices or other single attributes of the primary program rather than on providing a holistic view of how all the attributes work together. State department officials report they initially emphasized developmentally appropriate practices, authentic assessment, and qualitative reporting, because successful implementation of these attributes will move teachers toward a continuous progress philosophy.

Successful Primary Program Implementation: Barriers and Facilitators

Our study of primary classrooms suggests two factors important to successful implementation of the primary program: easing the teachers' work load and having a supportive principal.

Teacher Work Load

Teachers reported that time was the major barrier to successful primary program implementation. At all schools we visited, principals and teachers said they needed more time and help. Several aspects of the primary program require teachers to devote more time to their jobs than ever before.

Many teachers completed three times their required number of professional development hours in an attempt to prepare themselves for the new methods associated with the primary program. The new methods themselves require primary teachers to continually prepare and update materials for centers, whole language, hands-on math and science, and ever-changing thematic units. Authentic assessment requires much more time than keeping grade books and filling out report cards. Teachers spend time preparing narrative reports on student progress to send home. Parent conferences have required preparation time on the part of teachers, as well as time spent in the actual conference. Teachers are required to plan collaboratively with other primary teachers, special education teachers, and special-area teachers. This planning often has to be done before or after school.

Teachers at all schools reported frustration at trying to do so much in such a short period of time with so little help, and some have given up trying to implement some parts of the program. Collaborative planning with other teachers has been particularly difficult for many. Instructional aides and parents assist teachers at some schools, but few teachers have fulltime aides, and some teachers have no aides at all. Teachers continue to report they have no time for their families and their lives outside the classroom.

The time requirements of the primary program have had a strong effect on another aspect of KERA: school-based decisionmaking (SBDM). At some elementary schools in our study districts, no primary teachers were on school councils because they believed they could not spare the necessary time. At non-SBDM schools, teachers said they had not implemented SBDM because primary teachers did not have time to serve on councils; and they feared the primary program would not be sufficiently represented.

School Principal

While principals at most schools we visited gave considerable support to the primary program and enabled the teachers to implement the program reasonably well, it was evident from the extremes we observed that the principal plays a pivotal role in determining how effectively the program is implemented.

The three most supportive principals we observed received extensive training in the primary program and exerted direct leadership in helping teachers prepare the school's primary program plan—including scheduling as much individual and group planning time as possible for primary staff. In at least two schools. these principals were regarded by their staffs as experts on KERA. These three principals were also experts at finding additional resources or using current funding to ensure that primary teachers received the

training and materials they needed.

Once the primary program was underway, these principals monitored the program frequently, identified problem areas, and helped figure out ways to alleviate problems. For example, one principal hired substitute teachers for two half-days to give primary teachers time to work on authentic student assessment. The same principal did daily walk-throughs to get a quick view of the primary classrooms and modeled appropriate instructional practices for primary teachers at their request.

The two least supportive principals we observed engaged in such behaviors as failing to provide common planning time for teachers on the same primary team, avoiding the primary area of the school, avoiding training about the primary program, discouraging parents from visiting or volunteering in the school, allowing teachers to avoid those aspects of the primary program they found problematic (for instance, inclusion of 5-year-olds or anecdotal recordkeeping), allowing teachers to choose their own teams (leading to cliques or to concentration of the best, most enthusiastic teachers in just one primary team), and assigning students to teachers without teacher input. Teachers in schools led by these principals were considerably less enthused about the primary program, and our observations suggested that the program was being implemented less effectively in these schools.

Conclusions

Most primary teachers appear to have made a good start on implementing the nuts and bolts of the primary program. It is not surprising that they are focusing on the component parts rather than the big picture, given the magnitude of the task and the focus on components in their training.

Knowing how long it takes to implement major innovations, we are not surprised that problems still exist. For instance, most teachers continue to categorize and think of students by grade level, most seem to be struggling to learn new methods for monitoring skill acquisition, some schools still need to figure out how to establish productive relationships with the home and parents, the teacher workload is intolerable for more than a short time, and many seem to have not yet fully grasped the concept of continuous progress.

In spite of these problems, a great deal has been accomplished in a very short time. With only a year for study and preparation, primary teachers have devised different ways of addressing the seven critical attributes—many of which are highly effective. A recent report on a day and a half discussion among researchers, consultants, and policy analysts studying KERA implementation summarizes "remarkably consistent conclusions" that

> a tremendous amount of activity has occurred in a very short period—far more than skeptical outside observers anticipated. Changes are visible at all levels of the education system and there is continuing strong and broad public support for the reforms. The major challenges are created by KERA's main strength—its comprehensive, interconnected nature. Since everything cannot happen at once, how is it possible to get all of the pieces into place and build the capacity to implement KERA? (David, 1993, p. 1).

The question is apropos to the primary program: What is needed to ensure the continuing evolution of a continuous-progress primary program? A number of traditional solutions would undoubtedly ease teachers' burden considerably if the state or districts could find the funding to support them: providing a fulltime instructional aide for every primary teacher, giving at least one hour of daily planning time to each primary teacher and regular joint planning time for groups of teachers during the school day, and extending teachers' work year at both ends to give them paid time for planning and preparation.

Education Commissioner Thomas Boysen suggests another possibility: provide appropriate resource materials to educators to support new ways of teaching and of organizing schools. He points out that Kentucky is moving from a "cellular curriculum" in which "the teacher was supported by a textbook which was set up in lesson-size pieces." He goes on to say:

> We're now dealing with questions, issues, themes, and experiences that touch the hearts and minds of children. Unfortunately, the instructional resource material infrastructure is not available. That is why teachers are staying up late planning lessons and scrounging for materials. We cannot solve the workload problem until we solve the instructional resource problem (personal communication, April 26, 1993).

Boysen reports that the state department of education is trying to address this problem. Three projects are underway to develop instructional resource materials to assist teachers. Boysen also feels that the Kentucky Early Learning Profile should help solve some of teachers' time problems.

It is not surprising that, as KERA is implemented, the teacher burdens are proving to be greater than anyone anticipated originally. Like district and state department staff, we cannot say with assurance exactly what it will take to successfully implement the primary program without exhausting the system's human resources. If state department staff can rapidly develop the instructional resource and assessment materials described by Commissioner Boysen, this could ease teacher workload and stress considerably. Given that state department staff are as overburdened as primary teachers, however, it is unlikely that enough materials

can be produced to relieve teachers' burdens significantly during the coming school year. It will be very difficult to provide additional resources during a time of financial hardship for state government, but creative solutions to this problem are urgently needed at the state, district, and school levels.

It is clear from our observations and interviews that most primary teachers have made a good faith effort to implement the primary program, and are capable of effectively doing so if they're given proper assistance and support. The spirit expressed by one primary teacher suggests ways in which Kentucky educators are effectively coping with the demands of change:

> We started hearing about all these new programs and strategies, and we jumped in and went "whole hog" without adequate training or time to organize. I tried to teach like that for a year and a half, spending up to 38 hours per week in addition to class time in preparation. In the meantime, I also spent a month at the hospital with Daddy. I reached the point that I thought, "I'm going to snap. I'm trying to do too much too fast. I don't feel adequately trained. I don't see the end results coming out of my students that I want to see." So, during Christmas break, I said, "Uh-uh, this isn't going to cut it. If I'm ready to snap, I'm not giving my best to the students, and I'm not able to get their best out of them." So I had to revamp, and in January I took the best of the old methods that I knew would work for me and combined them with the best of the new methods that were working for me. There were still some ideas, which sounded good to me that I would like to try, but I didn't feel ready or competent to incorporate them at that time. Those things will have to wait for now. I'm using my own mesh of the old and the new, and when I can add more, I will.

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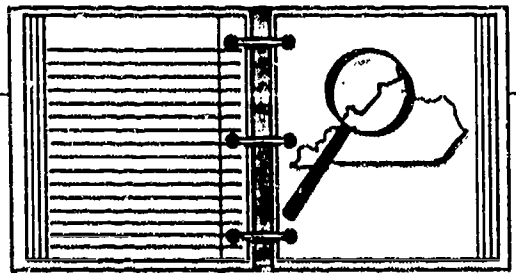

NOTES FROM THE FIELD:
Education Reform in Rural Kentucky

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AEL

School-Based Decisionmaking After Two Years

Two years ago, AEL devoted the second issue of "Notes from the Field" to initial organization of school-based decisionmaking (SBDM) in four, rural school districts participating in AEL's study of KERA implementation. This report records the ways in which SBDM has developed in the study districts over the past two years.

Major Findings

- Only one of the seven school councils studied practices balanced decisionmaking, where all members (principal, teachers, and parents) participate as equals in discussions and decisions, as KERA envisages. In three councils, teachers and principals dominate decisionmaking, although parents at two of these schools have begun to play a stronger role. The remaining three councils serve as advisory groups to the principal; they do not appear to be moving toward broader participation in decisionmaking.
- Major council actions in the seven SBDM schools studied are hiring personnel (especially principals), developing and managing instructional budgets, developing discipline policies, planning school primary programs, and constructing school schedules.
- Some councils—especially the three that manage instructional budgets—coordinate much, though not all, of KERA's implementation in their schools.
- Factors that help SBDM implementation are the principal's support, the recognition of councils' authority by district administrators and school boards, trust among the various role groups involved, public knowledge of and access to council meetings, and council training. The reverse in any of these areas hinders SBDM implementation.

Recommendations

Implementation of SBDM requires collaborative, ongoing education. New skills and knowledge are needed to enable everyone involved in implementing KERA to contribute significantly to decisionmaking. Our interactions and observations suggest that councils need the following training:

- familiarization with the reform law and the role of SBDM in achieving KERA goals (including its role in developing school transformation plans);
- group process skills for shared decisionmaking and consensus building, including each participant's responsibilities;
- strategies for encouraging widespread involvement in the SBDM process; and
- strategies for maintaining communication links between councils and administrators, school boards, parent organizations, faculties, students, support staff, the media, and the public.

This synthesis of findings is part of a qualitative study of education reform in rural Kentucky being conducted by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) to provide feedback to educators and policymakers on the implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990. Four researchers are documenting reform efforts in four rural Kentucky districts that have been assigned the pseudonyms of Lamont County, Newtown Independent, Orange County, and Vanderbilt County. For more information about this project contact Pam Coe (800/624-9120) or Patty Kannapel (502/581-0324), State Policy program, AEL, P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325.

Methodology

While the quantity and types of research activities on SBDM differed among districts, the following activities occurred in all four districts over the past two years: two superintendent interviews, one school board member interview, observation of one school board meeting, analysis of all school board meeting minutes; and, at each school implementing SBDM, one principal interview per year, one teacher council member interview, one parent council member interview, observation of at least three council meetings per year, and analysis of all council meeting minutes.[1]

SBDM Implementation in the Four Districts

When our study last reviewed SBDM implementation (in the spring of 1991), six schools out of 20 in the four districts had voted to adopt SBDM: four from one district, and one in each of two other districts. In the fourth district, teachers at all schools voted against SBDM, so the school board appointed a school to implement it, as required by KERA.

No further movement toward SBDM occurred during 1991-92 in our study districts, in contrast to developments statewide. In 1992-93, two schools in two districts voted on SBDM, but only one of these voted to adopt it. By July 1993, eight schools in the four districts had adopted SBDM: two high schools and six elementary schools. This report follows the seven schools that began formal implementation in 1991-92.

[1]A complete list of SBDM-related activities in each district for the past two years can be obtained by contacting Pam Coe at 800/624-9120.

Discussion of Major Findings

The assumption behind school-based decisionmaking is that those closest to the students understand best what is needed to help students succeed in school. SBDM—also called site-based decisionmaking or shared decisionmaking—empowers key actors in schools to share in decisions that are crucial to teaching and learning. KERA specifies that parents, teachers, and principals are the key players in the SBDM process (see box, page 7). Given this assumption, we addressed the following questions: To what extent has decisionmaking come to be shared among principals, teachers, and parents? What kinds of decisions have school councils made? What role do councils play in the school's overall implementation of KERA? What factors help or hinder the implementation of shared decisionmaking?

Extent of Shared Decisionmaking

After two years of SBDM implementation, only one of the seven councils in the study appears to have achieved SBDM as KERA intended, with all council members contributing as equals. At three of the seven schools, teachers share decisionmaking with the principal, but parents are on the fringes, often without adequate information to make informed decisions. At the remaining three schools, councils essentially act as advisory committees to the principal.

Balanced decisionmaking. The one school that currently shares decisionmaking among all members got off to a rocky start two years ago. Council members reported that teacher members at first voted as a bloc, with everybody suspecting everyone else's motives. The district had a history of strong parent involvement, and some teachers feared that parents would try to dominate the council. By the end of the council's first year, however, it operated as a cohesive group. All council members served for two consecutive years, and the council functioned smoothly during its second year of operation. At the end of that year, all five elected members chose not to seek another term, and the principal was promoted to a central office position. It is too early to know if the new council will continue balanced decisionmaking and strong parent involvement.

At council meetings observed these past two years, the principal facilitated, but did not dominate, council discussions. Parent and teacher members were outspoken. Council members talked through issues until they reached consensus; then they voted on motions that were formally moved and seconded. Almost all votes were unanimous. Ample opportunity was given for all council members to speak to issues, and observations suggest that all members felt free to contribute to discussions—and usually did.

The council encouraged participation in SBDM by holding meetings on regularly scheduled dates at a time convenient for working parents (5:30 p.m. or later) and by routinely advertising meetings through the local media. Teachers and parents not on the council served on committees, and teachers often attended council meetings to submit requests or listen to discussion of issues that affected them.

A core group of highly involved parents mobilized support for the 1993-94 elections, resulting in a voter turnout of 170 parents—up from 35 the previous year. This number far surpasses the 20-25 parents voting at other SBDM schools in the study. Parent representation on council committees ranged from one to eight members in 1992-93, with parents outnumbering teachers on two standing committees. Some parents

reported that they wished to serve on committees but the sign-up sheets were full when they tried to volunteer. One or two parents were in the audience at most of the meetings observed in 1992-93—making this one of only two schools in the study that had any regular attendance by parents. Topics as diverse as student assessment, computer software, configuration of the primary program, and formation of a health committee were raised by parents and addressed by the council.

Educator-dominated decisionmaking. Three councils in three districts appear to be dominated by educators, although recent observations indicate that two of the three are becoming more balanced in their decisionmaking. In two councils, strong leadership by principals committed to shared decisionmaking has given teachers the opportunity to play a strong role in SBDM from the beginning. Teachers at the third school assumed a strong role in their struggle to share in decisions with a principal whose management practices they opposed. The principal's resistance to SBDM figured in his reassignment at the end of 1991-92 school year, and the council hired a new principal who was more supportive of SBDM.

Interviews and observations at these three schools revealed that teachers influenced decisionmaking as much as principals, and sometimes changed the principals' minds on specific issues. Teachers not on the council generally participated in SBDM through committees, and much of these councils' work was handled at the committee level. Most teachers served either on the council or on committees, and the most active committees were dominated by teachers. Teachers typically attended council meetings to present committee reports. One of the three schools had trouble finding teachers willing to serve on the council in 1993-94, reportedly because they were already busy participating on committees.

Parent participation in SBDM at these three schools has been problematic. Parents were not especially active at any of these schools prior to SBDM implementation. During the first year of SBDM, there was an initial surge of parent interest at two of the schools, which formed Parent Teacher Organizations (PTOs) for the first time in their histories. This interest tapered off, however, and the councils appeared to focus on issues other than parent involvement. Parent members occasionally influenced decisions on topics where they felt adequately informed, such as discipline.

Parent council members at these three sites were not very vocal at the meetings observed over the past two years. Two of the three councils recruited parents to serve on committees, but the third recruited parents for the PTO committee only, which has since disbanded. One council initially required that a parent committee member be present for committees to transact business, but the requirement was eliminated in June 1993, when some committees were stymied by high parent absenteeism. Parent attendance at council meetings was poor at all three locations, although parents occasionally attended council meetings if a hot topic was on the agenda.

Principal-dominated councils. The remaining three councils in the study have evolved as advisory groups to the principal. All three initially attempted to adopt shared decisionmaking through group training, frequent meetings to reach consensus on bylaws and to hire personnel, and establishment of council committees. Over time, however, the councils gradually slipped into a decisionmaking mode in which the principals brought ideas or plans to the councils for their endorsement. The SBDM committee structure diminished or disappeared completely at these three schools. Parent representatives frequently had no advance information on topics presented and were mostly left on the fringes of decisionmaking. At all three sites, the researchers were told that teachers contributed to decisionmaking through faculty committees. Since these committees were not established by the council, they seldom reported to the council.

SBDM participation by noncouncil members was minimal at these three schools. Fewer teachers ran for council seats each year at two of the schools, and only a few teachers served on SBDM committees at any of the schools. Noncouncil members (both teachers and parents) rarely attended council meetings, and committee reports became rare as committees became less and less active. Two of the councils had only two nominees to fill parent slots the past two years, and relatively few parents participated in council elections. Although all three councils recruited parents to serve on committees, this did not serve to involve parents in SBDM as the committees themselves became less active. Parents seldom attended council meetings at two schools, though one or two parents generally attended meetings observed at the third school.

Changes in council decisionmaking modes. Ideally, councils should move gradually toward balanced decisionmaking. Indications are that this is occurring in two of the three councils dominated by their educator members. At these schools, researchers observed parent council members becoming more vocal and often influencing council decisions. Parent observers have begun attending council and committee meetings at one of these schools. This is not happening at the third school, where less-vocal parent members have been elected

to the council and teacher council and committee members are becoming more vocal and influencing council decisions more.

No movement toward shared decisionmaking appears to be occurring at schools where councils play an advisory role. In many ways, these councils appeared to be closer to balanced decisionmaking in the early stages of SBDM implementation than now. At two of the three schools with advisory councils, principals and teachers appear to be satisfied with the arrangement, but some parent council members have privately expressed dissatisfaction or confusion about their roles on the council. At the third school, the few council members who initially pushed for balanced decisionmaking gave up when their efforts were ineffective; they were replaced by members who were not willing to challenge the status quo.

Council Decisions

Even though decisionmaking was not shared equally at all schools, all councils in the study made important decisions, most notably in the areas of personnel and discipline. Some councils made significant decisions in other areas.

Personnel. Council members at all sites count personnel decisions among their most important, particularly the hiring of principals and teachers. The sheer quantity of hiring decisions at some sites illustrates that, over time, council involvement in hiring strongly influences the way schools function. Four councils in three districts hired principals over the past two years. Members of one council participated in hiring four teachers, three custodians, two instructional assistants, and one secretary. Another council participated in hiring three teachers, an extended school coordinator, a receptionist, and a number of coaches.

While the principal is only required to consult with the school council about hiring, council members at all seven schools reported that they participated in interviewing job applicants and generally reached consensus on hiring decisions. Council members at two schools, however, expressed frustration at not being able to participate in preliminary decisions, for example, advertising vacancies and screening applications.

Most teacher and parent council members at all sites said their councils hired the best qualified applicants, even when pressured to do otherwise. A principal who was hired by a school council remarked:

> A lot of places, it's the "good old boy" system, and, if you don't know somebody in the community, you really don't stand a chance. This made it very, very fair.

Some instances of pressure to hire local applicants were reported. Two councils hired local applicants as assistant principals after rejecting them as principals in favor of candidates from outside the district; some council members at both sites reported that the local candidates were qualified for the job, but others reported that council members felt obligated to make amends to the local applicants.

At another school, council members reported that the superintendent told the council whom he wanted them to hire for principal a year before the position was open. When the vacancy became official, the superintendent forwarded one application to the council—the application of the person he wanted to hire. The superintendent explained to AEL staff that he did not widely advertise the position, and only one person applied. The council interviewed and hired the one applicant. Two council members said they thought the applicant was well qualified for the job, but they believed it would have been fairer if there had been a larger number of applicants from which to choose.

Teacher council members at two schools reported that they have taken heat from colleagues or administrators for not hiring local applicants. In one district, a parent council member reported being ostracized by other community members after she voted to hire an applicant from outside the community for a teaching position rather than a less-qualified, local applicant. It appears that school councils are being subjected to the same political pressures many local school boards experienced when they were responsible for hiring decisions.

Discipline. All seven councils approved discipline policies developed by council committees. During a temporary ban on corporal punishment statewide, policies generally included options for detention, such as after-school or Saturday detention, or in-school suspension. After the ban expired in 1992-93, councils at four schools (in three districts) considered reinstating corporal punishment. Two schools did so.

Budget. Budget committees at the three schools that assumed budgeting responsibilities developed their schools' instructional budgets; the councils then adopted these budgets and approved or disapproved teachers' expenditures. Teachers at two of the three schools commented that the budgeting process had become more equitable since becoming the council's responsibility, and the council's effort to make the budget equitable was obvious in the third school.

Curriculum and Instruction. Involvement in budgeting carried with it many decisions about curriculum and instruction. Some curriculum committees were very active, while others had difficulty defining their roles.

Implementation of the KERA-mandated primary program was the major issue related to curriculum and instruction for elementary school councils. Council committees at three of the five elementary schools developed the schools' primary program action plans, while the remaining two elementary councils approved primary plans developed by the primary teachers.

Councils at both high schools devoted considerable time to parents' complaints that the math department was not meeting students' needs. Because councils have no authority to transfer teachers and were reluctant to confront individuals about teaching methods, both councils tried to remedy the problem by working with the math departments. One school's math department, when directed to conduct a self study, identified problem solving as a deficit area; the department subsequently issued a one-page handout about teaching problem-solving skills. At the other school, the principal recommended offering "basic" (lower-level) math courses to enable students not planning to major in math or technical areas to meet college requirements. Some council members questioned this solution, and one parent council member observed, "We're watering it down and letting the teacher not teach to the student." Nevertheless, the council ultimately approved a course schedule that included three levels of math classes.

Scheduling. Councils at two elementary schools and one high school assumed responsibility for developing school schedules. At the elementary schools, council committees' schedules were received positively by teachers. At the high school, the council's changes effected curricular innovations. After obtaining faculty approval, the council instituted a seven-period day to increase the number of class periods; this meant that more courses were available to students and the school was able to offer chemistry to all students who wanted it. Course changes also eliminated tracking in social studies and English classes.

Council Role in KERA Implementation

As defined by KERA, school councils are responsible for setting school policy to provide an environment that enhances student achievement and helps the school meet goals established by the law. The researchers examined the extent to which councils viewed themselves as key to the school's achieving KERA goals.

The three councils that assumed responsibility for the school budget appeared to be taking a global view of their task.

Management of the instructional budget appeared to help councils "get the big picture." Approval of teachers' purchase requests familiarized councils and their budget committees with materials and strategies teachers were using to implement the primary program, develop portfolios, and teach real-life tasks and problem-solving skills. Teacher interest and participation in SBDM was greatest at the three schools whose councils assumed budgeting responsibilities.

Councils with some degree of shared decisionmaking tended to be more involved in other aspects of KERA implementation than those that were advisory. Council committees at three of the five elementary schools developed their schools' primary program action plans. Two councils were directly involved in decisions about the extended school services program. One council heard regular reports on the development of a successful Family Resource Center proposal and on the district's curriculum alignment process.

Although these examples involve decisions that affect student achievement, only one council assumed primary responsibility for developing the school's transformation plan—a document that outlines in detail how the school will help students achieve KERA goals. Such plans are not mandatory, but the state department of education is encouraging all schools to develop transformation plans, and has issued guidelines suggesting a strong role for school councils in the process. Six of the seven SBDM schools in the study developed such plans; at five schools, teacher committees unrelated to the council developed the plans, and the councils merely approved them. At the sixth school, a council committee developed the plan.

Factors that Help or Hinder SBDM Implementation

Several factors apparently can help or hinder implementation of SBDM: the principal's role, the role of district administrators and school board, trust or mistrust among role groups responsible for SBDM, public knowledge of SBDM and access to council meetings, and council training.

The principal. Principals play a key role. The principal who led the most "balanced" council in this study facilitated SBDM primarily through a nonauthoritarian management style. He never dominated council meetings but facilitated them by keeping members on task. He willingly shared power with the council and sided with the council on several occasions when its authority was challenged by the actions of central office staff.

Researchers observed other principals impeding shared decisionmaking. These principals dominated council discussions, asked the council to rubber stamp decisions already made, failed to bring the council to closure on concerns raised by council members or others, withheld information needed to prepare a budget, and failed to implement council deci-

sions. One principal failed to schedule council meetings for several months in 1991-92 and only began to do so after council members confronted him. One of the council members remarked:

> I thought our facilitator was really dragging his feet.... We were just neglecting to have meetings. They were not getting scheduled. And then, the one meeting we had, there was no agenda and apparently nothing to do, and I just didn't feel that way. I thought there was a lot we should be working on.

Central office administration and school board. Central office administrators and school board members have tended to stay out of the implementation of SBDM. However, we documented a few instances of their helping or hindering implementation.

At one high school, parents and farmers protested to the school board that the school council's policy on punishment for tobacco possession was unfair. The school board sent the complaint back to the school council and supported the council when it reconfirmed its tobacco policy for the balance of the year.

When two councils hired new principals, two superintendents facilitated school-based decisionmaking by forwarding the names of qualified applicants from both inside and outside the district. Another superintendent, as reported earlier, impeded SBDM by making it impossible for the council to consider more than one, local candidate for principal.

In two districts, problems arose when the central office spent some of the schools' instructional money without council approval. In both instances, the councils were reimbursed after discussing the problem with administrators.

Trust/mistrust between educators and parents. One of the chief barriers to SBDM implementation is pervasive mistrust between educators and parents. In one district, parent council members expressed frustration that they lacked information available to school staff about the school and KERA. They wanted sufficient information to participate fully in council decisions. A teacher in this district shared some of her misgivings about parents participating in decisionmaking:

> Some of our parents are sitting down there with ... a high school education, and they come in and do volunteer work, and ... they see things going on, but to understand the concepts ... behind it, they don't.

In two districts, relations between parents and teachers appear congenial on the surface, yet the researchers have seen some evidence of an underlying mistrust—mostly on the part of educators—that prevents parents from becoming equal partners in the decisionmaking process. Two principals expressed fear of SBDM attracting parents with unreasonable demands or with inadequate knowledge. Researchers observed principals at two schools dispatching the topic of parent involvement at council meetings by changing the subject, offering some reason why the topic should not be dealt with, or insisting that everything that could possibly be done to increase parent involvement had already been tried. Parent council members in these schools have been reluctant to persist in raising the topic. A former parent council member at one school remarked:

> I know, from where I work, if you do too much ruffling, you get a label—you do everywhere in every job. I just hope it gets beyond that where people can feel comfortable saying what they think.

Publicity and meetings. Knowledge about SBDM and awareness that council meetings are open to the public seem to be rare among parents and the general public in three of the four study districts. In addition, some councils we studied did not make their meetings easily accessible to members of the public.

Although local newspapers in all the study districts routinely cover school board meetings, none has provided similar coverage to school councils. Council efforts to advertise their meetings have become increasingly half-hearted and intermittent at some study schools. A parent who attended a council meeting late in the 1992-93 school year commented:

> It has taken me ... just about the whole year to figure out that you're really supposed to come to these [council] meetings. I didn't even know what you did at one of these meetings.

Four councils scheduled meetings at inconvenient times for working parents or community members. A few councils held meetings later in the day but abandoned the practice when it did not result in larger audience attendance. Four of the seven councils held regularly scheduled meetings, making it easier for potential audience members to know when and where meetings would be held. Others, however, held meetings on an as-needed basis.

At the meetings observed for the study, three of the seven councils sat facing the audience or intermingled with the audience, enabling audience members to hear what was said. Other councils sat around a table facing in, which shut out audience members and made it difficult to hear. Most councils distributed agendas to audience members at council meetings, but, at five, no substantial information about policies or programs under

OVERVIEW OF KRS 160.345: THE SBDM STATUTES

The KERA Mandate

Each board of education was required to adopt a policy for implementing SBDM by January 1, 1991. At least one school in every district, except those containing only one school, was required to implement SBDM by June 30, 1991. If no faculty voted for SBDM (by two-thirds majority) by that date, the local school board was required to appoint a school. All schools in the Commonwealth must implement SBDM by July 1, 1996, unless they are the only school in the district. Schools achieving at or above the threshold level for student success defined by the state may also be exempted from SBDM, if a majority of faculty votes to do so and the school requests an exemption from the State Board for Elementary and Secondary Education.

Council Composition

Each SBDM school is required to form a school council to set school policy. The council consists of the principal, who acts as chair; three teachers, elected by a majority of teachers at the school; and two parents, elected by the parent members of the parent-teacher organization or by a parent organization formed for the purpose. Council membership may be increased proportionately. Council members serve one-year terms, but may serve consecutive terms if council bylaws permit.

Schools may apply to the state board for an alternative council structure. In considering alternative models, the state board requires that parents make up at least one-third of the council. Councils may elect their own chairs if they apply to the state board for an alternative structure (Kentucky State Board for Elementary and Secondary Education, *Agenda Book*, July, 1993).

Participation in SBDM by Noncouncil Members

KERA specifies that certified staff (teachers and administrators) may participate in SBDM by serving on committees. The law directs local boards to create policy specifying how parents, citizens, and community members may participate in SBDM.

Council Responsibilities

Councils have the following responsibilities:

- to set school policy, consistent with district board policy, to provide an environment that enhances student achievement and helps the school meet the goals established in KERA (contained in KAS 158.645 and KRS 158.6457);
- to determine the frequency of and agenda for meetings [158 Ken. Rev. Stat. §§645, 6451 (1992)];
- to determine, within the limits of available funds, the number of persons to be employed in each job classification;
- to select a principal when a vacancy occurs;
- to consult with the principal in filling staff vacancies;
- to determine what textbooks, instructional materials, and student support services to provide;
- to set policy in nine areas: (1) curriculum (including needs assessment), (2) assignment of time during the school day, (3) assignment of students to classes and programs, (4) scheduling the school day and week subject to the school calendar year and beginning and ending times of the school day established by the local board, (5) use of school space during the school day, (6) instructional practices, (7) discipline and classroom management techniques, (8) extracurricular programs and policies governing student participation, and (9) procedures, consistent with local school board policy, for determining alignment with state standards, technology utilization, and program appraisal.

The local board policy on SBDM must address procedures for council participation in decisions related to school budget and administration, student assessment, school improvement plans, and professional development plans. In addition, the local board may grant school councils any other authority permitted by law.

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consideration was available. One council prepared packets of information for audience members, which greatly facilitated audience understanding of the issues discussed. Four of the seven councils routinely scheduled time on the agenda for audience concerns; a fifth council occasionally did so.

Council training. Six of the seven councils in the study received at least six hours of training early in the SBDM implementation process, but one council operated for nearly a year with very little formal training. Another council began operating before receiving training. In both instances, the lack of training made it difficult for the councils to get organized.

Since the initial year of SBDM implementation, none of the councils has received ongoing, collegial training or has developed a plan to do so. Training has been made available each year in three of the four districts, but some sessions were offered during the day, which prevented working parents from attending. Many council members who served on councils for more than one year seemed to think that subsequent training sessions were only for new members.

Some of the problems observed in the study may reflect lack of adequate training and information. For instance, the council that waited for the principal to call a meeting apparently did not realize that councils have the authority to determine the frequency of their meetings.

Conclusions

SBDM is a complex reform that requires radical changes in participants' roles and in their ways of thinking about decisionmaking. It appears to us that SBDM has been implemented most successfully at the four schools where participants recognize that radical change is required and are making an effort to bring about this change. The remaining three schools, for the most part, are implementing SBDM only superficially: councils are in place and meeting regularly, but not integrally involved in decisionmaking, except in hiring.

Even at schools where decisionmaking is shared, including parents as equal partners has often been problematic. If parents are to participate fully in SBDM, educators must learn to share their expertise, and parents must assert their right to the knowledge they need for full participation. Both parties must be willing to expend the time and energy necessary to bring all council members up to the knowledge level needed to make policy decisions about the school.

SBDM has broadened participation in decisions about personnel and discipline at all schools, perhaps because educators and parents alike feel they understand these issues well enough to make decisions about them. Council involvement in decisions about curriculum and instruction has been less common. Management of the school's instructional budget appears to expand council involvement into other areas, such as curriculum and instruction. We have also seen that budget management tends to result in councils' developing a more global view of their role in the school and in KERA implementation. This suggests that budget management could serve as a vehicle for moving councils quite naturally into decisionmaking about issues that help students succeed in school, an underlying assumption of SBDM.

We have suggested several factors that help or hinder SBDM implementation, but the one factor that seems most critical in overcoming barriers to shared decisionmaking is training for everyone involved. Administrators should not bear sole responsibility for instituting a culture of shared decisionmaking and for knowing everything there is to know about SBDM. Everyone responsible for KERA implementation—parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, central office administrators, school board members, and others—need to understand their roles in changing the decisionmaking culture. This awareness is not likely to occur through participation in one-shot workshops but must be built through ongoing, collegial education.

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